

United States - 'He's not a quitter': faithful out in force as Trump gets back to the campaign trail

Sunday 27 June 2021, by [SMITH David](#) (Date first published: 27 June 2021).

Thousands of adoring fans turned out in Ohio to remind America that Trump's cult of personality never went away

There were raucous cheers and boos. There were Secret Service agents and metal detectors, food trailers in long grass and loudspeakers booming songs by Elton John and Dolly Parton. There were flags, hats, and T-shirts proclaiming Donald Trump the true winner of the 2020 election – or the man to beat in 2024.

And flying overhead was a small plane trailing a banner that proclaimed: "Ohio is Trump country."

Donald Trump returns to campaign trail with rally targeting Ohio Republican
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This strange carnival, unfolding on Saturday under the slogan Save America!, was the setting for Trump's first post-presidential campaign rally and a noisy warning to Democrats – and democracy – that his cult of personality never went away. It was merely sleeping and, in hibernation, becoming ever more extreme.

Although Trump has lost his hi-tech mouthpiece on social media, he still has the low-tech medium of standing in a field and ranting dangerous falsehoods to thousands of fans whose adulation and sense of grievance knows no bounds.

"Each Trump rally is different and each one is beautiful," said Deborah Wagner, 55, a retired court clerk wearing a "Count all the legal votes" T-shirt, who had driven four hours from New York to reach the fairgrounds in Wellington, Ohio. "We just want happiness and love for all people. Trump is not a quitter."

For all the high spirits, attendees' T-shirts held an inverted mirror up to reality: "Trump won, deal with it"; "Re-elect Trump. Make liberals cry again"; "Don't blame me, I voted for Trump"; "Trump 2024. Make votes count again"; "Fuck Biden. Trump 2024"; "Biden is not my president"; "Unmasked, unmuzzled, unvaccinated, unafraid".

Everyone interviewed by the Guardian took it for granted that last year's election was stolen from Trump, and some even clung to the belief that he will somehow be reinstated. As for the 6 January insurrection [[1](#)] at the US Capitol, the only disagreement was whether it was true patriots fighting for a just cause or an infiltration by Antifa and Black Lives Matter (there is zero evidence of this).

In soft evening sunshine, with freight trains rumbling by, Trump walked out to rapturous chants of "USA! USA!" and tossed caps into the crowd. "After five months," he declared, wearing his

customary dark suit, white shirt and red tie, “the Biden administration is already complete and total catastrophe.”

In a 94-minute speech, the former president complained of surging crime, weakened police, “illegal aliens” overwhelming the southern border, drug cartels back in business, schools turned into “leftwing indoctrination camps” and critical race theory – the mention prompted hearty boos – being “forced on the military”. He added: “Joe Biden is destroying our nation right before our very own eyes.”

Trump, whose business could face criminal charges from the Manhattan district attorney, spoke of the urgency for Republicans of winning back the House of Representatives and Senate in next year’s midterm elections. He endorsed Max Miller, a former White House aide challenging Anthony Gonzalez – a congressman who voted to impeach Trump – in a local Republican primary.

There were moments of time warp and throwback to his first wildly improvised campaign five years ago. When Trump pointed to “the fake news media”, supporters turned to boo and show the middle finger. “Do you miss me? They miss me. They look at their terrible ratings and they say, ‘We miss this guy’.” Later, the crowd chanted: “CNN sucks!” and a mention of Hillary Clinton prompted cries of, “Lock her up!”

Trump has pushed “the Big Lie” in TV interviews and emailed statements but now it was made flesh. “What happened in the election, it’s a disgrace,” he said, embarking on long meandering riffs about it being “rigged”, insisting “We didn’t lose,” and delving into supposed irregularities state by state.

“This was the scam of the century and this was the crime of the century,” he said. “We’re never going to stop fighting for the true results of this election ... Remember I’m not the one trying to undermine American democracy. I’m trying to save American democracy.” His false claim of voter fraud has been debunked by his own attorney general, state election officials and judges.

