



OPINION

OTHER VOICES



President Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally at the BOK Center, June 20, 2020, in Tulsa, Okla. (AP)

Black candidates tap protest energy

Trump rally highlights vulnerabilities heading into election

NEW YORK, June 22, (AP): President Donald Trump's return to the campaign trail was designed to show strength and enthusiasm heading into the critical final months before an election that will decide whether he remains in the White House.

Instead, his weekend rally in Oklahoma highlighted growing vulnerabilities and crystallized a divisive reelection message that largely ignores broad swaths of voters — independents, suburban women and people of color — who could play a crucial role in choosing Trump or Democratic challenger Joe Biden.

The lower-than-expected turnout at the comeback rally, in particular, left Trump fuming.

"There's really only one strategy left for him, and that is to propel that rage and anger and try to split the society and see if he can have a tribal leadership win here," former Trump adviser-turned-critic Anthony Scaramucci said on CNN's "Reliable Sources."

The president did not offer even a token reference to national unity in remarks that spanned more than an hour and 40 minutes at his self-described campaign relaunch as the nation grappled with surging coronavirus infections, the worst unemployment since the Great Depression and sweeping civil unrest.

Nor did Trump mention George Floyd, the African American man whose death at the hands of Minnesota police late last month sparked a national uprising over police brutality. But he did add new fuel to the nation's culture wars, defending Confederate statues while making racist references to the coronavirus, which originated in China and which he called "kung flu." He also said Democratic Rep. Ilhan Omar, who came to the US as a refugee, "would like to make the government of our country just like the country from where she came, Somalia."

Trump won the presidency in 2016 with a similar red-meat message aimed largely at energizing conservatives and white working-class men. But less than four months before early voting begins in some states, there are signs that independents and educated voters — particularly suburban women — have turned against him. Republican strategists increasingly believe that only a dramatic turnaround in the economy can revive his reelection aspirations.

"It's bad," said Republican operative Rick Tyler, a frequent Trump critic. "There's literally nothing to run on. The only thing he can say is that Biden is worse."

But the day after Trump's Tulsa rally, the president's message was almost an afterthought as aides tried to explain away a smaller-than-expected crowd that left the president outraged.

The campaign had been betting big on Tulsa.

Trump's political team spent days proclaiming that more than 1 million people had requested tickets. They also ignored health warnings from the White House coronavirus task force and Oklahoma officials, eager to host an event that would help him move past the civil rights protests and the coronavirus itself.

His first rally in 110 days was meant to be a defiant display of political force to help energize Trump's spirits, try out some attacks on Biden and serve as a powerful symbol of American's re-opening.

Instead, the city fire marshal's office reported a crowd of just less than 6,200 in the 19,000-seat BOK Center, and at least six staff members who helped set up the event tested positive for the coronavirus. The vast majority of the attendees, including Trump, did not wear face masks as recommended by the Trump administration's health experts.

After the rally, the president berated aides over the turnout. He fumed that he had been led to believe he would see huge crowds in deep-red Oklahoma, according to two White House and campaign officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

There was no sign of an imminent staff shakeup, but members of Trump's inner circle angrily questioned how campaign manager Brad Parscale and other senior aides could so wildly overpromise and underdeliver, according to the officials.

Publicly, Trump's team scrambled to blame the crowd size on media coverage and protesters outside the venue, but the small crowds of pre-rally demonstrators were largely peaceful. Tulsa police reported just one arrest Saturday afternoon.

It's unclear when Trump will hold his next rally.

Before Oklahoma, the campaign had planned to finalize and announce its

K-Pop fans ally to rally protesters

Did TikTok teens, K-Pop fans 'trump' comeback?

OAKLAND, Calif., June 22, (AP): Did teens, TikTok users and fans of Korean pop music troll the president of the United States?

For more than a week before Donald Trump's first campaign rally in three months on Saturday in Tulsa, Oklahoma, these tech-savvy groups opposing the president mobilized to reserve tickets for an event they had no intention of attending. While it's unlikely they were responsible for the low turnout, their antics may have inflated the campaign's expectations for attendance numbers that led to Saturday's disappointing show.

"My 16-year-old daughter and her friends in Park City Utah have hundreds of tickets. You have been rolled by America's teens," veteran Republican campaign strategist Steve Schmidt tweeted on Saturday. The tweet garnered more than 100,000 likes and many responses from people who say they or their kids did the same.

Reached by telephone Sunday, Schmidt called the rally an "unmitigated disaster" — days after Trump campaign chairman Brad Parscale tweeted that more than a million people requested tickets for the rally through Trump's campaign website.

Andrew Bates, a spokesperson for Trump's Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, said the turnout was a sign of weakening voter support. "Donald Trump has abdicated leadership and it is no surprise that his supporters have responded by abandoning him," he said.

