

# From Slate: Trump Didn't Believe His Election Lies; Pollster Autopsies Explained Loss

*I wouldn't do justice by merely quoting from the two articles I just read on Slate.com. I urge you to subscribe to Slate Plus, as I do. So here's the first article by William Saletan, published on Slate.com on Feb. 4th The 2nd article, also by Saletan, was published on Feb. 2nd. The blue type are hyperlinks, so look for the article on Slate.com if you want to click on them.*

Did Donald Trump lie about who won the 2020 election? The answer seems obvious, but it isn't. If Trump was just deluded—if he told his followers to march on the Capitol on Jan. 6 because he really thought the election had been stolen—some senators might cut him a break in his impeachment trial. But if Trump knew his allegations were bunk, and he sent his mob to the Capitol anyway, that's a more coldblooded crime.

Firsthand accounts from Trump's former aides, lawyers, and political allies, detailed in several recent articles, suggest that he knew his allegations were false, flimsy, or baseless. He was repeatedly advised that his claims didn't check out. He also privately admitted that some of these claims were dubious or absurd. Several episodes are worth exploring at his trial. Here are some of them.

**October.** Trump “was given several presentations by his campaign advisers about the likely surge in mail-in ballots,” according to the [Washington Post](#). He “was told they would go overwhelmingly against him.” Axios explains how Trump set out to “exploit” the delay in counting these ballots. “As Trump prepared for Election Day, he was focused on the so-called red mirage ... that early vote counts would look better for Republicans than the final tallies,” says the [Axios report](#). “His preparations were deliberate, strategic and deeply cynical.” In an early October phone call with Reince Priebus, his former chief of staff, Trump “acted out his script, including ... prematurely declaring victory on election night if it looked like he was ahead.” And that's what Trump eventually did.

**Nov. 7.** The day after the networks called the election for Joe Biden, Trump's campaign advisers told the president that the call would stand unless ongoing vote counts in Arizona

and Georgia shifted markedly in his direction. Even then, Trump would need favorable court rulings in Wisconsin. At this meeting, Trump's deputy campaign manager, Justin Clark, told him that the chances of this scenario were [5 to 10 percent](#). Trump “[signaled that he understood](#).”

**Nov. 12–13.** By this point, the counts in Arizona and Georgia were complete, and Biden's margins were too big to overturn. According to [Axios](#), “the core campaign team told Trump his pathway was dead. In retaliation, Trump stopped listening to them.” Rudy Giuliani insisted there was still a path, but Clark, in a meeting described by the Post, told Trump that Giuliani “[was feeding the president bad information](#).” Giuliani and fellow attorney Sidney Powell, when “asked for evidence internally for their most explosive claims ... could not provide it.” Nevertheless, on Nov. 14, Trump put Giuliani and Powell in charge of his legal team.

**Nov. 20.** Two Michigan Republicans—state House Speaker Lee Chatfield and state Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey—met with Trump at the White House. A “person familiar with their thinking” [told the Post](#) that the two men intended “to deliver to Trump ‘a flavor of the truth and what he wasn't hearing in his own echo chamber.’ ” Afterward, the same source said the lawmakers “left with the impression that ... his blinders had fallen off.” Their message, summarized in a [public statement](#), was that they weren't “aware of any information that would change the outcome of the election in Michigan.”

**Dec. 1.** In a confrontation at the White House, Attorney General William Barr told Trump that the Department of Justice had looked into his fraud allegations and that they were “[just bullshit](#).” Barr told Trump, “The stuff that these people are filling your ear with just isn't true.” According to a New York Times paraphrase, Barr told Trump that “[the allegations about manipulated voting machines were ridiculously false](#).” Trump's White House counsel, Pat Cipollone, backed up Barr in this meeting.

**Dec. 18.** In an Oval Office interrogation of Powell, White House senior adviser Eric Herschmann and staff secretary Derek Ly-

ons [shredded the lawyer's allegations](#). Herschmann pressed Powell for evidence; she failed to supply it. Cipollone pointed out that the FBI and the Department of Justice had investigated every major claim of fraud. During this meeting, according to Axios, “Trump expressed skepticism at various points about Powell's theories, but he said, ‘At least she's out there fighting.’ ” He told Herschmann and Cipollone that they were “offering me nothing.”

**Jan. 2.** In a [phone call](#), Trump pressed Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to reopen the state's vote count. Raffensperger listened to Trump's allegations and told him, “The data you have is wrong.” He explained to Trump that only two ballots in Georgia had been submitted in the names of dead people—not thousands, as Trump had alleged—and that contrary to another Trump falsehood, an audit had “proved conclusively that [ballots] were not scanned three times.” During the call, Raffensperger's general counsel told Trump that the FBI and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation had investigated Trump's claims, and “what we're seeing is not at all what you're describing.” But Trump persisted in his demand that Raffensperger overturn the result.

In addition to these episodes, other advisers may have cautioned Trump. One of his campaign lawyers, Stefan Passantino, says the president's attorneys knew “[within a week](#)” after the election that the allegations of machine fraud in Georgia were bunk. Later, according to [Axios](#), White House staffers “spent weeks poring over the evidence underlying hundreds of affidavits and other claims of fraud promoted by Trump allies like Powell. ... Time and time again, they found, Powell's allegations fell apart under basic scrutiny.” The president reportedly had “[animated debates](#)” with Cipollone, consultations with former adviser [Steve Bannon](#) (who by mid-December was grouching that the machine-fraud allegations [lacked evidence](#)), [hostile phone calls](#) with Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp and Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr, and a Jan. 4 showdown with [Vice President Mike Pence](#). All of these conversations are worth investigating.

Trump sometimes conceded that he doubted or disbelieved what he was telling the public. “In conversations in the Oval Office, Trump would occasionally slip and seem to acknowl-

edge he lost,” says [Axios](#). The president's exact words were, “Can you believe I lost to that fucking guy?” After Powell presented her allegations at a press conference on Nov. 19—and was [dismantled](#) by Fox News host Tucker Carlson for failing to supply evidence—Trump decided that some of her stories were [absurd](#). According to the Post, Trump “spent part of Thanksgiving calling advisers [to ask if they believed he really had lost the election](#).”

In late November, according to Axios, Trump told his staff that Powell was “crazy” and that “[no one believes this stuff](#).” But he continued to promote her accusations, explaining to a political ally that “sometimes you need a little crazy.” On Dec. 1, when Barr privately ridiculed the president's legal strategy and called his public assertions “bullshit,” Trump replied, “Maybe.” Then, before Barr had even walked out of the White House, Trump [tweeted more tales of fraud](#).

Trump is a well-known fantasist. He says things that are crazy or plainly false, and he often believes them. At times, he probably thinks he won the election. But when you're repeatedly warned that what you've said is false or baseless, and you acknowledge that these warnings are well founded or probably correct, that's enough to establish that you knew you should stop. Trump lied, and his lies caused a bloody insurrection. The Senate should judge him accordingly.

## Trump Destroyed Himself:

*Two reports by his own pollsters show why he should have won but didn't.*

Donald Trump might be in denial about who won the 2020 election, but his pollsters aren't. Two of them have performed autopsies on his defeat, and those autopsies are now public. One of his pollsters, John McLaughlin, published an analysis on [Newsmax](#) in November. Another [report](#), written by consultant Tony Fabrizio, was posted on Monday by [Politico](#). Neither pollster blames the former president, but their numbers tell the story: Trump destroyed himself.

*Read the rest of this second article on Slate.com. I will post links to both articles on my own blog, [www.JimSmithBlog.com](http://www.JimSmithBlog.com).*

## Talking Turkey



By Jim Smith