



# Fly! Fly! The winged monkeys of Trump spread the ‘big lie.’

VISUAL ESSAY BY STEVE BRODNER

A “big lie” needs a small air force working behind the scenes to divert, obfuscate and defend the absurd claim that Donald Trump won the 2020 election. Trump’s acolytes in this effort worked in Washington and around the country, in government and the media, to perpetuate the fraud. They made up false stories, spread dubious claims and swarmed anyone who suggested that truth mattered in the land of make-believe.

## The plotters behind the “big lie”

A circle of longtime Trump loyalists and eager recruits plotted between Election Day and the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol to block certification of Joe Biden’s victory.

Lt. Gen. **Michael Flynn**, who served briefly as Trump’s national security adviser in 2017, pushed him to consider using the military to confiscate voting machines as part of a larger scheme to overturn the election.

**John Eastman**, a conservative California lawyer who once clerked for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, outlined a plan for Vice President Mike Pence to overturn the 2020 election results and pressured him to do so.

**Roger Stone**, a GOP operative since the days of Richard M. Nixon, came up with “Stop the Steal” in 2016 and worked to repurpose the movement after Trump’s 2020 defeat.

**Mike Lindell**, the MyPillow CEO turned right-wing activist, spent \$30 million trying to prove fraud in the 2020 elections and to promote various “election integrity” efforts.

After the election, lawyer **Sidney Powell** filed multiple lawsuits in district courts alleging voter and raised more than \$14 million to do so. A federal judge imposed sanctions on her for the baseless claims. Lawyer **Cleta Mitchell**, an early promoter on social media of imaginary voter fraud, set out to recruit “Stop the Steal” activists to monitor election offices and work at polling places ahead of the 2022 and 2024 elections.

**Mark Meadows**, Trump’s last White House chief of staff, assured concerned Republicans that Trump would eventually drop his claims on a second term. Meanwhile, he privately encouraged election deniers to keep fighting. He also fielded various election conspiracies from Trump activists. **Ginni Thomas**, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, messaged lawmakers in Arizona and Wisconsin after the election, urging them to overturn Biden’s victory.

## Media

Some media figures helped undermine public confidence in the 2020 election results and divert attention from the events of Jan. 6.

Fox News stars **Tucker Carlson** and **Laura Ingraham** promoted fake voter fraud stories and falsely suggested that left-wing antifraud members organized the Jan. 6 insurrection while downplaying the involvement of Trump supporters.

GARY ABERNATHY

## Politicizing Christianity was a mistake

I grew up attending a small country church where, every Sunday morning, the 75 or so regular attendees heard Bible-based sermons with a heavy emphasis on the danger of veering from the straight and narrow and landing in eternal damnation in a fiery hell. It was fun.

Occasionally woven into the dogma were reminders of the Christian underpinnings of the United States — complete with spiritually based quotes from the Founding Fathers asking God’s guidance and blessings on the new nation. In the 1960s and early 70s, such teachings were markedly apolitical. There were no rantings or ravings declaring one political party good or evil. There was simply a comforting belief that we lived in a nation formed and guided by God, and no one need lift a finger to ensure that situation. It simply was.

But in the wake of *Roe v. Wade* and other perceived attacks on that Old-Time Religion by an increasingly liberal world, Christianity had by the 1980s become politically weaponized, with “Christian soldiers” mostly aligning with the GOP. That war rages today.

Looking back, politicizing conservative Christianity was a mistake, even if well-intentioned. It’s natural for Christianity to exist in a state of tension within an inclusive democracy. Consider Jesus’ Great Commission to “go and make disciples of all nations,” which includes, of course, this nation. By scripture, Christians are not encouraged to just live and let live. But our Constitution says otherwise.

Walking that tightrope is a challenge. For instance, Christians often struggle with how much to be involved with, or live apart from, the world. As parents, do you run for school board or try in other ways to influence the public school system? Or do you retreat within your walls and home-school your children? Either choice is ripe for criticism. But at the end of the day, the Christian belief that this short life is a mere prelude to the eternal one makes spending so much effort on influencing our temporal governments seem odd.

What will not change is the sincere belief held by millions of Christians (and others) that the United States has a special spiritual purpose. Such a purpose as carried out by Black churches and ministers during the civil rights era of the 1950s and ‘60s is regarded as crucial to the movement’s success. But when defined today as “Christian nationalism,” church involvement in political affairs is said to be dangerous. For many White Republicans, who are typically identified as the movement’s drivers, the recent focus on Christian nationalism is the latest way to call their very existence a threat, close on the heels of accusations of racism, fascism and being “MAGA Republicans,” defined in changing ways but always negatively, by President Biden.

Consider an onslaught of similar headlines in recent weeks: the Daily Beast, Aug. 14, “I’m a Cradle Catholic. I Don’t Want Christian Nationalism in My Church”; Rolling Stone, Sept. 1, “Meet the Apostle of Right-Wing Christian Nationalism”; The Post, Sept. 1, “Americans are growing more accepting of Christian nationalism”; PBS, Sept. 7, “Former Trump adviser Michael Flynn ‘at the center’ of new movement based on conspiracies and Christian nationalism.”

Gathering no moss, Rolling Stone followed up last week with video that showed the Pennsylvania GOP’s candidate for governor, Doug Mastriano, praying a week before the incursion at the U.S. Capitol that national leaders would “on the sixth of January ... rise up with boldness” along with other supplications deemed troubling. The self-identification of Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) as a Christian nationalist also bothers critics. But what is asked in prayer or otherwise invoked of heaven should never disturb anyone. God often answers, “No.”