In a statement, the Trump campaign blamed the "fake news media" for "warning people away from the rally" over COVID-19 and protests against racial injustice around the country.

"Leftists and online trolls doing a victory

lap, thinking they somehow impacted rally attendance, don't know what they're talking about or how our rallies work," Parscale wrote. "Reporters who wrote gleefully about TikTok and K-Pop fans — without contacting the campaign for comment — behaved unprofessionally and were willing dupes to the charade."

On midday Sunday, it was possible to sign up to stream a recap of the Tulsa event later in the day through Trump's website. It requested a name, email address and phone number. There was no age verification in the sign-up process, though the site required a PIN to verify phone numbers.

Inside the 19,000-seat BOK Center in Tulsa, where Trump thundered that "the silent majority is stronger than ever before," numerous seats were empty. Tulsa Fire Department spokesperson Andy Little said the city fire marshal's office reported a crowd of just less than 6,200 in the arena.

City officials had expected a crowd of 100,000 people or more in downtown Tulsa, but that never materialized. That said, the rally, which was broadcast on cable, also targeted voters in battleground states such as Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Florida.

Social media users who have followed recent events might not be surprised by the way young people (and some older folks) mobilized to troll the president. They did it not just on TikTok but also on Twitter, Instagram and even Facebook. K-Pop fans — who have a massive, coordinated online community and a cutting sense of humor — have become an unexpected ally to American Black Lives Matter protesters.

In recent weeks, they've been repurposing their usual platforms and hashtags from

boosting their favorite stars to backing the Black Lives Matter movement. They flooded right-wing hashtags such as "white lives matter" and police apps with short video clips and memes of their K-pop stars. Many of the early social media messages urging people to sign up for tickets brought up the fact that the rally had originally been scheduled for Friday, June 19, which is Juneteenth, commemorating the end of slavery in the United States. Tulsa, the location for the rally, was the scene in 1921 of one of the most severe white-on-Black attacks in American history.

Schmidt said he was not surprised. Today's teens, after all, grew up with phones and have "absolutely" mastered them, he said. They are also the first generation to have remote Zoom classes and have a "subversive sense of humor," having come of age in a world of online trolls and memes, Schmidt said. Most of all, he said, "they are aware of what is happening around them."

"Like salmon in the river, they participate politically through the methods and means of their lives," Schmidt added.

That said, the original idea for the mass ticket troll may have come not from a teen but from an Iowa woman. The politics site Iowa Starting Line found that a TikTok video posted on June 11 by Mary Jo Laupp, a 51-year-old grandmother from Fort Dodge, Iowa, suggesting that people book free tickets to "make sure there are empty seats." Laupp's video, which also tells viewers how to stop receiving texts from the Trump campaign after they provide their phone number (simply text "STOP"), has had more than 700,000 likes. It was also possible to sign up for the rally using a fake or temporary phone number from Google Voice, for instance.

next rally this week. Trump is already scheduled to make appearances Tuesday in Arizona and Thursday in Wisconsin. Both are major general election battlegrounds.

At least one swing state governor, meanwhile, says Trump would not be welcome to host a rally in her state amid the pandemic.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a Democrat, said she "would think very seriously about" trying to block Trump from hosting a rally there if he wanted to.

"We know that congregating without masks, especially at an indoor facility, is the worst thing to do in the midst of a global pandemic," Whitmer said in an interview before the Oklahoma event, conceding that she wasn't aware of the specific legal tools she had available to block a prospective Trump rally. "I just know we have limitations on the number of people that can gather and that we're taking this seriously."

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NEW YORK: Amy McGrath and Eliot Engel live hundreds of miles apart in states with dramatically different politics.

Yet they are both the preferred candidates of the Democratic Party's Washington establishment as voters in Kentucky and New York decide their congressional primary elections on Tuesday. And both may be in trouble.

On the eve of their elections, Engel, a 16-term House incumbent who represents parts of the Bronx and New York City's wealthy suburbs, and McGrath, a former military officer and fundraising juggernaut running in her first Kentucky Senate campaign, are facing strong challenges from lower-profile Black candidates. The challengers have tapped into the wounded progressive movement's desire for transformational change suddenly animated by sweeping civil rights protests across America.

Engel's challenger, 45-year-old former public school principal Jamaal Bowman, and McGrath's opponent, 35-year-old state Rep Charles Booker, speak openly about their personal experience with police brutality and racism as they promote progressive plans to transform the nation's health care system and economy. And both accuse their white opponents of being absent from the front lines of the civil rights debate.

Bowman and Booker have also won the endorsement of Bernie Sanders, among a growing list of progressive leaders trying to influence the races from afar. The Vermont senator failed to win the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, but he continues to shape congressional primaries — even if it puts him at odds with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is backing Engel, and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, who helped recruit McGrath.

editor's choice

