

Stopping Trump, Saving Democracy¹

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July 20, 2026²

Exhortation

Trump, according to many experts, has now crossed the line into autocracy and we are in the process of descending into fascism. According to the The Varieties of Democracy Institute, “For the first time in 50 years, the USA loses its long-term status as a liberal democracy” (see Appendix 7). This document provides many different sources of information on our current political crisis, with an emphasis on what you, and we together, can do to stop Trump and restore democracy. I have compiled information to answer the following questions: How can we understand President Trump’s behavior, and the behavior of the Trump administration? And, more importantly, what can we do to stop Trump from seizing power unconstitutionally and becoming an imperial president? But first, an exhortation.

JUST UPDATED — READ THIS DOCUMENT NOW! I WROTE IT MYSELF — NO AI, NO HELP. Brand-new material, new organization, powerful new guidelines. This update is HUGE — really tremendous. Did I say that the new material is GOOD, really, really, good. TRUMP DOESN’T HAVE A CHANCE!!!! Civil resistance, noncooperation, and even “TACTICAL FRIVOLITY” will systematically disable his pillars of support. TRUMP, YOU HAVE NO CHANCE!! YOU ARE FINISHED!!! KAPUT!!!!!!!!!! Just open this Google Doc and take a look: [Stopping Trump, Saving Democracy](#). Trump is finished and he doesn’t have a chance!! THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!! Concerned citizen (BORN IN THE U S OF A!!) DEMETRIOS KARIS.

If you want to learn about effective actions you can take, skip to the section below on [What You Can Do, and What You Should Remember](#).



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¹ If you are reading this as a PDF, it may be easier to follow links from the Google Doc (which is updated regularly):

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CJVkmid5_ifZdwwHeqWDjSCz7kBM_r6OJI5227C2Sul/edit?usp=s_haring

² First draft May 19, 2025

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Prelude: The Easter Sunday Post

On Easter Sunday morning, April 5, 2026, President Donald J. Trump posted that “Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the Fuckin’ Strait, you crazy bastards, or you’ll be living in Hell—JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah. President DONALD J. TRUMP”
[June 16, 2026 update: the strait is still closed, although there is supposedly an agreement in place to open it.]

“*Terrorism* involves violence or the threat of violence against people or property to further a particular ideology.... Terrorists do not care who they hurt or kill to achieve their goals. (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement website.³)

“If I were in Trump’s Cabinet,” Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut posted on X, “I would spend Easter calling constitutional lawyers about the 25th Amendment. This is completely, utterly unhinged. He’s already killed thousands. He’s going to kill thousands more.”

Trump, on April 7, 2026: “A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again.” This is threatening genocide.

Then, two days later, after agreeing to a two-week cease fire with Iran, Trump posted on Truth Social, “The reason for doing so is that we have already met and exceeded all Military objectives, and are very far along with a definitive Agreement concerning

³ <https://www.ice.gov/hsi/investigate/terrorism-national-security-threats>)

Longterm PEACE with Iran, and PEACE in the Middle East. We received a 10 point proposal from Iran, and believe it is a workable basis on which to negotiate.”

The Strait of Hormuz

"When we mean open the straits, we mean open the straits free in international waterways. I know of no country on the planet that supports tolling or a fee for the use of the straits. That's just not -- that's not going to happen. The president has been abundantly clear." Secretary of State Marco Rubio, June 24, 2026

“The U.S.A. will be, from this point forward, known as ‘THE GUARDIAN OF THE HORMUZ STRAIT,’ but as such, and as a matter of FAIRNESS, will be reimbursed, at the rate of 20% on all cargo shipped, for any and all costs necessary to do the job of providing safety and security to this very volatile section of the World.”
President Trump, July 13, 2026

But within hours, Trump said that cargo ships will not have to pay 20% to the U.S. because our Gulf allies would rather invest directly in the U.S. rather than pay tolls.