An individual’s personal belief system, whether based on religion or other guiding principles, informs their political actions. That will never change. But because Christianity is and will long be the predominant religion in the United States, it is important that Christians consistently remind themselves not to impose their beliefs on others by weight of law or strength of numbers. The deal we made long ago for the freedom to worship as we see fit was to guarantee that same right to people of all religions — or no religion at all.

But whether in times of war or natural disaster, from the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, to the disturbing Capitol incursion of Jan. 6, 2021, the belief that God has his hand on our nation is a reassuring thought for millions of Americans — not a weapon to incite “violent and undemocratic strains,” as the authors of an analysis in The Post suggested. When divesting Christian nationalism, nuance is as usual, in short supply. It’s one thing to hold the misguided belief that Christianity should have a government-sanctioned presence in society. It’s quite another to be comforted by the thought that the United States plays a special role in God’s plan. As for the latter, believers should reassure themselves that God’s will for America will be fulfilled — with no legislative assistance required.



**Mehmet Oz**, television personality turned politician, has refrained from calling Biden’s victory “rigged” or “stolen,” but he has without evidence cast doubt on the credibility of absentee ballots and voter IDs.



**J.D. Vance**, the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate in Ohio, shifted to the right to boost his chances, calling Biden a “fake president.”

## Politicians obstructing voting reform

Three members of Congress — two Democrats and a Republican — played a leading role in sinking negotiations when Democrats tried to modernize the rules to reform federal voting rights legislation in response to Republican states curtailing voter access.



Democratic Sens. **Joe Manchin III** (W.Va.) and **Kyrsten Sinema** (Ariz.) joined all 50 Republicans to oppose a rule change that would’ve allowed for federal voting rights legislation to pass with 51 votes instead of the usual 60.



Senate Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (R-Ky.) organized Republican senators to oppose various voting rights bills that would’ve established minimum early voting requirements, vote by mail and automatic voter registration.

## States undermining the electoral system

Two Republican governors took the lead on imposing voting restrictions. Legislatures in 18 states have passed 34 laws making voting harder since the start of 2021. Many of these states were pivotal to Biden’s victory in 2020.



Florida Gov. **Ron DeSantis** (R) signed laws making it harder to vote by mail, restricting the use of drop boxes and implementing stricter voter ID requirements.



Texas Gov. **Greg Abbott** (R) has banned drive-through voting, limited mail-in voting and invigorated partisan poll-watchers. Thousands of mail-in ballots in Texas were rejected ahead of the March 1 primary after the rules were enacted. Some state legislatures had made it harder to vote. For instance, Georgia imposed new ID requirements for mail-in ballots, limited the use of drop boxes and allowed electors to challenge the eligibility of voters; Iowa shortened the state’s early voting period and closed the polls an hour early on Election Day. Arizona was sued for a new law requiring proof of citizenship to vote.



Ahead of Jan. 6, 2021, Republicans in seven swing states sent **dummy Trump electors** to Congress to delay certification of Biden’s victory in an effort to overturn the 2020 election results. Trump’s allies are working to install “big lie” sympathizers in key election posts. These **election board infiltrators** are becoming election canvassing board members, local voting judges and inspectors, poll watchers and county clerks, often in swing states.

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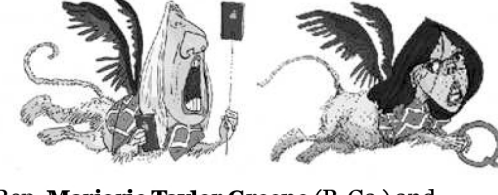
**Rupert Murdoch** owns and runs News Corp. and Fox News. In March 2021, Dominion Voting Systems sued Fox News for defamation, arguing Dominion was harmed by the network’s decision to perpetuate baseless stories about the election.



**Dinesh D’Souza** wrongly claimed on Fox News that police used “massive amounts of force” on “unarmed Trump supporters” on Jan. 6. He also created “2000 Mules,” a film purporting to show evidence that the 2020 election was rigged; its claims have been debunked. **Stephen K. Bannon**, a former White House strategist, used his podcast to radicalize many of Trump’s supporters and later refused to testify before the House committee investigating Jan. 6. He was convicted of contempt of Congress in July.

## Election deniers in Congress

Some members of Congress who repeated the “big lie” have continued to advocate for tighter limits on voting in future elections.



Rep. **Marjorie Taylor Greene** (R-Ga.) and Rep. **Lauren Boebert** (R-Colo.) were among the most active and inflammatory tweeters ahead of the Jan. 6 insurrection. Boebert tweeted about 1776 before the Capitol attack, which was seen as a possible call to armed revolution. Greene urged voters to cast multiple ballots in a Georgia congressional election.



Rep. **Elise Stefanik** (N.Y.) replaced Liz Cheney (Wyo.) as the House GOP conference chair in part because of Cheney’s adamant denial of Trump’s “big lie” — and because of Stefanik’s enmeshment in it. Rep. **Jim Jordan** (R-Ohio) falsely accused Democrats of rigging the 2020 election even before Election Day arrived. Following Trump’s loss, Jordan called for Congress to investigate the election.



Rep. **Matt Gaetz** (R-Fla.) falsely claimed that Trump won the 2020 election in March. He allegedly sought a presidential pardon for fellow House members who voted to overturn the election on Jan. 6. Rep. **Paul A. Gosar** (R-Ariz.) inaccurately said at a Trump rally in January, “Was there fraud? Absolutely. Was it enough to overturn the election? Absolutely.”

## ‘Big lie’ candidates

Some Republican candidates pulled much of their popularity from denying the 2020 election results.



**Doug Mastriano**, the Republican nominee for Pennsylvania governor, organized a post-election public hearing on voter fraud that Trump phoned into. **Karl Lake**, the Republican nominee for Arizona governor, called it “disqualifying” and “sickening” that a rival in the state’s GOP primary wouldn’t say the election was stolen — even though it wasn’t.