

INTERNET

Far-right laments Tucker Carlson's ouster, and loss of their shot at the mainstream

Carlson's show echoed conspiracy theories and disinformation that gained traction on extremist forums like 4chan – and that would otherwise not have appeared on Fox News.



— A Fox News promotion featuring Tucker Carlson in New York in 2022.

Sarah Blesener / The New York Times / Redux

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By Brandy Zadrozny and Ben Collins

Fox News' [dismissal of top-rated host Tucker Carlson](#) sent shockwaves through mainstream and conservative media this week. But nowhere was Carlson's loss felt more than on the fringe and right-wing websites and forums where so many of his narratives originated.

On web shows and message boards, creators of hate and conspiracy theory content bemoaned the loss of Carlson and their path to a mainstream audience.

"He amplified [my] reporting more than anyone else," Darren Beattie, a blogger and [purveyor of conspiracy theories](#) related to the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, said Monday during a web show hosted by Turning Point USA President Charlie Kirk.

"He was basically the only person on Fox who would dare to have me on, and I'm not the only case," Beattie said. "There are other people and nobody would dare let them on any other Fox show. But Tucker would have them on to say things that you won't hear anywhere on American TV."

Carlson's relationship to fringe figures on the far right was, in some ways, symbiotic. Carlson would use his platform to attack institutions and individuals, unleashing a troll army drawn from the very ranks of the fringe right-wingers and 4Chan users that loved him – something we've personally experienced on several occasions.

Steve Bannon, a former top Trump aide who appeared Tuesday on Kirk's show, said that the "power of Tucker Carlson" was his ability to distill and package fringe political ideas to a new audience. Bannon said Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch, the father and son [who oversee Fox News' parent company](#), fired Carlson to keep "those ideas [from] seeping into a more mainstream audience."



Those sentiments are backed up by academics and researchers who study how internet extremism makes its way into mainstream U.S. politics and culture. Carlson's show repeatedly echoed conspiracy theories and disinformation that gained traction on extremist forums like 4chan – and that would otherwise not have appeared on Fox News.

“Once a story reached Tucker Carlson, it was at the apex of conservative media, and Fox News is the voice of authority in conservative media,” said Robert Faris, a senior researcher at Harvard University's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy, who studies networked digital technologies and media. “It let other people know that it's OK to talk about these kinds of things in the language that they use. Just that it's on the air, it's ambient and it's on in so many public spaces means that anything they platform has a wider reach than any of the more committed hyper-partisan sites.”

A spokesperson for Fox News declined to comment beyond [the statement the company issued announcing Carlson's departure](#) and thanking him for his work there.

Carlson used his platform at Fox News to spread information that had been widely discredited.

Earlier this month, Carlson featured a segment claiming that Ukrainian casualties in the Russian invasion were widely underreported. [Carlson was citing an altered document](#) that first appeared on 4chan and was widely debunked before the segment aired.

Days before that, Carlson devoted a segment to a 4chan hoax about a “Trans Day of Vengeance” that was being promoted on April Fools’ Day. As evidence, [Carlson aired a tweet from an anti-Black troll account](#) whose name alludes to a racial slur.

Carlson also succeeded in using his platform to turn his audience on certain individuals. Most recently, Ray Epps, who has [sought a retraction](#) over Carlson’s false allegations that he worked for the federal government and helped incite the riot at the Capitol, [told CBS News’ “60 Minutes”](#) that he believed Carlson was trying to destroy his life.

We saw that first-hand at times when Carlson aired segments about our reporting and even lobbed personal and professional attacks at us, [alleging that legitimate reporting was an effort to ruin lives](#) and that reporting on social media platforms was activism for censorship.



— People watch Tucker Carlson during an election night watch party in Atlanta, in 2022.

Brynn Anderson / AP

Beyond the attacks and misinformation, Carlson also embraced some of the more extreme views of white supremacists.

A 2022 analysis [by The New York Times](#) found that Carlson had repeatedly promoted a racist conspiracy theory known as the Great Replacement Theory, which posits that Jews and Democrats encourage immigration, feminism and gender nonconformity as part of a conspiracy to wipe out the white race. The analysis found he devoted at least 600 segments to white victimhood.

Without Carlson, experts say that a sort of pipeline carrying misinformation and hateful ideologies from the fringes of the internet to a large national audience is now missing a crucial juncture.

“Tucker Carlson often looks for relatively obscure figures and theories that are basically defenses of white supremacy and gender binary ideologies,” said A.J. Bauer, an assistant professor who studies right-wing movements and media at the University of Alabama.

“He platforms those and finds ways of amplifying peculiar, narrow theories that don’t have a widespread circulation,” Bauer said. “Because of that, he’s been particularly dangerous with regard to the problems of misinformation and conspiracy thinking. These fringe and marginal figures who struggled to get mainstream media access saw Tucker Carlson as their route into the mainstream.”

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White supremacist message boards, which frequently watched along live with Carlson’s show, were overloaded with posts lamenting his firing.

Users on the politics board on 4chan implored one another to “stop flooding the board” with new threads announcing Carlson’s departure.

“Tucker’s one of the last /ourguys/,” wrote one 4chan user, referring to a meme [among white nationalists to identify fellow travelers online](#).

“Bad times coming, anons. Been obvious for a while, but it seems to be reaching its apogee,” another 4chan user wrote.

The “newslinks and articles” board on Stormfront, the web’s oldest self-identifying white nationalist message board, was flooded with new posts lamenting the cancellation of Carlson’s show.

The forum’s posts usually struggle to crack double-digit replies, but a thread about the Carlson news had over 200 posts, many of which blamed his firing on an antisemitic conspiracy theory about control of the media.

NBC News was unable to reach Carlson for comment. He did not respond to direct messages on Twitter, and messages left on cell phone numbers and an email address associated with Carlson were not answered.

Other prominent white nationalists, like Nick Fuentes and the white supremacist website The Daily Stormer, brushed off Carlson’s impact, saying they do not believe that his ability to “soft redpill” his audience – or slowly radicalize them into white supremacy – had a major impact.

Eric Owens, who worked for Carlson for five years when Carlson was The Daily Caller’s editor-in-chief, said the future of the far-right-to-mainstream pipeline depends on what Fox News executives decide to do next.

“Are they actually worrying about making the country better and avoiding these lawsuits in the future, or are they just going to replace him with another newer, cheaper Tucker?” Owens said in an interview, referring to Dominion Voting Systems’ recent lawsuit against Fox.


Owens, who has frequently renounced The Daily Caller’s current iteration, said Carlson noticeably changed between the time he began working at The Daily Caller in 2012 and when he left in 2018.

“I don’t know what happened to Tucker,” Owens said. “I think the executives at Fox News just kind of lost control, and I think they’re scared.”

Owens pointed to Carlson's text messages unveiled in the Fox-Dominion trial, which cost the network \$787 million to settle. In the texts, Carlson noted that telling the truth about the 2020 election was "measurably hurting the company" and noted that "the stock price is down," while insisting that the network should stop accurately reporting on the results.

"They became a juggernaut, and then they realized they had to serve these really bad impulses," Owens said of Fox News.

Whether Fox News attempts to reproduce the pipeline that Carlson built or whether Carlson could rebuild it at another outlet remains to be seen.

"The question becomes if the grievance machine is still going to need feeding and someone to feed it, what can Fox News add to that time slot?" Faris, of Harvard's Shorenstein Center, asked. "How are they going to replace Tucker?" 



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 Feed

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