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When moderator Margaret Brennan noted during last night's vice presidential debate that Republican nominee J.D. Vance had, once again, lied about the legal status of migrants in Springfield, Ohio, Vance retorted: "The rules were that you guys weren't going to fact-check!" As scholar of propaganda Pekka Kallioniemi noted, this was "[t]he epitome of post-truth politics."

Vance lied throughout the debate and has lied throughout this campaign, and in that, he is following the MAGA Republicans and Trump, who has become entirely untethered from reality. Aaron Rugar, who watches Trump's rallies, and Noah Berlatsky wrote in *Public Notice* that Trump's growing mental incapacity was obvious yesterday, as in two rallies he made a "wide-ranging journey through conspiracy theories, hatred, and nonsense." He "seems ever more adrift in his own fog of hate and ego," Rugar and Berlatsky wrote, "He mixes up world leaders, confuses countries, garbles pronouns, loses track of his nonsense talking points."

Vance's post-truth world did not dominate last night's debate. A Politico/Focaldata snap poll afterward showed that while party voters overwhelmingly declared their party's nominee the winner, 58% of Independents backed Democratic vice presidential nominee Tim Walz.

Before the debate, political consultant Stuart Stevens posted: "If you want to know what the campaigns think of their VP candidates debate, just watch how they schedule the candidates post-debate. After Cheney VP debates, Lieberman and Edwards basically disappeared, banished to tiny markets. If Trump world believes America wants more Vance, they can put him in big markets in big states. I'm doubting that will happen. I suspect that [the] Harris campaign gets Walz in front of more voters after debate. He wears well."

Today, Stevens noted that the campaign is ramping up Walz's schedule, sending him through Pennsylvania, Nevada, and Arizona and adding more media, including "two national TV interviews, a podcast and a late-night TV appearance," and that Trump said he was "satisfied with Vance's 'fantastic' performance."

But Vance's willingness to lie matters to Trump, and nowhere more than in his refusal to acknowledge that Trump lost the 2020 presidential election. Vance has repeatedly said he would have done what Vice President Mike Pence would not: go along with Trump's attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, urging the states to approve "alternative" slates of electors than the ones that accurately reflected the choice voters made at the polls.

"Let's be clear," former representative Liz Cheney (R-WY) responded, "This is illegal and unconstitutional. The American people had voted. The courts had ruled. The Electoral College had met and voted. The Governor in every state had certified the results and sent a legal slate of electors to the Congress to be counted. The Vice President has no constitutional authority to tell states to submit alternative slates of electors because his candidate lost. That is tyranny."

Vance's stance was poorly timed. This afternoon, Judge Tanya Chutkan released the government's motion for immunity determinations, special counsel Jack Smith's legal filing laying out the government's case against Trump for his attempt to overturn the 2020 presidential election. The filing pulls from previously unreleased interviews, calls, and messages to paint a damning picture of Trump's behavior as he tried to steal the presidency. Names in it are redacted, but journalists have already figured them out.

The filing is coming now because Trump and then the Supreme Court repeatedly delayed the case. After the Supreme Court decided that presidents are immune from prosecution for crimes committed as part of a president's official acts, the court had to take on what constituted an official act. In today's filing, Smith argued that where Trump "was acting 'as office-seeker, not office-holder,' no

immunity attaches.” The government asks that “the Court determine that the defendant must stand trial for his private crimes as would any other citizen.”

The facts of the case begin with a damning statement: “When the defendant lost the 2020 presidential election, he resorted to crimes to try to stay in office.”

Fundamental to those crimes was disinformation. The entire plan for keeping Trump in office depended on Trump and his loyalists lying to the American people, convincing them of a completely false story that the 2020 presidential election had been stolen.

That effort started long before the actual election when it became clear to the Trump team that he was unlikely to win. They knew, though, that since Democrats were more likely than Republicans to use mail-in ballots, there would be an initial period when his numbers were higher than Democratic nominee Joe Biden’s.

In that case, Trump told advisor Roger Stone, his chief of staff Mark Meadows, and Vice President Mike Pence’s chief of staff Mark Short, he would simply declare before all the ballots had been counted that he had won. In the meantime, he planted the idea that the election would be stolen from him, publicly saying, for example, that he would “have to see” whether he would accept the election results and saying that the only way he could lose would be if the election was rigged.

On October 31, advisor Steve Bannon, whose specialty was disinformation, told a group of supporters that Trump was simply “going to declare victory. That doesn’t mean he’s the winner, he’s just going to say he’s the winner...that’s our strategy.”

