

# [***Rupert Murdoch, a kingmaker in GOP politics, enriched himself as he poisoned America***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69P2-0PD1-JBSS-S04N-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Rupert Murdoch's reign over the insidious right-wing media kingdom he forged into existence over a decades-long career is [*coming to a close*](http://www.cnn.com/2023/09/21/media/rupert-murdoch-steps-down-fox/index.html).

The 92-year-old right-wing media mogul, who announced Thursday that he will [*step down as chairman*](http://www.cnn.com/2023/09/21/media/lachlan-murdoch-fox-news/index.html) of Fox Corporation and News Corporation, will leave behind a stain that cannot be erased and will far outlive the time he spent on the throne of his global media empire.

Through a hazardous cocktail of mis- and disinformation, conspiracy theories, and outright propaganda, Murdoch profited off of fear and division with little apparent regard for warping the public discourse, disfiguring American ***politics***, and imperiling Western democracy.

With his rise to kingmaker in Republican ***politics*** and an unflinching eye for infusing news and hyperbole once only found on talk radio, Murdoch tapped into the fears and fantasies of his hungry audience, many of whom were eager to hear their own thoughts fed back to them and now remain detached from reality.

Left in his wake is a deeply polarized society squabbling over culture wars and plagued with mistrust and dysfunction, pulled further to the right by his mouthpieces that have used their platforms to twist and manipulate the truth, leaving the public and its political leaders with a lost sense of trust.

In his letter to staffers announcing his exit Thursday, Murdoch attempted to portray himself as a gladiator who fought "the battle for the freedom of speech and, ultimately, the freedom of thought." Sounding like one of the Fox News pundits on his payroll, Murdoch bashed the "elites" who he portrayed as having "open contempt for those who are not members of their rarefied class."

"Most of the media is in cahoots with those elites, peddling political narratives rather than pursuing the truth," Murdoch wrote, without any sense of irony.

Murdoch, himself a billionaire many times over who has spent his life rubbing shoulders with society's most elite members, must have known that deep down in his bones he was offering up a fitting description of himself - a man whose companies printed money through the peddling of outrageous narratives aimed at satisfying the thirst of his tragically duped audience.

Murdoch, who personally took great precaution during the pandemic and was later one of the world's first recipients of the Covid-19 vaccine, stood by silently as he handsomely paid his roster of right-wing commentators who promoted lies about the virus and sewed conspiracy theories about the life-saving jabs. The cost of those lies, which was paid in the form of actual human lives who turned to the outlet they entrusted with their own health decisions, might never be fully known, but it was unquestionably too high.

The cost, however, of the election lies that Murdoch's Fox News spread to protect Donald Trump is more easily measurable, courtesy of the mammoth defamation lawsuits brought by voting technology companies Dominion Voting Systems and Smartmatic. Murdoch, who behind the scenes rejected the unhinged rhetoric that was broadcast on his air, [*paid Dominion a historic $787.5 million*](http://www.cnn.com/2023/04/19/media/dominion-murdoch-cost-phone-hacking/index.html) to settle and avert a jury trial earlier this year. Fox News still faces a $2.7 billion [*lawsuit from Smartmatic*](http://www.cnn.com/2023/08/23/media/smartmatic-newsmax-lawsuit/index.html).

The question coursing through media circles in the wake of Murdoch's stunning announcement is: Why now? Why did he decide that Thursday, September 21, 2023, would be the day to announce he would be stepping down and vacating the throne? Murdoch is a strategic thinker and ruthless businessman, who would have given the timing of his exit immense thought.

Is the announcement an indication that Murdoch is attempting to further cement his son, Lachlan, as his successor? Does he believe that [*naming Lachlan as chairman*](http://www.cnn.com/2023/09/21/media/lachlan-murdoch-fox-news/index.html) of both of his companies before his death, whenever that might be, will make it more difficult for his other children to overthrow him upon his passing? Perhaps Murdoch believes that if he seats Lachlan on the throne and places the crown atop his head, it will eliminate - or at least shrink - the power vacuum that his death is surely to spawn.

Or perhaps there is something else at play. Murdoch said in his note that he is in "robust health." But he is 92, after all, and has slowed down in recent years.

The other question is: How will this transition impact the organization of Murdoch's companies? Murdoch stressed that Lachlan shares his ideological worldview. But the executive ranks of Fox and News Corporations are comprised of Murdoch's own lifelong, loyal lieutenants. Will Lachlan make some changes? Will he empower a new generation?

And the biggest question of all: Does Murdoch have some additional surprises left up his sleeve? Are there more shoes to drop? We will see.

Analysis by Oliver Darcy, CNN

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