

# THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE EPSTEIN SCANDAL

One of the longest part of Vanity Fair's two-part (one, two) interview with Susie Wiles focuses on Jeffrey Epstein. It goes like this:

¶1: Chris Whipple's explanation of why it's important.

¶2: Wiles' admission she underestimated the import of it.

¶3: A review of Pam Bondi's binder fiasco, with Wiles commenting on Bondi's fuck-up.

¶4: A report on how many FBI agents reviewed the files, with Wiles' claim they weren't just searching for Trump.

¶5: Wiles' claim there was nothing bad on Trump in the files, just him and Epstein being "young, single playboys."

¶6: Wiles debunking Trump's false claims about Clinton's ties to Epstein.

¶7: Wiles describing that Kash Patel and Dan Bongino really understood Epstein, except Kash was wrong.

¶8: Wiles' failure to offer an explanation for Todd Blanche's interview with Ghislaine Maxwell.

¶9: Wiles' claim that Trump was pissed Ghislaine got moved.

¶10: Wiles' claim that the birthday letter to Epstein is not from Trump.

¶11 – ¶12: Wiles' claim that Trump would sit for a deposition in his WSJ lawsuit if necessary.

¶13: Whipple explaining the threat of the Epstein files again, then quoting Wiles on who cares about it.

¶14: Someone at the White House who might be JD Vance explaining who cares about it.

¶15: A specific mention of Vance, with further explanation of those who care about Epstein.

Elsewhere, Wiles credits herself with a great read of electoral outcomes (even while describing her own prediction that Jack Ciattarelli might beat Mikie Sherill last month): She was certain they would win last year, she didn't think November would be that

bad, they're going to win midterms.

Her confidence (even if feigned) is why I'm so interested in Wiles' description of the relative knowledge about Epstein. As noted, she admitted to Whipple that she didn't understand how important this scandal could be, deferring knowledge on such issues to Kash Patel, Dan Bongino, and JD Vance – two of whom she describes as conspiracy theorists.

Wiles told me she underestimated the potency of the scandal: "Whether he was an American CIA asset, a Mossad asset, whether all these rich, important men went to that nasty island and did unforgivable things to young girls," she said, "I mean, I kind of knew it, but it's never anything I paid a bit of attention to."

[snip]

The people that really appreciated what a big deal this is are Kash [Patel] and [FBI deputy director] Dan Bongino," she said. "Because they lived in that world. And the vice president, who's been a conspiracy theorist for a decade... For years, Kash has been saying, 'Got to release the files, got to release the files.' And he's been saying that with a view of what he thought was in these files that turns out not to be right."  
[brackets original]

But then six paragraphs after describing that longtime Trump loyalist Kash Patel was totally into [a false belief] about the Epstein files, first Wiles and then someone who might be JD Vance (who is mentioned in the following paragraph) describe their understanding of who cares about this: "people that are sort of new to our world."

The Epstein files debacle poses a dire political threat to Trump and the future of the GOP. "The people that are

inordinately interested in Epstein are the new members of the Trump coalition, the people that I think about all the time—because I want to make sure that they are not Trump voters, they’re Republican voters,” Wiles said. “It’s the Joe Rogan listeners. It’s the people that are sort of new to our world. It’s not the MAGA base.”

A senior White House official described the mindset of an overlapping bloc of voters who are angered by both Trump’s handling of the Epstein files and the war in Gaza. It’s as much as 5 percent of the vote and includes “union members, the podcast crowd, the young people, the young Black males. They are interested in Epstein. And they are the people that are disturbed that we are as cozy with Israel as we are.”

Susie Wiles, who has been around Trump since he was first elected, claims “the people that are inordinately interested in Epstein” are “not the MAGA base”!!!

And then that anonymous White House official who might be JD Vance (whom Wiles explains is a conspiracy theorist) describes that the “young Black males” are the ones who care about Epstein.

To be fair, it is the case that the MAGA base voters who do care deeply about this – people like Charlie Kirk, Benny Johnson, and Jack Posobiec – quickly fell in line when Trump demanded they stop talking about Epstein in July.