That’s exactly what Trump did. He claimed there had been fraud in the election and that he had won. Then, as states continued to count votes, Trump’s operatives tried to create chaos at the polling places. When the vote count in

Detroit swung toward Biden, for example, operative Michael Roman told a colleague there to “give me options to file litigation... even if itbis [sic],” apparently meaning “even if it is BS.” Smith noted that “[w]hen a colleague suggested there was about to be unrest reminiscent of the Brooks Brothers Riot, a violent effort to stop the vote count in Florida after the 2000 presidential election”—a riot in which Roger Stone had participated—Roman responded: “Make them riot” and “Do it!!!”

Even as Trump publicly claimed victory, his campaign staff told him his chances of prevailing were slim. To win, they told him, he must carry Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin. When the campaign conceded its litigation in Arizona on November 13, it effectively admitted Trump had lost the election. As soon as his lawyers conceded in Arizona, Trump sidelined his campaign staff and turned to Giuliani and lawyers who would back the Big Lie.

To overturn the election results, Trump and his loyalists turned to pressuring Republicans in the states he had lost, especially Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, as well as in states that used certain voting machines, to say the election had been fraudulent. When officials demanded proof of their claims, Trump and Giuliani threatened them, then accused them of betrayal and spread their names to angry supporters, who harassed them. Again and again, Republican officials told Trump his numbers were wrong and that he had lost the election. They begged him to stop spreading lies.

As for the idea that voting machines had been compromised, Chris Krebs, the director of the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, publicly posted that claims of election fraud through voting machines “either have been unsubstantiated or are technically incoherent.” When Trump tried to get then–Republican National Committee chair Ronna McDaniel to publicize a report that claimed machines in Antrim County, Michigan, had affected the vote, McDaniel declined, saying she had already discussed the report with Michigan’s speaker of the house, who had

told her the report was “f*cking nuts.”

By late November, neither the legal challenges nor the threats had worked. So in early December the conspirators decided to get the people who would have been the electors if Trump had won to sign certifications saying that they were the legitimate electors and were casting their electoral votes for Trump. The lawyer who came up with the plan, Ken Chesebro, admitted that “the votes aren’t legal” but thought Congress could use them to challenge the real votes.

Many of the electors were wary of the plan, but Trump and his conspirators managed to get the slates of fake electors on December 14, the appointed day for real electors to meet. The plan was for Vice President Mike Pence, who as president of the Senate would preside over the counting of the electoral votes, to use the fake electors to say there were competing slates of electors and thus to “negotiate a solution to defeat Biden.” On December 19, Trump posted: “Statistically impossible to have lost the 2020 Election. Big protest in D.C. on January 6. Be there, will be wild!”

But the plan hit a snag. Pence maintained he did not have the power to do any such thing. The more Pence refused, the more insistent Trump became. After another argument on January 1, 2021, Trump told Pence that “hundreds of thousands of people are going to hate your guts,” “people are gonna think you’re stupid,” and, finally, “You’re too honest.”

Trump, Bannon, and Trump’s lawyers all continued to pressure Pence, and Bannon normalized the plan on his podcast. Trump continued to talk publicly of fighting to make sure his opponents didn’t take the White House and continued to pressure Pence. On January 5—the day before the election certification proceeding—he talked to Bannon, and less than two hours later, on his podcast, Bannon told his listeners: “All Hell is going to break loose tomorrow” in Washington, D.C.

Concerned at Trump’s escalating fury at Pence, Pence’s chief of staff Mark Short alerted Pence’s secret service detail. Then, after Trump spoke with Bannon and

lawyer John Eastman, who had come up with the legal argument for Pence's power to affect the count, he simply lied on social media that Pence agreed the vice president could change the election results, then posted: "Do it, Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!"

When Pence continued to refuse, on January 6, Trump told his supporters at the Ellipse that Pence had let him down and then continued to lie that the election had been stolen, assuring them they would "never take back our country with weakness." Then he sent the crowd to obstruct the proceedings.

Trump sat in the small dining room off the Oval Office watching the Fox News Channel and scrolling through Twitter as the crowd broke into the Capitol. At 2:24, Trump tweeted that "Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution, giving States a chance to certify a corrected set of facts, not the fraudulent or inaccurate ones which they were asked to previously certify. USA demands the truth!" A rioter read the tweet through a bullhorn for the crowd. A minute later, the Secret Service had to evacuate Pence to a secure location. When told of Pence's danger, Trump answered: "So what?"

When Congress came back after the riot, Trump and Giuliani tried to delay further, calling senators and one representative to slow the process down. It didn't work. On January 7, at 3:41 in the morning, Pence announced that Biden's election had been certified.

It was all a lie.

One hundred and forty police officers assaulted, close to \$3 million in damage, close to 1,200 people charged, more than 450 serving prison sentences, a poisonous political movement taking root, and voter suppression laws...all because Trump couldn't bear to have lost an election.

"Post-truth politics" has real-world repercussions.

Last night, when a reporter in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, asked him if he trusted the electoral process this time around, Trump answered: "I'll let you know in about 33 days."

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