

# TRUMP'S MUGSHOT PROVES THAT POLITICS IS ONE BIG MEME



**MARIA SHAIKH**  
Copy Editor

If you are reading this article, every contour of that image is likely branded into your brain: the thin-lipped scowl, the blonde frizz, the hard blue eyes highlighted by a suit far too formal for a county jail. You have seen the memes and the online wars about whether the indictment was deserved or not, and the self-aggrandizing editorials whining about how the photo is a metaphor for the 2024 general election. Donald Trump's mugshot photo — released after his arrest in Georgia over 91 felony counts including election fraud and racketeering — is already immortalized as one of history's iconic photographs. But our reactions to this photo do far more than illustrate the drama of the upcoming presidential race. They reveal a striking attitude, unmistakably post-pandemic and roaring 2020s: the crumbling of America's belief in the political establishment.

Political reactions to the mugshot follow the pre-existing culture war surrounding Trump. His supporters insist he's facing fabricated charges while his opponents celebrate it as justice rightfully served. But if you look at the reaction of average

people instead of politicians, particularly the younger generations, the concern is not the legitimacy of Trump's arrest. No one cares about that topic anymore; rather, we spend our time making fun of it.

The legal and political reality of Trump's indictment is so dismissible to the average person that the only way to engage with the topic is by laughing at it. For the first time in history, a previous American president is facing criminal charges, and our reaction is to Photoshop him as a "2000s party girl." Our hysterics aren't over his crimes, but his self-identifying as "strawberry blond" on the county jail website.

This is the political culture that decades of social media and tabloid news have manufactured. In an economy where attention can reliably generate money, it is no longer profitable to be sensible or civil. What hooks people is outlandish cruelty and an endless cycle of drama that stains your reputation but keeps your relevance sparkling. News media has grown more sensationalized to compete with modern, attention-grabbing tech-

nologies: every complex topic is now beaten into digestible meme mush and every old-school, upright politician is irrelevant. And



**DONALD J. TRUMP**

in this new world, being irrelevant and being dead are more alike than different. We all forgot Joe Biden existed as a legitimate human being and not some White House ghost story until the "soda" meme

went viral. Infinitely quotable Trump, though, has never had this issue.

While social media and its attention economy play a significant role in how we received the Trump mugshot, there's more to the story. For decades now, Americans have been losing faith in establishment politics' ability to solve problems. Inflation climbs, wages stagnate and recessions cripple the country. New wars are waged as we find out old wars were false flag operations. Political extremism has doubled since 2004 as more people abandon liberal democratic procedures and seek real, radical change. None of our jesters — sorry, politicians — will get anything done, because they are too busy entertaining. And the sustained, systemic change that would actually help us hardly makes for a good story.

When every little thing clamors to sell itself as huge, nothing ends up mattering. Why should I care about the minutiae of Trump's 91 felony charges? Why should I follow local elections? I have work

to do, and I can only spare mental energy for what holds my attention ...

like a great Photoshop of Trump's mugshot into the "Barbie and Ken LAFD" meme. We don't rally for change even though our trust in government has reached all-time lows. We don't fact-check, critique our sources or demand better journalism — we're just so busy. We eat the slop handed to us and maybe throw money at charity whenever something bad happens. We talk about today's hottest topic, be it the Kardashians or the Trumps, and then we forget and move on.

Can we keep living like this? As long as our politics and our entertainment mix together, we will never escape this trap of ineffectual politicians turning the country into a circus. That is what sells, after all. Reagan the actor sloganized his way to the White House, where he pushed policies many of us hate today. Bush Jr. the nepo baby did much the same. And Trump still engages his followers even from a prison cell. Right now, the more a person is thought and talked about, the more money and votes they accrue, even if most of the attention is negative. We need to break that cycle.

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## How the resume grind-set kills our campus

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The first few weeks of the semester always bring a flood of "we're hiring" and "officers wanted" flyers across campus. If you're currently struggling to balance your responsibilities or running low on time, but are looking to add a shiny title or two to your resume, here's my advice: don't apply. We need less grinders in campus leadership if we want this university to thrive.

Many archetypes populate a college campus — the slackers, the partiers, the teacher's pets — but none are as iconic as the grinder. We all know this person: they take ten thousand credit hours, run every club, volunteer every weekend, go to work and internships and job shad-

ows, study for the MCAT... and somehow make it look easy. While the rest of us plebeians struggle to balance a handful of commitments, the grinder is doing literally everything. If they said they had invented time travel to get it all done, we would be unsurprised. The grinder is relentlessly productive, well-rounded and experienced; the aspiration of every imperfect student.

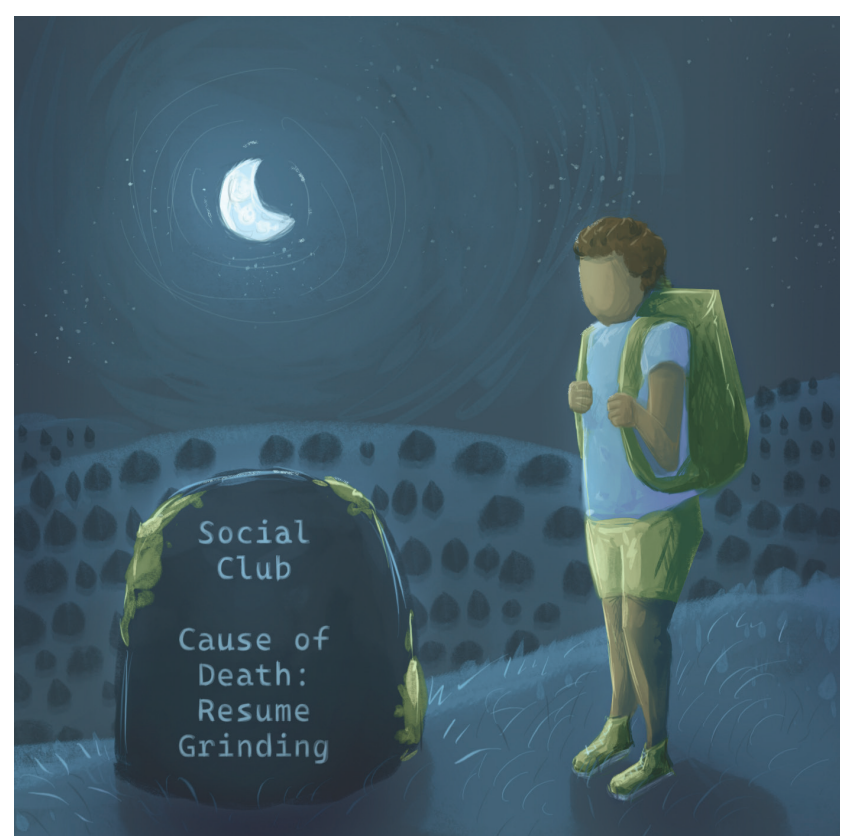
But the grinder hides one fatal flaw. They frequently overcommit and underperform, leading to the mismanagement of all kinds of organizations — which damages campus culture for all of us.

The truth of the matter is that the grinder doesn't care about everything they do. No one has enough soul-scorch-

ing passion for 15 different things. Some things naturally fall to the wayside in the great shuffle of priorities. But when the overambitious student, having signed up for several leadership roles that demand huge time commitments, gets busy with what they actually care about — studies, work or internships — then what happens to the less important things? The student organizations they're on the officer boards of, the nonprofit they founded, the startup they lead? All the great tasks they took on not out of love, but from a pathological need to fatten up their resume like a cow for slaughter?

Startups stagnate. Clubs fade into obscurity, leaving members feeling lost and

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