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# What Is Dark MAGA? Trump Supporters Attempt Rebrand for 2024

BY **GIULIA CARBONARO** ON 4/19/22 AT 5:44 AM EDT



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NEWS

DONALD TRUMP

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JANUARY 6

**A** small fringe of Donald Trump's supporters is calling for the former president to get back on the highest stage of U.S. politics with a vengeance with the motto: #DarkMAGA.

More of a meme than a political slogan, Dark MAGA is a post-alt-right aesthetic that promotes an authoritarian version of Trump in dystopian, Terminator-like images. In some, the Trump Tower is painted entirely in black and the former president is seen piercing through the screen with blue laser eyes.

The hashtag first appeared on Twitter on January 21, and it had become increasingly popular by March. It can now be found in thousands of memes on Telegram and TikTok as well.

The aesthetics of the movement are easily recognizable: images edited in red and black or red and blue, featuring people with blue laser eyes often holding weapons or standing in front of neo-Nazi symbols.

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Dark MAGA supporters are calling for a ruthless, unforgiving version of Trump to take revenge on his political enemies at the 2024 election - though the movement hasn't been recognized or endorsed by Trump in any form. The former president hasn't yet even formally confirmed whether he'll run for president in 2024.

In the description of the #DarkMAGA hashtag creator, as described by the Global Network on Extremism & Technology (GNET), Dark MAGA represents "Napoleon, being exiled, and then raising a f\*\*\*\*\* army to attack Europe to attack the elites."

"#DarkMAGA is the aesthetic demand that Trump embrace a harder and more focused approach to the role only he can fill. He was too kindhearted, too forgiving. Dark MAGA demands he learn from his mistakes," writes another Twitter user.

"It's the realization that there is no political solution beyond vengeance," tweets another user.

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"If you want to win, if you don't want to repeat the past, you have to get mean; you almost have to embrace the villain role that they're bringing you with," describes another supporter quoted by GNET.

A portrait of former President Donald Trump while speaking at a rally on April 9, 2022, in Selma, North Carolina, over an image of the White House. A small fringe of Trump supporters are calling for a darker, punishing Trump to run for president in 2024.

ALLISON JOYCE/GETTY IMAGES AND CANVA

Behind the movement there's no single identifiable group, or a clear ideology, GNET said. Many of the messages posted by Dark MAGA supporters incite violence and contain misogynistic and/or racist comments.

The movement is full of early internet trolling techniques in the tradition of the post-Charlottesville alt-right, which has, since the deadly Unite the Right rally in Virginia in 2017, been trying to reunify that loose coalition of white supremacists and white nationalists under the same group, said Tim Squirrell, head of communications & editorial at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

"What we are seeing is numerous attempts to unify those factions again, to some degree," he explains.

"Dark MAGA is, to some extent, the latest attempt to try to do that, to pull those things together and to try to unify the Trumpists and the kind of people who are more on the fringes behind this hardened image of Trump coming back as a vengeful kind of leader, having been deposed, and removing all the kindness and mercy from his heart, in this sort of anime arc," says Squirrell.

The Dark MAGA idea of "this glorious leader who has been punished and sent away, deposed and humiliated, and he needs to come back and harden his heart," is a narrative that wouldn't be out of place in games like Warhammer 40k or a Japanese anime, Squirrell says.

But not being able to distinguish what's ironic from what's serious in Dark MAGA is exactly within the strategy of how the movement hopes to gather mainstream attention.

"The whole point of something like Dark MAGA is that it's over the top. It's melodramatic, it's a bit ridiculous. It's Trump highlighted in red with blue laser eyes, and the bit that they are doing is to create that ridiculous aesthetic as a way of attracting attention."

## **The Long Shadow of January 6**

Dark MAGA, according to Alice E. Marwick, associate professor of communication at the University of North Carolina and principal researcher at the Center for Information, Technology and Public Life, is an evolution of the feeling of disappointment and disenfranchisement many Trump supporters have felt after the 2020 election.

"There's a certain group of people who were very disappointed with the 2020 election and there is a sense that what precipitated the attacks on the Capitol on January 6 is the idea that the election had been stolen, a message that was primed by mainstream Republicans for months leading up to the election," Marwick said.

