



THE affluent suburb of Paradise Valley in Arizona is a traditional Republican stronghold. With multi-million-dollar homes dotting a desert filled with towering saguaro cactus plants, its residents enjoy a choice of more than half a dozen golf courses, discreet upmarket shopping centres and award-winning restaurants, all nestled against the spectacular backdrop of Camelback Mountain.

Donald Trump stormed to victory here in 2016. Paradise Valley is part of Maricopa County, an area of 2.1million voters which includes the city of Phoenix and its outlying areas and which has voted Republican for as long as anyone can remember.

Yet in 2020, Maricopa County delivered a bombshell when voters turned in droves against President Trump in favour of Democratic rival Joe Biden.

'It was seismic,' says life-long Republican Benny White, who unsuccessfully ran for local office and found himself being chased down driveways by furious residents branding him a "Trumper".

'People just turned against Trump. He became a visceral figure of hate. I was chased away. People were screaming abuse at me.'

Losing Maricopa County – and, subsequently, Arizona itself – proved fatal for Trump, who continues to insist the election was 'stolen' from him, a claim which has been roundly refuted and which his critics have dubbed the 'Big Lie'.

Yet today in Paradise Valley (population: 14,362), things are feeling rather different. The November 2020 election seems a long time ago. And for the former President, that could be very good news.

Many Paradise Valley voters regret switching their support to Biden. And when The Mail on Sunday visited last week, they said they'd now rather vote for Trump, should he choose to run again.

Many of those we spoke to declined to give their names, saying that because of the toxic nature of US politics, they were fearful of even admitting they voted for Biden, such is the residual anger of Trump supporters who fervently believe his claims that the election was 'stolen'.

A 64-year-old retired doctor reading the New York Times at the Hava Java coffee shop told us he voted for Trump in 2016, 'but couldn't bring myself to' in 2020. He said: 'If it's Biden versus Trump again, if things are still going so badly, then you'd have to go with someone else, even if you have to put up with a disagreeable character like Trump.'

To many, it might seem outrageous that a man who left the White House in disgrace after hundreds of his supporters stormed the US Capitol building on January 6 last year could ever reappear on the political landscape – let alone run for the highest political office in the country.

YET it increasingly appears that Trump is determined to do exactly that. Politics professor Larry Sabato called Trump's following 'almost cult-like', saying: 'Almost all of the potential Republican candidates, if not all, will not run if Trump does because they know they will be put in the meat-grinder. He has cult status with a large majority of the Republican electorate. You'd put your money on Trump.'

Certainly in Arizona, many are talking about 'Teflon Don' returning to power, and it's the same in other crucial 'swing states'.

While Trump has remained uncharacteristically coy about his plans, last night saw the clearest sign yet that he is setting his sights on the presidency when he held a 'Save America' rally at the aptly named Thunder festival grounds in Florence, Arizona, just an hour's drive south-east of Phoenix.

Thousands of his supporters brandishing 'Trump 2024' flags attended the event, which had guest speakers including Kari Lake, billed as 'Donald J Trump's endorsed candidate for Governor of Arizona', and businessman Mike Lindell, known as 'the pillow guy' because he made his fortune selling bedding. Lindell has spent \$25million (£18million) trying –

He's amassed a \$115million war chest, has a new slogan and 82 per cent of Republicans back him. As supporters flocked to his rally in Democrat-held Arizona last night, no wonder Americans are daring to say...

TRUMP really could be on his way back to the WHITE HOUSE



From **CAROLINE GRAHAM** IN LOS ANGELES and **MATHEUS SANCHEZ** IN ARIZONA



unsuccessfully – to prove that the 2020 election was rigged.

Trump's new 'Save America' slogan was on full display at the rally – emblazoned on the podium and on banners waved by supporters.

A Republican pundit said: "'Save America' replaces "Make America Great Again" which was so successful first time around.

'Apparently he considered "Make America Great Again, Again", but that was ditched because it sounded like a parody.'

New phrases such as 'Stop the steal!' were chanted, alongside old favourite 'Drain the swamp!'

lower. Today, few dare speak out against him. Of the ten Republicans who voted to impeach Trump after January 6, three have announced they will give up politics.

On Friday, Congressman John Katko from New York said he was retiring: 'My conscience, principles and commitment to do what's right have guided every decision I've made as a member of Congress and they guide my decision today.'

