

# *In Bid to Oust Johnson, Greene Tries to Reclaim a Powerful Perch on the Fringe*

The Georgia Republican's doomed push to remove the speaker has placed her at odds with most in her party, but it has brought her back to her roots as a norm-busting provocateur.



By Annie Karni

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When Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, Republican of Georgia, first dangled the threat of ousting Speaker Mike Johnson, she received a call from a longtime ally and fellow hard-right Republican who urged her not to follow through.

“I don’t know how this helps us, six months before an election when we’re trying to win the White House,” Representative Jim Jordan, Republican of Ohio, told her, he said in a recent interview. Republicans were in a strong position to win back the Senate, Mr. Jordan said, and former President Donald J. Trump had a decent shot at winning the White House.

“The only thing that makes me a little nervous is, could we somehow lose the House?” he told Ms. Greene, adding: “Let’s don’t make it a chance.”

Mr. Jordan was far from the only person Ms. Greene respected telling her to stand down. Mr. Trump, who thinks the chaos in the House is harming his re-election chances, publicly vouched for Mr. Johnson as someone doing “about as good as you’re going to do” and has gently pressed Ms. Greene in private to move on, according to people familiar with their conversations who described them on condition of anonymity.

Former Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who elevated Ms. Greene and turned her into one of his top allies during his abbreviated time in the top post, never criticized her publicly. But privately, he called Mr. Johnson and offered to intervene with her on his behalf, according to people knowledgeable about the exchange.

Ultimately, none of it mattered. Ms. Greene could not be controlled — even if her campaign against the speaker has left her isolated within her party.

So on Wednesday morning, wearing a red MAGA cap and standing in front of a blown-up picture of Mr. Johnson embracing Representative Hakeem Jeffries, Democrat of New York and the minority leader, Ms. Greene said she would demand a vote next week to remove Mr. Johnson from the speakership. Mr. Jeffries, she said, had embraced Mr. Johnson with “a warm hug and a big, wet, sloppy kiss,” making them the joint leaders of what she refers to disdainfully as the “uniparty.”

She did so knowing that her effort to depose Mr. Johnson was all but certain to fail. She has only two Republicans publicly committed to backing it and Democrats have said they would vote to block any motion to oust the speaker, giving him more than enough votes to kill it.

But Ms. Greene has never abided by the conventional rules of politics, where a loss on the House floor is considered a major defeat. Since arriving in Congress four years ago, she has played a different game all together — one in which the only way to lose is by becoming irrelevant and inconspicuous.

That was true when she first arrived in Washington after embracing the QAnon conspiracy theory during her campaign (she later said she decided to “choose another path”) and caused constant headaches for House Republican leaders with her inflammatory statements. After a brief interlude of trying to play the inside game by forming an alliance with Mr. McCarthy, Ms. Greene is back to her old playbook, even though she insists she is being deliberate about how she proceeds.



Ms. Greene referred disdainfully to Speaker Mike Johnson and Representative Hakeem Jeffries, Democrat of New York, as the joint leaders of the “uniparty.” Valerie Plesch for The New York Times

For more than a month, she has dangled the threat of an ouster over Mr. Johnson, raising doubts about whether she would go through with a move even hard-right Republicans oppose. She continued to hesitate even on Wednesday, when she said she wanted to give her colleagues one more weekend to think about how they would vote, and offered Mr. Johnson one last opportunity to resign.

“I’m not irresponsible,” she told reporters outside the Capitol. “I care about my conference. I have been measured. I have given this time. I have been giving warning after warning. It was a warning to stop serving the Democrats and support our Republican conference and support our agenda. And he didn’t do it.”

To understand her refusal to drop the matter in the face of solid resistance from her colleagues, it helps to know how Ms. Greene spends her time. In Congress, she operates more as a MAGA influencer than a legislator, relentlessly attacking Democrats and railing about the southern border. In doing so, she appeals to a white, working-class audience that sees her as one of them.

