

Twitter Thread by [Brad Littlejohn](#)



[Brad Littlejohn](#)

[@WBLittlejohn](#)



A thread on election fraud, political grandstanding, and incitement—expanding on my tweets last week about Hawley and Carlson.

Let us begin by stipulating the following. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, and the first rule of rhetoric is knowing one's audience.

2. Consider three convictions (1) Widespread election fraud occurred, on such a scale that Biden "stole" the election. (2) You doubt that, but you think it's at least possible. (3) You're pretty sure that, despite irregularities here and there, they did not alter the outcome.

3. It is clear that President Trump, beginning election night and insistently thereafter, made claim (1). Polls and personal experience show that a large portion of the GOP public, for their own reasons or because Trump said so, also embraced claim (1).

4. However, when it comes to conservative intellectual and political leadership, I have not encountered anyone personally who holds claim (1). Some seem to hold claim (2), most, however, are in camp (3). They believe Biden won fair and square. So, apparently, do the courts.

5. Now, consider if you are in camp (2). You think there might've been serious fraud. You think it's worth investigating. But you also recognize that's a massive claim. A claim that could destabilize the entire political system for years to come.

6. If this is where you stand, you have a duty to speak up, but with great care. If the election was stolen, the stakes are high; but they are just as high if it was *not* and you make people think it was. Thus, you have a duty to carefully distinguish claim (2) from claim (1).

7. You have to know your audience, and if your audience is already convinced "the steal is real," you have a duty to make it clear that you are opposing their stance (by insisting on reasonable doubt), as well as opposing those who categorically deny the fraud.

8. If you use your megaphone to *only* sow doubt about the election result, you are either being stupid (failing to understand your audience), or acting in bad faith, since you know that your words will be used to support a view you do not hold—that the steal was definitely real.

9. Now consider if you are in camp (3). You do not believe there was systemic fraud. But you are talking to people who by and large do. Since rhetoric is the art of persuasion, you are responsible not merely for what you say, but for how you are heard.

10. In this rhetorical context, any insinuation of fraud, any “there’s some really fishy stuff that needs looking into here,” any talk about the evils of mail-in voting, or unconstitutional voting procedures, cannot but be heard as an endorsement of “the steal is real” narrative.

11. Folks like Tucker and Josh Hawley are brilliant masters of rhetoric. They know how to move hearts and minds. To tell me they don’t know how their words will be heard, given the assumptions of the audience they’re speaking to, is insulting to their intelligence.

12. Ergo, since “they’re being stupid” does not seem a plausible account, one can only assume that they intend to be heard this way. If you say something that you know will be heard as affirming X, when you yourself believe X to be false, the word for this is deception.

13. Now, there could be 3 motives for this deception: (1) incite something like an insurrection; (2) earn political capital with a group of angry constituents that can be cashed in later; or (3) because you want to harness that rage to address what you believe *are* real problems

14. The most charitable read is #3. Perhaps Hawley really was just concerned to limit procedures like mail-in voting in future. He didn’t think massive fraud *had* happened. He just wanted to prevent it in future. Ok, fine. But good rhetoric is also about timing.

15. If someone has yelled “FIRE!” in a crowded theater, you can’t yell into the midst of the mob, “THERE’S NOT ENOUGH FIRE EXTINGUISHERS IN THIS BUILDING!” and protest later that you knew there was no fire, and were just drawing attention to a possible future problem.

16. Again, these people aren’t dumb. They knew their audience, they knew the timing, they knew they were playing with fire. And still they played. And the question we must ask is, “Why?”