Joe Walsh, a former Republican congressman, said: 'This is Donald Trump's party. If he wants the nomination in 2024, it's his.'

'Trump is the king-maker,' one

prominent Republican strategist told the MoS. 'Everyone thought he was finished when he left the White House but his base stuck with him. His fans are more rabidly pro-Donald now than ever.'

It is understood that during weekly political gatherings at Mar-a-Lago – Trump's estate in Palm Beach, Florida, dubbed the 'Winter White House' – he is openly talking about running.

'Donald hates losing,' the source said. 'There has been a continuous line of contenders coming to kiss his ring. He is the king-maker. Even if he doesn't run he can make or

break a candidate. But everyone thinks he will run.'

A recent YouGov poll showed 82 per cent of Republicans have a 'very favourable' or 'somewhat favourable' view of Trump, with 51 per cent supporting him as the Republican nominee. President Biden's approval ratings are in free-fall, with a poll this week showing they have dropped to a dismal 33 per cent.

Biden has already declared he will run again in 2024, when he will be 81. 'Trump smells blood and he's going for it,' the source said. 'He is positioning himself for 2024 but is demanding total fealty.'

To enforce obedience, Trump has viciously attacked those within his party who contradict his claims about election fraud.

Last Sunday, Republican senator

Mike Rounds, of South Dakota, said: 'There is no evidence of fraud that would have changed the vote outcome in a single state.' Trump immediately sent out an email to his millions of followers on his 'Save America' website blasting Rounds as 'woke' and a 'RINO' (Republican In Name Only).

Incredibly, Trump has built up a \$115million (£84million) election 'war chest' through donations sent to his website. Despite being banned by social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter for peddling misinformation about the election, Trump continues to hold enormous sway in the American heartland.

His supporters have switched to sites such as Parler, Rumble and Newsmax, while Fox News and powerful talk radio hosts Sean Hannity and Mark Levin back his claims that he was swindled.

Levin recently told his 11million listeners to: 'Crush them, crush them. We need to kick their a**s. Stealing elections has become the norm for the Democratic Party.'

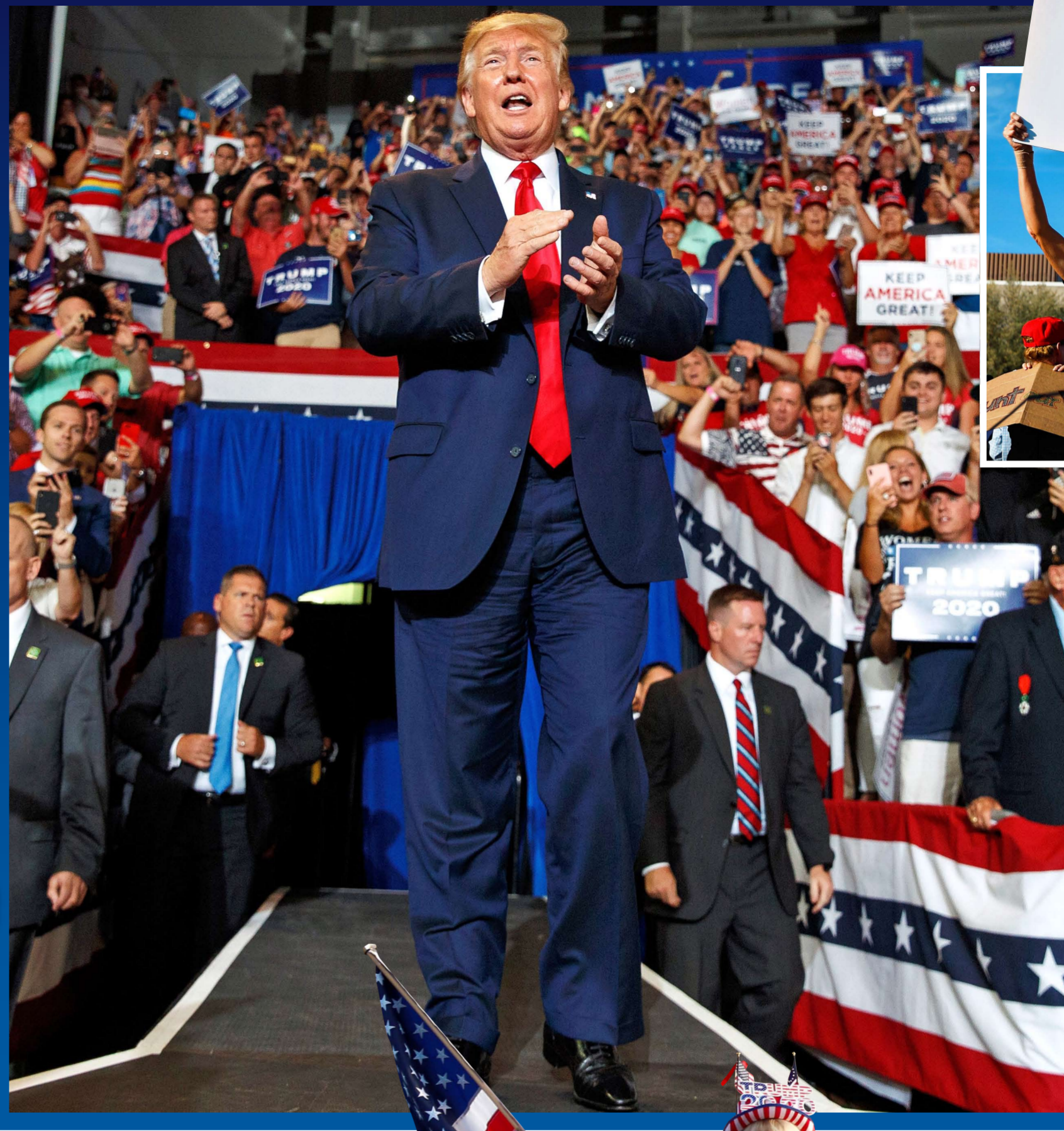
Whoever ends up winning on November 5, 2024, this sort of rhetoric stokes the potential for further political warfare – and worse. Many have raised the spectre of a