Introductory Letter

Dear Friends, Family, Concerned Citizens, and Residents of the United States,

We must work together, and individually, to stop Trump. Stopping Trump should not be a partisan issue, because Trump and his administration are engaged in multiple illegal activities and tremendous corruption. The president of the United States is a madman, a raving lunatic with a serious personality disorder. "The emperor has no clothes" is an appropriate phrase for the current situation. Trump is not only destroying democracy in the United States, but also destroying the fabric of our country. Some historians and political scientists write that we have already crossed the line into fascism. Others describe what is happening as an administrative coup or a competitive coup; both refer to the situation in which a politician comes to power legitimately but then consolidates power without regard to laws or norms, the “illegal overthrow of a government, but achieved primarily without overt violence and relying heavily by claiming powers, intimidation, bullying, extortion, threatening media, and thereby seizing all powers” (<https://choosedemocracy.us/what-is-an-administrative-coup/>).

It is sobering to read what 400 scholars from over 30 countries write in an open letter against the return of fascism (June 14, 2025; see excerpts in a section below). “The signatories include a particularly long list of historians, philosophers, and political scientists who are among the leading world experts on fascism and democracy

When they point out fascist-adjacent political groups are on the rise, they are not alarmists. They are scholars who have spent their lives studying how democracies collapse, and what allows authoritarian movements to rise. Their warning is not abstract. They recognize the signs.

They are not predicting the future.

They are describing the present.”⁴

These scholars describe what should unite us all: “a commitment to core democratic values: the rule of law, national and international; the independence of the judiciary and the press; the autonomy of institutions of culture, science, and higher education; the central role of evidence and knowledge in public life; and the inviolable dignity of every human being, regardless of origin, identity, or beliefs.”

(<https://stopreturnfascism.org/about/>)

We must all act to stop Trump. Donate money (see Appendix 4), take to the streets, contact politicians, “pressure a pillar of support to defect” – there are many things you can do (see the section below on *What You Can Do*). One thing I am doing is collecting and disseminating information about how to stay informed and what actions are most effective. Here is my list. Please send me comments and additional suggestions.

Understanding Trump

Trump has no grand philosophy or strategy. To understand his actions you only need to understand that he is mentally ill and has a serious personality disorder. In his first term, several psychologists and psychiatrists labeled him a “malignant narcissist.” People with this disorder have an inflated sense of self-worth, a need for admiration, and they manipulate and exploit others, engage in verbal or physical abuse, and are “driven by a need to control others and assert their dominance” (see the section below on malignant narcissism).

As Jonathan Rauch and Peter Wehner write in their article titled, “The Trump Administration is in a Psychotic State,”

The reason the administration so often does not act coherently is that it cannot. The world faces something new and baffling and frightening in Mr. Trump’s second term: a psychotic state.... The issue is that the administration as a whole lacks a consistent attachment to reality and the ability to organize its thinking coherently. Mr. Trump’s grandiosity, impulsivity, inconsistency and outright breaks with reality have become state policy.... What are the implications if the administration of the world’s

⁴ Note that this open letter was written over a year ago. The situation in the United States is now much, much worse.

most powerful country is chaotic in its thinking, unpredictable in its actions and not reliably in touch with reality? It's impossible to know. America and its allies have dealt with a lot of presidential imperfections and failings, but there is no precedent or even category for the institutional psychosis displayed by the second Trump administration. Precisely because the psychotic state is so unpredictable, setting up systems to manage it will not work" (The New York Times, April 10, 2026; see additional excerpts from this article in Appendix 5).

There are many ways of describing how the Trump administration works. As the columnist Thomas Friedman wrote, "Trump is governing by unchecked gut impulses, with little or no homework or coordination among agencies. He respects no real lines of authority He compels anyone who wants to stop him to take him to court, while blurring all lines between his legal duties and personal enrichment" (see link in the next paragraph). And the Trump administration? Thomas Friedman continues and summarizes it excellently:

In sum, what you are seeing from this Trump II administration, and its bended-knee Congress, is a dangerous, undisciplined, intellectually inconsistent farce that we will pay dearly for in the future. Major geo-economic moves are being made by one man who has done no homework, modeling or stress-testing and has fostered little apparent interagency process, with no congressional oversight or apparent reference to history.

(https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/03/opinion/trump-president-governing-ruler.html?unlocked_article_code=1.MU8.-q1k.I0ZPSWmErjaw&smid=url-share: This is a link that nonsubscribers should be able to access).

How could the United States be doing so many crazy things? As Jeffrey Sach says, with respect to the tariffs, "It's just dumb policy." And how could it happen? Well, "We are in one-person rule in the United States. Our political system is in a state of collapse" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWDNIY1o1Vc>).

