

Contradicting medical evidence and health experts, Biggs, Gosar cast doubt on severity of COVID-19 in Arizona

CLEO KREJCI JUNE 23, 2020



Despite Arizona's status as a national hot spot for COVID-19, some of the state's congressional Republicans have grown more insistent that the pandemic is not as severe as it's made out to be and spread their own interpretations of data in contrast to the word of medical experts.

Arizona recorded another 3,333 new cases on Thursday, continuing a steep upward trend in the state's caseload that has caused some hospitals to enter surge mode as they become increasingly burdened with COVID-19 patients. After weeks of public pressure to take more drastic action against the spread of the virus, Dr. Cara Christ, the Arizona Department of Health Services director, said hospitals would be allowed to activate crisis standards of care, and Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey shuttered some public spaces like gyms, bars and movie theaters until July 27.

But neither the state's actions nor the word of medical experts has stopped some elected officials from spreading their opinions.

Last week, Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., tweeted that "The Fake News says the pandemic is worse than ever," paired with a screenshot of the Arizona Department of Health Services data portal on hospitalization numbers. "The pandemic is clearly waning here. Many in the media are lying again and inciting fear," he said in the tweet.

Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz., this week tweeted that Arizonans should not trust the word of the White House's top medical advisers, Drs. Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx.

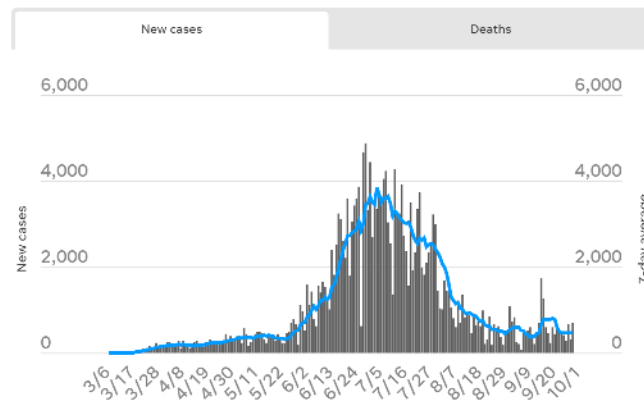
Public health experts, along with Ducey, agree that hospitalizations are rising in Arizona. However, both Gosar and Biggs have challenged hospitalization numbers in the state based on their own interpretations, suggesting that hospitalizations are lower than they are made out to be. However, [data from the Arizona Department of Health Services can experience a lag in updates — from seven to 10 days — that can make hospitalization data look lower than reality on the graph cited in the tweets.](#)

On Monday, Ducey cited rising COVID-19-like illnesses in emergency rooms and COVID-19 patient hospital bed use as signals that the virus is spreading in Arizona.

Biggs repeatedly has shared his thoughts about COVID-19 data with the public over Twitter, radio talk shows, Fox News and other channels, saying contrary to the word of experts that some data points, like lowering hospital discharge rates and mortality rates, suggest the severity of the virus is being blown out of proportion.

In a guest column written by Biggs titled “Arizona Governor’s Shut Down Order Defies Reason” published Wednesday on conservative political website townhall.com, Biggs says he believes Ducey’s recent order is not justified based on the numbers.

Day by day: New cases of COVID-19 announced in Arizona



SOURCE: Arizona Department of Health Services

NOTE: Arizona's official tally likely does not capture all cases of COVID-19 in the state.

“It is time to acknowledge that the Democrat Leftists and their accomplices in the media are busy engendering hysteria in the American people over the COVID-19 outbreak. They take certain COVID-19 numbers reported by governments and push them into the public without giving that data the context necessary to understand what is really going on,” Biggs wrote.

On Thursday, Biggs got into a heated exchange with Fox News host Neil Cavuto over [Biggs' call](#) for the White House Coronavirus Task Force to be disbanded.

Biggs' tweets have been shared by the Arizona Republican Party's official Twitter account.

Data points such as mortality rates and hospital discharges alone do not signal that things are getting better, said Dr. Ross Goldberg, president of the Arizona Medical Association.

Those numbers could go down for a number of reasons, Goldberg said. For one, the recent trend of more young people carrying the new coronavirus will lower mortality rates. And along with more patients in hospitals, health care is getting more specialized to care for people with COVID-19, meaning patients can be discharged more quickly than when the pandemic first began.

Goldberg said that all too often, the public and the media choose to listen to politicians for analysis of medical data rather than trusting the word of people actually trained in the field who see hospitals from the inside every day.

“If you're sick, you don't go to a politician to get taken care of. You go to a physician. So why, with all this going on, are we asking the politicians what they think?” Goldberg said.

Christopher Weber, a professor of political science and political psychology at the University of Arizona, said accessing data on the virus is more difficult than it should be for the average citizen, which could contribute to confusion about its spread.

“Science and information can be sometimes easy to misinterpret. And, unfortunately, we've seen the politicization of that misinterpretation,” Weber said.