"I spend a lot of time in far-right groups online and there's an increased sense of persecution there. There's an increased sense of urgency," she adds.

"There is an increased sense of anger about things like the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, COVID lockdowns and COVID restrictions. I think in many communities there's been the cementing of ideas that the Biden regime or the left in general are engaging in these widespread conspiracies to sort of suppress the truth or suppress the Trump regime, suppress the opinions of conservatives and suppress conservative action."

People look at a sign before a rally for former President Donald Trump at The Farm at 95 on April 9, 2022 in Selma, North Carolina. The rally comes about five weeks before North Carolinas primary elections where Trump has thrown his support behind candidates in some key Republican races. The Dark MAGA movement shows influences from the 'Skull Mask Network'.

ALLISON JOYCE/GETTY IMAGES

According to Marwick, the result of this is a "heavy victim mentality" among some Trump supporters.

"The general messaging that the Democrats are evil, that children are under threat, that people may need to take extreme acts, even political violence to protect their children and their values, I think is consistent across the (far-right) spectrum," says Marwick.

Marwick believe there's an overlap between Dark MAGA and QAnon, with both groups believing that "an evil Democratic cabal of elites" are kidnapping, sex trafficking, and murdering children.



"Now, what this does is it allows there to be this rhetoric of a reckoning where these evil people will get their comeuppance," explains Marwick.

If you're a "mainstream Republican," Marwick says, your plan of action to counteract this "danger" will be through anti-trans and anti-LGTB bills and, when it comes to 2024, through electing the candidate who most reflects your values.

"But if you're somebody who's more in this extremist space, as we see with the Dark MAGA hashtag, the idea is that there's a huge sense of urgency to protect children because they're literally being like kidnapped and killed by this evil group of elites. And that has to be done right now."

Squirrell believes Dark MAGA is trying to unite these groups around the same goals, "as a way of unifying mainstream conservatives with hardline white nationalists and white supremacists."

### **Beyond Social Media Trends: The Real Impact**

The threat of political violence posed by far-right movements like Dark MAGA is real, says Marwick, but it's right now very limited as the group doesn't have mainstream support.

"I think the Biden administration has been more attentive than the Trump administration to recognizing the potential violence from far-right groups," she says.

But that doesn't mean that the alt-right has disappeared. "The far right, the neo-Nazis, the white supremacists, the militias, the conspiracy theorists, the anti-vaxxers, they all still exist," Squirrell said.

Marwick believes that the ideas feeding the Dark MAGA movement are already creating harm in American society, after seeping into the mainstream political discourse.

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In that same mind frame of protecting children promoted by Dark MAGA supporters, recent legislation (like the 'Don't Say Gay' bill in Florida) has been used to curtail LGTB and trans rights and to restrict women's rights, Marwick said.

"While obviously the threat of political violence is always something at the forefront of people's minds, that's often just the most sensational expression of a lot of these hateful ideas," Marwick added.

"And I think what can often be the most damaging is when these hate ideas are codified into legislation because those have the greatest impact on the greatest number of people.

"And when we're talking about things like LGBT families, LGBT youth, especially trans youth, we're talking about bills that actually will harm those young people. There's demonstrable harm on trans people if they're not able to get gender affirming health care, for example."

Dark MAGA was born from the alt-right's feeling of having lost power, and seeking to regain that power, at any cost.

Dark MAGA posts are far from receiving the same kind of attention that brought similar sorts of political memes to become so relevant in the 2016 election. But in the next two years, things might change.

*Newsweek* has reached out to Donald Trump for comment.

Former President Donald Trump gestures as he speaks during a rally at the Canyon Moon Ranch festival grounds in Florence, Arizona, southeast of Phoenix, on January 15, 2022. The post-alt-right #DarkMAGA movement celebrates violence, misogyny and trolling.

ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

*Update 04/20/22 at 3:27 a.m. ET. This article was updated to embed a link to a GNET article offering an in-depth analysis of the movement and its roots.*

*Update 04/20/22 at 11:14 a.m. ET. This article was updated with Alice E. Marwick's full title.*

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