As isolated as she appears to be on Capitol Hill, Ms. Greene’s strategy is working for her political brand. In mid-April, Mr. Johnson was more popular with Trump voters than Ms. Greene, according to a poll by The Economist/YouGov. About 18 percent of Trump voters at that time held an unfavorable view of him, compared to 25 percent who held a negative view of Ms. Greene.

But after the House passed a massive foreign aid bill with bipartisan support and Ms. Greene continued to threaten Mr. Johnson, his popularity with Trump voters suffered and Ms. Greene’s increased. About 31 percent of those voters now have a negative view of Mr. Johnson, compared to 23 percent who hold an unfavorable view of Ms. Greene.

She also epitomizes the incentive system that many blame for Congress's deep dysfunction. Her rhetoric and behavior generate viral social media content that keeps her where she most likes to be — in front of a camera — which in turn helps make her more famous and drives more small-dollar donations to her campaign.

Ms. Greene is not necessarily concerned that her behavior will hurt the House Republican conference, a place where she has few allies, as long as she is strengthening her own brand that is beloved by the MAGA base.

“It’s a brilliant move,” Stephen K. Bannon, the former Trump adviser and host of the influential “War Room” podcast, said of Ms. Greene’s decision to move ahead with the effort to oust Mr. Johnson. “The old politics is gone. Politics today is media and theater and drama and coming into the moment. You have to pierce the white noise, and she knows how to pierce it. She doesn’t need to connect to the donors. What’s relevant is this mass movement that’s out there that’s looking for leadership.”

He added, “She’s giving original, pure Trump.”



At this year’s State of the Union address, Ms. Greene came dressed like a one-woman political protest — and heckled Mr. Biden in the middle of his speech. Kenny Holston/The New York Times

On Wednesday morning, Ms. Greene’s first stop after her news conference was a 45-minute appearance on Mr. Bannon’s program. Ms. Greene said her goal was to put her colleagues “on record” by holding the vote “to see who the uniparty is.”

Mr. Bannon, whose show serves as a major fund-raising platform for MAGA Republicans, previously banned Ms. Greene from appearing there after she made an alliance with Mr. McCarthy and supported the debt limit deal he negotiated with President Biden.

During that period, Ms. Greene was taking a different approach to the job, trying on the uniform of team player in an attempt to gain more influence. Ms. Greene, who had been stripped of her committee seats by Democrats during her first term in Congress, tried transforming from a powerless sideshow into a more serious legislator.

During Mr. McCarthy’s weeklong, 15-vote ordeal to win the gavel last year, Ms. Greene locked arms with him in a surprise move and said she just wanted Congress to get down to business.

“I’ve been here for two years without committees, and I’m really ready to get to work,” she said in an interview last year. “Before I even came to Congress, that’s what I did in my life, was work. We need to be doing that.” She was later kicked out of the House Freedom Caucus because of her close alliance with Mr. McCarthy.

But now she has returned to a posture that’s a more natural fit: berating the leader of her party on Capitol Hill and seeking maximum attention, even if nobody is rushing to join her.

At Mr. Biden’s State of the Union address this year, Ms. Greene came dressed like a one-woman political protest — complete with MAGA cap, political buttons and a T-shirt bearing the name of Laken Riley, a nursing student alleged to have been killed by an undocumented immigrant — and heckled Mr. Biden in the middle of his speech.

Ms. Greene has maintained that her actions are not driven by a deep need for attention or by any personal animus toward Mr. Johnson. Instead, she said it’s about policy, and his decision to push through a foreign aid package that included \$60.8 billion in aid to Ukraine by relying on Democratic votes.

“Nobody wants this drama right now, but it’s Mike Johnson who has completely brought it on all of us,” she told Mr. Bannon on his show. “Yeah, this is inconvenient, but I didn’t come up here to Washington to go along and get along and put it in cruise control.”

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