But in this corner of Ohio, a bellwether state he won, it was an article of faith. The crowd shouted: “Trump won! Trump won!”

When Marjorie Taylor Greene, a far-right Republican congresswoman from Georgia, asked them, “Who’s your president?”, they roared back, “Trump!”, punching the air. Greene said bitterly that he should still be the president but “the dirty rotten Democrats stole the election”.

An heir to the 45th president’s politics of outrage, Greene also said she wanted to fire Anthony Fauci, a top infectious disease expert and coronavirus pandemic adviser, prompting shouts of “Lock him up!” The congresswoman asked gleefully: “Did you hear that Tony? They want you locked up.”

She echoed a similar comment about Democratic congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York before making the nakedly racist statement: “She’s not an American. She doesn’t embrace our American ways.”

Indeed, the rally was a vivid demonstration how distortions of the rightwing political and media ecosystem seep down into the grassroots with real world consequences.

Wagner, the retired court clerk, argued that last year’s poll was “criminally stolen” and cited a fringe website as evidence. If Trump does not run in 2024, she would like to see his former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, an arch conspiracy theorist, become the Republican nominee; she was not alone in floating his name.

Wagner looks after her 12-year-old grandson and said she is considering withdrawing him from

school if coronavirus vaccinations become mandatory and critical race theory is taught. "The people that are calling people racist are actually being racist," she said. "I treat everybody the same across the board."

Trump Organization could face criminal charges in New York next week

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Critical race theory examines systemic racism in law and institutions but has been caricatured and demonised by Republicans. Trump used the rally to call for it to be banned from schools, the military and other walks of life.

Gary Bartlett, 65, who declines to be vaccinated, condemned critical race theory. "It's teaching little five-, six-, seven-year-olds you're supposed to be the oppressed and the white kids are supposed to be oppressors," he said. "I don't think critical race theory has any place in schools. There isn't as much racism as Democrats want us to think there is."

Bartlett, from Lexington, Ohio, a retired manual worker at General Motors, was attending his first Trump rally, having always voted for Democrats until he switched to Trump in 2016. He, too, believes the 2020 election was stolen. "There were too many things on TV showing polling places and too many rumours. When I drive around Ohio and other states I see Trump signs everywhere; there's no way Biden could have got that many votes."

Randy Weld, 53, a self-employed carpenter, was wearing a black T-shirt that proclaimed "If you don't like Trump then you probably don't like me ... and I'm OK with that". He said he "most definitely" wants to see Trump run for president again in 2024. "The best president we ever had. He's a man of America."

And if Trump opts out? "I'd like to see his son run. I'd like to see some younger blood."

Asked if Trump should run in 2024, David Snell, 55, a logistics specialist who was at the US Capitol on 6 January but did not enter the building, said: "Earlier than that. I feel like he's coming back real soon. He might be reinstated as president. God is exposing what's going on. There was fraud, 100%."

Gary Sherrill, 65, a concrete mixer driver wearing a "Make America great again" cap, added: "There's no doubt in my mind Biden stole it." But asked for evidence, he replied: "I just know it in my heart. And I trust Trump when he says it's true."

Trump's rallies thrived in 2016 as presenting an insurgent campaign against the status quo. He has not yet committed to run in 2024, but once again he is the Washington outsider, striking a chord in restive crowds with invective against a Democratic president.

Rose Kidd, 63, a retired nurse who watches the conservative Newsmax and One America News Network channels, said of Biden: "We have wide open borders because of that idiot. He can't put a sentence together; he's not there cognitively. He's not much older than Trump but Trump is still very sharp. Their agenda is to destroy America; president Trump's agenda is to save America."

David Smith in Wellington, Ohio
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P.S.

- The Guardian. Sun 27 Jun 2021 05.02 BST :
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jun/27/hes-not-a-quitter-faithful-out-in-force-as-trump-gets-back-to-the-campaign-trail>

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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jun/26/capitol-attack-officer-michael-fanone-republicans>