bloody second civil war. An opinion piece in the Washington Post by retired Major General Paul Eaton and Antonio Taguba warned of 'the potential for a total breakdown of the chain of command along partisan lines', which 'risks the rise of a shadow government... led by a losing candidate.'

Mary Trump, the former President's estranged niece and a vocal critic, predicts her uncle would run again and warned of violence.

She said: 'Interfering with a peaceful transfer of power is obviously bad, as is undermining the legitimacy of the incoming administration... but who knows what other kind of smash-and-grab activities he's going to engage in?'

'Somebody with the seriousness of the psychological disorders he has does not get better. He suffered the greatest narcissistic injury of his life in 2020. If



ANGER: A protester in Phoenix disputes the 2020 election result

looking increasingly likely, his final two years in power will see him become a lame-duck President, unable to pass any legislation, including his \$2trillion Build Back Better infrastructure and social spending bill.

Many fear Trump is trying to cheat his way to victory. While Republican officials in charge of ballot-counting in 2020 stood up to Trump's calls to change the outcome, he is actively supporting candidates who will bow to his demands.

Kari Lake, a former TV presenter who appeared alongside Trump on stage last night and has his backing to be governor of Arizona, said she would not have acknowledged

'Biden is weak and old – people miss the bluster of Trump'

Biden's victory. 'I would not have certified it,' she said, meaning she would have refused to vote for the measure formally recognising the presidential election result – the final technical stage in creating a new presidency.

Trump is already funnelling cash into local politics to support officials who are redrawing polling districts to favour Republicans, to the dismay of 'old school' Republicans such as Benny White.

White was involved in an audit of Arizona's election results and says no voter fraud has been found.

It is an irony that Republicans who voted against Trump in 2020, including 'soccer mums' and immigrants who could not stomach his anti-women, racist rhetoric, may be turning back towards him.

A Hispanic woman says: 'My mother hated Trump because of his immigration policies, but he's been pro-life and actively talking about repealing Roe v Wade [the historic Supreme Court decision which legalised a woman's right to abortion] and so she now likes him.'

'Trump appeals to people who hoped Biden would help them and who, for a variety of reasons, are feeling disappointed.'

'Memories are short. Trump didn't solve many problems but he was strident. In contrast, Biden is weak and old and hasn't done much.'

'People miss the bluster of Trump. He is offering hope. 'And hope is all they have.'



STARS AND STRIPES: A Trump supporter dresses up for the occasion