

# KAYLEIGH MCENANY

**IMPACT:** Kayleigh McEnany is a political commentator, devout Christian, and vocal defender of U.S. President Donald Trump. She currently serves as the White House press secretary, and has previously worked for both *CNN* and *Fox News*. McEnany has a history of defending and making false, anti-Muslim statements.

- Kayleigh McEnany graduated from Georgetown University and received her J.D. from Harvard University. McEnany has a **long history of political involvement**, beginning as a high school volunteer for the 2004 Bush presidential reelection campaign. While in college, she interned on Capitol Hill and wrote media briefings for the Bush Administration’s White House’s Office of Media Affairs. McEnany **spent three years working as a producer on former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee’s *Fox News TV* show** after graduation. According to *Business Insider*, **McEnany first appeared on TV as a conservative pundit on *Fox News* in 2011.**
- In August 2017, the Republican National Party appointed McEnany as the party’s TV and radio spokesperson. In 2019, she joined the Trump campaign as national press secretary. In **April 2020, McEnany was named the White House press secretary.**
- McEnany has been active on Twitter since 2011 and currently uses both a personal account and the official press secretary account. In **2012, she promoted the birther conspiracy theory aimed at then-President Barack Obama** claiming he was not born in the United States on her personal account. She tweeted: “How I Met Your Brother—Never mind, forgot he’s still in that hut in Kenya. #ObamaTVshows.”
- In March 2014, **McEnany spoke on a *Fox News* panel alongside the founder of far-right white nationalist group the Proud Boys, Gavin McInnes.** In the segment, McInnes delivered a racist monologue, declaring that “they’re [Muslims] totally irrational...they hate us because we’re infidels and the Qur’an says to destroy all infidels,” going on to claim that Muslims are genetically inferior because of “inbreeding,” which is linked to “extremism.” **McEnany failed to interrupt McInnes and even nodded and smiled when he claimed Muslims are “totally irrational” and “totally insatiable.”** When McInnes claimed, “foreign policy is a tiny part of their [Muslims] crazy inbred agenda,” **McEnany replied, “I agree.”** McEnany referenced Samuel Huntington’s much critiqued “clash of civilizations” argument to explain violent attacks by individuals who identify as Muslim. She denied that U.S. foreign policy is a factor for militant attacks, claiming, “U.S. foreign policy has done a lot of good for the Muslim people. I think Bush liberated 15 million Muslims from the hands of dictators.” A September 2020 piece in the *Intercept* noted that conservative estimates find that U.S.-led wars following 9/11 have killed over 800,000 people. Further, the Costs of War project by Brown University found that “over 8.4 million Afghans, Pakistanis, and Iraqis are living as war refugees in other countries or are displaced from their homes.”
- A June 2020 article in *The Atlantic* reported that McEnany began making regular appearances on CNN in 2015. During a **June 2015 segment, she criticized Donald Trump, even stating, “I don’t want to claim this guy” and that it was “unfortunate” and “inauthentic” to call Trump a Republican.** In a separate June 2015 segment McEnany stated, “I don’t support what Donald Trump said. I think he said something very unartful, very inappropriate,” (in reference to

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Trump's racist comments calling Mexican immigrants "rapists").

- According to a May 2020 [CNN article](#), **McEnany shifted positions and had begun defending Trump by July and August of 2015 when the candidate continued to lead in primary polls.** In October 2015, she [defended](#) Trump's racist statements about Mexicans, claiming they were taken out of context. A May 2020 [piece](#) in the *Guardian* stated that this shift in her stance occurred after a talk with her fellow summer law associate and Democrat Michael Marcantonio, who told her "Donald Trump is going to be your nominee," adding that if "a smart, young, blond Harvard graduate" wanted "to get on television and have a career as a political pundit, you would be wise to be an early backer."
- During the November 2015 Democratic presidential debate, McEnany [tweeted](#) "Clinton wants to let in 65k Syrian refugees," and went on to falsely claim that an "estimated 1/50 are ISIS terrorists." In **October 2016, she claimed in a tweet that taking in more refugees would mean more terrorism** and linking to an [article](#) by a Russian state-operated news network quoting that German police claimed that "hundreds of refugees in the country might be linked to terrorism." A claim that was [debunked](#) by the *Guardian*.
- In March 2016, McEnany [tweeted](#), "Obama endlessly preaches tolerance towards Islam but never mentions this-- 'Genocide: Christian Population in Iraq Drops 80% in a Decade.'" An April 2020 article in *Middle East Eye* [provided](#) context for the decreasing Christian community in Iraq, noting, "The number of Iraqi Christians has dwindled in recent years largely due to sectarian violence and civil unrest ushered in by former President Bush's 2003 invasion of Iraq," conflicting with McEnany's argument.
- **During the 2016 election, McEnany gained more public attention as she filled a "niche" on CNN speaking on behalf of Trump supporters and defending the then-presidential candidate.** In October 2016, following the release of a 2005 Access Hollywood tape [revealing](#) Trump's [boasting](#) of grabbing women's genitalia, McEnany [stated](#), "Those comments are despicable [but] he apologized for them." In the same month, she also defended Trump during a CNN panel discussion, [stating](#), "We don't have proof that Donald Trump acted in that way. There's one person out of both of these families who has been accused of sexual assault in a court of law. One. And that is Bill Clinton."
- McEnany took part in a November 2016 [CNN segment](#) discussing then [President-elect Trump's](#) appointment of former General [Michael Flynn](#) as National Security Adviser. **Despite Flynn's history of anti-Muslim comments—including calling Islam a "cancer" and a "political ideology"—McEnany defended him:** "There's a new movement of radical Islam taking over the Middle East and he was right. He was right, he was let go of his job because of it." **McEnany further claimed that "90 percent of the Quran is a legal doctrine, it is sharia." Religious studies scholar Reza Aslan was also on the panel and negated McEnany's claims** stating that "about 120 verses of the Quran have to do with legal matters out of tens of thousands." Aslan went on to note that by calling Islam a political ideology and failing to recognize [Islam as a religion](#), Muslims are at risk of losing their constitutional rights of religious freedom.
- In March 2017, **several weeks after President Trump instituted the [Muslim Ban](#) (a travel ban targeting a number of Muslim-majority countries), McEnany wrote an opinion piece in *The Hill* arguing that it was inaccurate and false to describe the ban as a "Muslim Ban."** However, government data [demonstrated](#) "that there was a significant decrease in the