After President Trump's speech to the United Nations on September 23, 2025, a senior foreign diplomat at the U.N. texted a journalist and wrote, "This man is stark, raving mad. Do Americans not see how embarrassing this is?" (As reported by Heather Cox Richardson, <https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/p/september-23-2025>).

Demetrios

The Current Political Situation in the United States

Month by month, the situation continues to deteriorate. Consider the following sections from a recent report by The Steady State,⁵ released on October 16, 2025:

This assessment, *Accelerating Authoritarian Dynamics: Assessment of Democratic Decline*, authored by members of The Steady State, all of whom are former U.S. Intelligence Community officers with analytic responsibilities, applies the analytic tradecraft of the U.S. Intelligence Community to conditions inside the United States. It concludes—with moderate to high confidence—that the cumulative effect of multiple reinforcing dynamics is placing the nation on a trajectory toward competitive authoritarianism: a system in which elections, courts, and other democratic institutions persist in form but are systematically manipulated to entrench executive control.

We judge that the U.S. drift towards authoritarianism has accelerated this year, a trend characterized not by an abrupt seizure of power but by an erosion of democratic norms and institutional checks and balances.

(<https://steadystate1.substack.com/p/accelerating-authoritarian-dynamics>)

Here are the key findings (verbatim):

1. We assess with high confidence that democratic backsliding in the United States is accelerating, characterized by a consolidation of executive power, erosion of institutional checks and balances, and deliberate weakening of civil service protections and oversight mechanisms.
2. We judge with high confidence that the Executive Branch is actively weaponizing state institutions to punish perceived opponents and shield allies...
3. We assess with moderate confidence that judicial independence is under sustained threat...
4. We judge with moderate confidence that legislative weakness is compounding the authoritarian trend...
5. We assess with high confidence that public trust in U.S. democratic institutions is declining, fueled by repeated contrived assaults on electoral integrity lacking evidence, attacks on the press, and efforts to delegitimize dissent...
6. We judge with moderate to high confidence that the cumulative effect of these dynamics places the United States on a trajectory toward “competitive

⁵ “Founded in 2016, The Steady State (<https://thesteadystate.org/>) is a nonprofit 501(c)(4) organization of more than 340 former senior national security professionals. Our membership includes former officials from the Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of State, Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security. Drawing on deep expertise across national security disciplines including intelligence, diplomacy, military affairs and law, we advocate for constitutional democracy, the rule of law and the preservation of America’s national security institutions.”

authoritarianism.” While formal democratic institutions such as elections and courts remain in place, the playing field is being systematically tilted to favor incumbents, raising risks for both domestic stability and U.S. global credibility. (<https://steadystate1.substack.com/p/accelerating-authoritarian-dynamics>)

What is the leading driver for these changes?

We judge that the primary driver of the U.S.’s increasing authoritarianism is the increased frequency of Executive Branch overreach. President Donald J. Trump has leveraged emergency powers, executive orders, federalized military forces, and bureaucratic politicization to consolidate control and weaken checks and balances. These actions extend into undermining independent oversight and weaponizing justice and intelligence agencies for partisan ends. Taken together, they go beyond traditional executive discretion, setting dangerous precedents that future presidents could exploit.

(<https://steadystate1.substack.com/p/accelerating-authoritarian-dynamics>)

In a recent article in Foreign Affairs, Levitsky, Way, and Ziblatt also discuss competitive authoritarianism:

In Trump’s second term, the United States has descended into competitive authoritarianism—a system in which parties compete in elections but incumbents routinely abuse their power to punish critics and tilt the playing field against their opposition. Competitive authoritarian regimes emerged in the early twenty-first century in Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela, Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s Turkey, Viktor Orban’s Hungary, and Narendra Modi’s India. Not only did the United States follow a similar path under Trump in 2025, but its authoritarian turn was faster and farther-reaching than those that occurred in the first year of these other regimes.⁶

The Editorial Board of the NYTimes, on October 31, 2025, published one of their scariest opinion pieces (it was Halloween after all): *Are We Losing Our Democracy?*; also called *12 Signs We’re Sliding Toward Autocracy*. “Countries that slide from democracy toward autocracy tend to follow similar patterns. To measure what is happening in the United States, the Times editorial board has compiled a list of 12 markers of democratic erosion, with help from scholars who have studied this phenomenon. The sobering reality is that the United States has regressed, to different degrees, on all 12.” Here are the 12 markers:

⁶ December 11, 2025,
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/american-authoritarianism-levitsky-way-ziblatt>

1. An authoritarian stifles dissent and speech. Trump has started to.
2. An authoritarian persecutes political opponents. Trump has.
3. An authoritarian bypasses the legislature. Trump has started to.
4. An authoritarian uses the military for domestic control. Trump has started to.
5. An authoritarian defies the courts. Trump has started to.
6. An authoritarian declares national emergencies on false pretenses. Trump has.
7. An authoritarian vilifies marginalized groups. Trump has.
8. An authoritarian controls information and the news media. Trump has started to.
9. An authoritarian tries to take over universities. Trump has started to.
10. An authoritarian creates a cult of personality. Trump has.
11. An authoritarian uses power for personal profit. Trump has.
12. An authoritarian manipulates the law to stay in power. Trump has started to.⁷

And now Trump is destroying the East Wing of the White House to build a \$300 million dollar gold-encrusted ballroom. As Paul Krugman explains, “The tawdry grandiosity serves not only to glorify Trump’s fragile ego, but also to send the message that resistance is futile.” Adam Gopnik, writing in the New Yorker (November 3, 2025), writes “The act of destruction is precisely the point: a kind of performance piece meant to display Trump’s arbitrary power over the Presidency, including its physical seat. He asks permission of no one, destroys what he wants, when he wants The shock that images of the destruction provoke – the grief so many have felt – is not an overreaction to the loss of a beloved building. It is a recognition of something deeper: the central values of democracy being demolished before our eyes. Now we do not only sense it. We see it.”

Krugman describes what is happening in the country while Trump is tearing down part of the White House – without any approved plans or the necessary permits:

Masked government agents are snatching people off the street. The National Guard has been sent into major cities on the obviously false pretext that these cities are in chaos. The U.S. military is essentially murdering people on the high seas. Huge tariffs are, in addition to their economic costs, undermining a system of alliances former presidents spent generations building. Green energy is being eviscerated, vindictive prosecutions are the norm, and many millions are on course to lose their health insurance.

(<https://paulkrugman.substack.com/p/trumps-gilded-ballroom-and-the-fall>)

Grave Human Rights Violations in the U.S.

⁷https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/10/31/opinion/trump-autocracy-democracy-report.html?unlocke&_article_code=1.x08.PBRH.Gmh2bW4smF7V&smid=url-share

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) released a report with the following title on March 11, 2026: *USA: Racial profiling and racist hate speech by political leaders heightened human rights violations against migrants and asylum seekers, UN committee warns*. The report concludes that there are currently grave human rights violations occurring in the United States, and lists multiple areas where it is either “deeply concerned,” “gravely concerned,” or “alarmed” by what is currently happening in the United States. For example, the committee is

Deeply concerned about the reportedly increased use of racist hate speech, including the use of derogatory and dehumanizing language, and the dissemination of negative and harmful stereotypes targeting migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, including by portraying them as criminals or as a burden, by politicians and influential public figures at the highest level of the State Party, particularly its President, which fosters intolerance and may incite racial discrimination, hate crimes and hate speech, particularly on the Internet and social media, and about the insufficient measures to prevent and address racist hate speech ([OHCHR Press Release - March 2026](#)).⁸

The Next Coup Attempt

In his April 4th, 2026, Substack blog, Timothy Snyder writes about *The Next Coup Attempt: And How to Stop It*:

We are seven months away from the most consequential midterm election in the history of the United States. Meanwhile, we are fighting a war. These are the structural conditions for a coup attempt in which a president tries to nullify elections and take permanent power as a dictator. If we see this, we can stop it, overcome the movement that brought us to this point, and make a turn towards something better.

(<https://snyder.substack.com/p/the-next-coup-attempt>)

Snyder explains how “war offers at least five kinds of opportunities for aspiring dictators (see the article for details!).