Distrust in institutions and a wide availability of information online that people use to confirm their own biases have contributed to a polarized national climate surrounding COVID-19, Weber said. The politicization of COVID-19 is divided even within the Republican Party, and politicians who more closely align with Trump generally dispute the science, he said.



President Donald Trump speaks at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.



Protesters demonstrating against President Donald Trump argue with supporters of the president outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.





Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, top center, looks on as President Donald Trump speaks at the "Students for Trump" rally at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.



Protesters walk in front of dozens of Phoenix police vehicles alongside Cave Creek Road approaching the intersection of Thunderbird Road after police declared an unlawful assembly and ordered protesters to disperse outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Donald Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



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Protesters demonstrating against President Donald Trump argue with supporters of the president outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.





Protesters belonging to the W.E. Rising Project demonstrate against President Donald Trump outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



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Protesters demonstrating against President Donald Trump argue with supporters of the president outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



Protesters demonstrating against President Donald Trump argue with Phoenix police officers outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.





Protesters belonging to the W.E. Rising Project demonstrate against President Donald Trump outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



President Donald Trump's motorcade arrives at Dream City Church in Phoenix where the president was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



Protesters belonging to the W.E. Rising Project demonstrate against President Donald Trump outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



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Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



Supporters of President Donald Trump argue with protesters demonstrating against the President outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



A truck filled with supporters of President Donald Trump approaches a marching crowd of protesters belonging to the W.E. Rising Project demonstrating against the president outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



Protesters belonging to the W.E. Rising Project demonstrate against President Donald Trump outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



After police declare an unlawful assembly and force protesters to disperse, a person demonstrating against President Donald Trump argues with Phoenix police officers outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



Phoenix police officers dressed in riot gear stand in a line after declaring an unlawful assembly order against protesters demonstrating against President Trump outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where the president was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



Phoenix police officers dressed in riot gear stand in a line after declaring an unlawful assembly order against protesters demonstrating against President Trump outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where the president was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



Dozens of Phoenix police vehicles drive against less than one hundred remaining protesters alongside Cave Creek road approaching the intersection of Thunderbird Road after police declared an unlawful assembly and ordered protesters to disperse outside of Dream City Church in Phoenix where President Donald Trump was holding a rally on June 23, 2020.



President Donald Trump speaks at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.



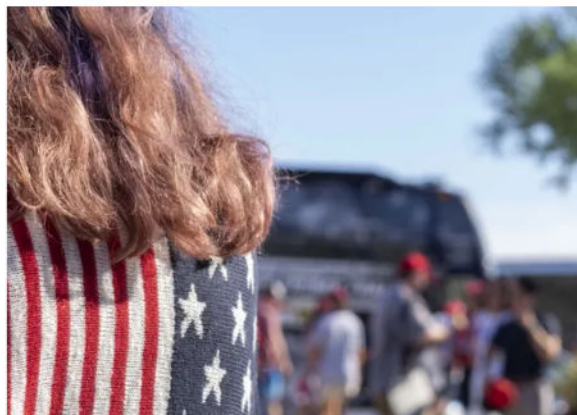
A supporter of President Donald Trump listens as he speaks at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.



Protesters near Dream City Church in Phoenix march as Trump speaks at the "Students for Trump" rally on June 23, 2020.



Supporters of President Donald Trump go home after seeing him speak at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.



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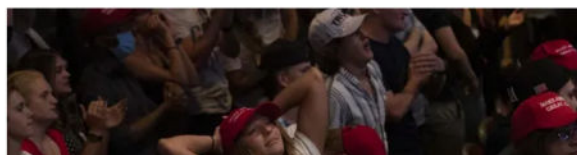
President Donald Trump speaks at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.



President Donald Trump speaks at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.



Supporters listen as President Donald Trump speaks at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.





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President Donald Trump speaks at Dream City Church in Phoenix on June 23, 2020.

Biggs and Gosar are among a number of elected officials in Arizona whom President Donald Trump praised at his rally in Phoenix. Trump said to the crowd of mostly unmasked supporters that the pandemic is in its final stages and called for a reduction in testing because "with smaller testing, we would show fewer cases."

He also suggested that cases are rising because testing is too, a sentiment that has been widely discredited by medical experts as a logical fallacy about a virus that is still spreading in many states. The percentage of positive tests, regardless of how many tests are conducted, gives a more accurate picture of its spread. In Arizona, that figure is rising, with one in five cases last week coming back positive, according to state data.

Dr. Lee Ann Kelley, president of the Maricopa County Medical Society, said there are many untruths floating around about the new coronavirus, often that are shared on social media.

"People who are of that mindset will believe those things with really no basis in fact," she said.

Kelley said she is happy to see Ducey take actions to slow the spread, but would like to see more availability of rapid testing and a statewide mask mandate.

She is surprised and disappointed by how political it has become to wear a mask, knowing that there are other public health mandates in society — such as wearing seat belts or not smoking in public areas — that have gone unchallenged.

"Here's the time when more than ever, people need to trust their doctors and trust their scientists and place where it belongs with the science, in

medicine," she said.

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