But like Kash and Bongino themselves, these are the people who made Epstein specifically and conspiracy theories about pedophiles more generally some of the central glue of Trump’s coalition.

As I wrote for TPM’s anniversary series, the

superpower of reclaiming attention which Trump has honed with these same far right trolls has always been developed in parallel with the use of conspiracy theories about pedophilia – from Posobiec’s Pizzagate, to QAnon, to Epstein – to keep that attention.

On July 8, something happened to Donald Trump that I’ve not seen happen in the entire decade he has dominated presidential politics. As his base clamored for more disclosures about sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, his superpower – his ability to grab and redirect attention – briefly failed him. “Are you still talking about Jeffrey Epstein?” he whined when a journalist asked about the Justice Department’s **decision** to abort any further disclosure of documents related to the case. “This guy’s been talked about for years.”

[snip]

Two things had disrupted Trump’s superpower. First, after Trump’s top DOJ appointees – Attorney General Pam Bondi, FBI Director Kash Patel, and his deputy Dan Bongino – had fueled, then disappointed, MAGA’s demand for Epstein disclosures, the failure to fulfill their promises fed the conspiracy itself. By thwarting the conspiracists’ demands, Bondi, especially, created rifts and distrust in Trump’s own base.

Conspiracy theories about Epstein were always non-falsifiable; the mob will never be satisfied. But Bondi made that dynamic worse.

More important for understanding what happened in July: the very same online trolls who’ve been critical partners in Trump’s success managing attention were precisely the same people who had spun those conspiracy theories. There is a

direct through-line from a relatively small set of social media accounts that helped Trump win the 2016 election to PizzaGate and, after that, QAnon. QAnoners played a key role in Trump's 2021 insurrection attempt, and its adherents remain a substantial portion of Trump's base. Since 2016, pro-Trump trolls' exploitation of social media algorithms to redirect political news coverage – whether from legacy media or newer outlets – has disrupted traditional news cycles.

And while some of what Wiles says about Epstein – her claim Trump was pissed Ghislaine got moved, her feigned certainty that the birthday letter is not from Trump – is clearly bullshit, Wiles and the anonymous person who might be JD nevertheless offered a very specific, and very inaccurate, description of which Trump voters care about Epstein.

Maybe they're telling this tale because it's the same thing they told House members in a bid to kill the Massie-Khanna discharge petition. Maybe they're telling this tale because everyone Wiles thinks knows about Epstein is a conspiracy theorist and the guy who really knows is just a former young playboy.

But even though Trump got Kirk and Benny and Posobiec to give up their sustained demand for Epstein materials, it remains the case that Trump has never fully recovered from the fiasco in July. First Mike Johnson had to flee a week early in July or risk embarrassing votes, then Bondi's desperate bid – using the White House situation room – to convince Lauren Boebert to defect from the discharge petition backfired, then the Epstein fiasco ultimately led Marjorie Taylor Greene to break with Trump more substantially.

And tomorrow, DOJ will be forced to hand over the Epstein files themselves.

For five months, Epstein has remained at least a low-level burn undermining Trump's ability to manage the public's focus and his own policy goals. The Epstein thing was the first thing that led Republicans to defect, and now they're defecting left and right.

And yet Wiles (and her anonymous friend who might be conspiracy theorist JD Vance) professes to believe the only people who care about Epstein are the young Black voters that Trump just won over last year?

That's either a fantastic lie. Or a confession that explains far more about why Trump has bolloxed Epstein so badly.

Update: On Xitter, Liz Wheeler (no known relation), one of the recipients of Bondi's binder, focuses on the same passages I did – blaming Wiles for misinforming Trump about how important this is to MAGAts. But she doesn't note what I do: that Wiles, at least, is still unclear how important it is.

It now makes total sense as to why President Trump has—at times—dismissed the Epstein scandal and even called it a “hoax.” Over the summer, Trump said he did not understand why many of his supporters were so fixated on Epstein.

Well, now why know why he said that—it would seem Susie Wiles was the one misinforming Trump about the MAGA base's concerns.

We care about the Epstein files because we want transparency, we want the elites held accountable, and we want JUSTICE for the Epstein victims.