SuperPower Suicide

We are becoming an authoritarian nation, but perhaps in exchange for the loss of democracy and freedom Trump will usher in an era of power and “greatness” (MAGA, after all, stands for Make American Great Again). The opposite, in fact, is happening, and Timothy Snyder, in a very depressing (but brilliant) blog post outlines how the

⁸ Full report: <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/27871997/int-cerd-ewu-usa-11429-e.pdf>

guiding principle of Trump's foreign policy is "superpower suicide." "Empires have risen and failed before," Snyder writes, "but to my knowledge no state has ever chosen to kill its own power, and succeeded with such rapidity."⁹

Snyder describes how Trump is weakening thirteen traditional bases of state power. These include statehood, national interest, succession, elites, education, science, energy, technology, diplomacy, alliances, the international system, the idea of victory, and finances. For example, to maintain power there must be qualified people in charge (the elites category) but we have Tulsi Gabbard, Kash Patel, Pete Hegseth, and many unqualified others. Education, science, and technology are critical, but Trump is weakening us in all of these areas. In energy, Trump has "chosen to cancel America's energy transition and subsidize technologies that have no future." Diplomacy, alliances, and the international system have all been great strengths for the United States, but Trump has "trashed" the foreign service and mocked and pushed away our allies. The United States "essentially created a set of laws, rules, and norms that allowed American power to maintain itself and to expand," but we are now working to destroy this international system that we created.

The Entire World, Not Just the U.S.

Trump is single handedly destroying the world trading system and the international order of alliances. And he has now assaulted eight countries around the world, including Iran, in an illegal war raging as I write this on March 8, 2026. Trump told reporters that he hopes to topple the government of Cuba next. This is after asserting he wants Greenland, and may use military force to take it, and also attacking Venezuela and abducting its leader. We keep thinking that the situation in the U.S. and around the world can't get any worse, but that is not true. Many describe what is happening, but need to continuously update their summaries. Here is part of a long substack post by David Rothkopf from March 7, 2026:

Not since Adolf Hitler blew his brains out in a bunker beneath the garden of the German Reich Chancellery on April 30, 1945, have the lives of so many people around the world been so buffeted by the psychosis of a single man.

It is not that there have not been mad men in power since. There have even been very powerful ones. But, at this moment in history, the fate of virtually everyone on the planet is being impacted by the toxic cocktail of character flaws, insecurities, and pathologies that are shaping the actions of the President of the United States.

⁹ <https://snyder.substack.com/p/on-superpower-suicide>

...

Why? Why? Why?

Because he's insane. Because he's venal. Because he's a malignant narcissist. Because he's a sociopath. Because he has a fragile ego. Because those around him exacerbate and play to those traits to advance their own interests. Because CEOs and investors do likewise to fill their coffers. Because to some people, whether he is insane or malevolent or repugnant or not matters less than whether his actions will feather their nests, increase their power.¹⁰

A Ray of Hope: Orbán's Defeat in Hungary

Viktor Orbán has been the model for right wing groups in the U.S. and Europe, and a leader that Trump obviously admires. He rigged the election rules in Hungary, but yet Péter Magyar still won a supermajority in a landslide victory in the elections in April, 2026. How did Orbán rig the system, and how did Magyar still manage to win? Western media provided few clear explanations, but Kim Sheppele, in an interview with Paul Krugman, lays out the situation excellently.

And the shortcut of what he [Orbán] did was that essentially a vote in the countryside counted three times as much as a vote in the cities. And what he counted on was that usually, if you get a challenger to a right-wing autocrat, they're all going to be liberals, right? They're all going to get their votes from the cities, from the educated populations. And Orbán had a lock on the countryside. And then he put all the weight of the system on counting his people more than others. So Péter Magyar spent the last two years going out to villages, just meeting all of these people in person and getting around the fact that Orbán also controlled all the media. So the media was rigged, the election system was rigged.... the results came in and Peter Magyar won.... about 138 seats out of the 199 seats in the parliament, and Orbán had to concede. There was just no way that he could even claim fraud or try to do anything to change it, because he just didn't have votes come in from anywhere.

(<https://paulkrugman.substack.com/p/kim-lane-scheppele-on-hungary>)

There's a lot more to the story (e.g., how Orbán controlled the media), and I strongly recommend the interview. For example, why couldn't Orbán just come after Magyar and kill or imprison him? One reason is that Magyar became a member of the European

¹⁰ <https://davidrothkopf.substack.com/p/living-in-a-time-of-lunatics-and>

Parliament, which gave him parliamentary immunity.¹¹ Orban was also constrained because Hungary was an EU member, and thus subject to various forms of pressure from the EU. Unfortunately, Trump's opponents in the U.S. will not have these protections.