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number of immigrant visas issued to Muslim countries affected by the travel ban. Meanwhile, the number of immigrant visas issued per month to the non-Muslim countries in the ban virtually remained unchanged.”

- Following the deadly June 2017 London Bridge attacks in the United Kingdom, McEnany wrote a [piece](#) in *The Hill* stating that “toxic and deadly political correctness” was to blame. She **claimed that “refusing to utter the words ‘radical Islamic extremism,’ opening the door to millions of half-vetted refugees and decrying the concepts of borders and assimilation have resulted in a culture in crisis** – a culture without democratic, freedom-loving identity and constantly under murderous attack from cancers within.”
- In **August 2017, McEnany left CNN to join TrumpTV**. The official Trump campaign [tweeted](#), “Join @kayleighmcenany as she provides you the news of the week from Trump Tower in New York! #MAGA #TeamTrump.” A video of McEnany reporting the news, [signing off](#) with “that’s the real news,” accompanied the tweet. In response to the segment, former U.S. ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul [said](#), “Wow. Feels eerily like so many state-owned channels I’ve watched in other countries.”
- On her personal account in May 2019, McEnany [tweeted](#), “Is anyone surprised by ANOTHER anti-Semitic comment from a sitting Democrat rep? Rashida Tlaib made another horrible & outrageous remark, this time about the Holocaust.” This was in response to Congresswoman Tlaib’s comments on Yahoo’s podcast ‘Skullduggery’ where she [said](#), “There’s always kind of a calming feeling, I tell folks, when I think of the Holocaust, and the tragedy of the Holocaust, and the fact that it was my ancestors — Palestinians — who lost their land and some lost their lives, their livelihood, their human dignity, their existence [...] And, just all of it was in the name of trying to create a safe haven for Jews, post-the Holocaust, post-the tragedy and the horrific persecution of Jews across the world at that time. And, I love the fact that it was my ancestors that provided that, right, in many ways, but they did it in a way that took their human dignity away and it was forced on them.” In response to accusations of anti-Semitism, Tlaib [said](#) Republicans were “twisting and turning” her words.
- During a **February 2020 appearance on Fox News, McEnany in her role as the Trump campaign spokesperson, claimed, “We will not see diseases like the coronavirus come here...and isn’t it refreshing when contrasting it with the awful presidency of President Obama.”** McEnany made this claim despite officials from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) [stating](#) the previous day that, “It’s not so much of a question of if this will happen anymore but rather more of a question of exactly when this [the coronavirus spreading to the United States] will happen.” **An April 2020 CNN piece found that McEnany had “repeatedly downplayed the threat of the coronavirus.”** An August 2020 piece in the *New York Times* [described](#) McEnany as an “operative known for overtly partisan and often fact-free defenses of the president.”
- In April 2020, Trump appointed McEnany to the position of White House press secretary. **She is the fourth person to hold the position since Trump took office.** A *Washington Post* [op-ed](#) by Jonathan Karl, president of the White House Correspondents’ Association, described briefings led by McEnany as “contradictions” because she “admonishes reporters for asking about the president’s exact words.” He went on to note that the press secretary is a “public servant whose salary is paid by taxpayers. The job is to inform the public,” and that by “denying reality and

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using the White House podium for purely political purposes is a violation of public trust.”

- In August 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Israel reached an [agreement](#) to normalize diplomatic relations between the two countries. Palestinian leaders [criticized](#) the deal, calling it a “betrayal of [...] the Palestinian cause.” In an interview with *One America News*, **McEnany criticized the Obama administration for making “deals with our enemies” and claimed that this new “historic deal brokered by the U.S.” is the “closest we’ve been to Middle East peace.”** In an August 2020 [piece](#) for CNN, Palestinian American political analyst Yousef Munayyer stated the “deal will only deepen Israeli oppression of Palestinians and...boost the election prospects of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump -- neither of whom seem to be particularly interested in peace, justice or equality.”

Bridge Initiative Factsheet