What You Can Do, and What You Should Remember

Here are some of the main points about what you can do and what you should remember. They are developed throughout the rest of this document:

1. Nonviolent resistance works. Protests, boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience, and other forms of nonviolent noncooperation can produce remarkable results.
2. Join with others to act. "Fighting authoritarianism starts with one simple rule: Don't fight alone" (ACLU Fall Impact Report).
3. Successful movements often require sustained efforts, not just one-time demonstrations. Keep at it!
4. Support these movements financially, and help defeat Trump at the ballot box by donating to political campaigns (see Appendix 4).
5. Pressure a pillar of support to defect: media, military, corporations.
6. The presidency is not all powerful – "any power structure relies upon the subjects' obedience—when people do not obey, rulers have no power" (Anti-Authoritarian Handbook).
7. Lesson number 1 in fighting tyranny is *Do not obey in advance*.
8. The Trump administration is coming after its perceived enemies. Protesting legally and peacefully and engaging in free speech may not protect you. Know how to stay safe and understand your rights.
9. Understand that autocracies often follow a common playbook, built around the "3 Ps": populism, polarization, and post-truth.
10. Stay informed. Get your news from a variety of reliable sources of information and not from Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok.
11. "Stand out. Someone has to. It is easy to follow along. It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease, there is no freedom. Remember Rosa Parks. The moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow" (one of Timothy Snyder's twenty lessons for fighting tyranny).

Protests

"Protest is a driver of political change. Mass protests in Rio de Janeiro in 1984 helped end Brazil's military dictatorship. Protests in Tunisia in 2011 forced from office dictator

¹¹ EU parliamentary immunity prohibits the detention or prosecution of a member of Parliament, unless the European Parliament votes to waive that immunity. Orbán's government tried to get that immunity waived, but failed.

Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and helped spark the Arab Spring. In the United States, large-scale protests have led to civil rights legislation (the 1963 March on Washington) and environmental action (the Earth Day protests of 1970, which drew an estimated 20 million participants around the country, preceded the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency)" (<https://wapo.st/4nTR4eE>). This article goes on to make the following point:

Just as important are targeted actions...that wield culture as a tactical weapon....As we pass through the sixth month of President Donald Trump's second term, and protests against his administration's thuggish deportation methods intensify, artifacts of culture — art, design, music, dance — have surfaced as important elements of the fight.

A piece of music can express defiance and joy; in dance, the body conveys what words cannot. Even the smallest aesthetic gesture can have outsize resonance in the context of protest the aesthetics of a protest can "rupture conventions of doing politics." An ocean of protesters can be powerful. More powerful is seeing them come together to sing "We Shall Overcome," with its refrain of "We are not afraid/We are not afraid today" — as civil rights advocates did during the 1963 March on Washington.

Consider the "tactical frivolity" during the No Kings rallies on October 18, 2025, when over seven million people at over 2,500 locations demonstrated against Trump and his administration. Continuing what started in Portland, Oregon, many people wore inflatable costumes "to counter a narrative that they were violent extremists, instead promoting peaceful resistance through humor and a less-threatening visual" (Google AI Overview). The lighthearted images of people dancing in animal costumes contrasts with Trump's depiction of Portland and other cities as a "war zone," "war-ravaged," and a "burning hellhole." Some observed that armed ICE agents were less likely to escalate and use force when confronted by an inflatable frog or unicorn. When a gathering is fun and peaceful, and includes people of all ages, it is far less threatening.

Protests are, of course, just one of many types of actions that should occur. The information here, and the section below on civil resistance, describe many other actions that should occur along with protests.

Protests and Marches Are Just the Start

Casey Burgat provides several compelling case studies, including on how Seattle's \$15 minimum wage actually came about, how North Carolina's bathroom bill (HB2) was

beaten by accountants, and how two students started a campaign to hold colleges and universities accountable for not investigating campus sexual assault appropriately.

Marches are cathartic but fleeting. Outrage burns hot and then disappears. The systems people are protesting seem unmoved. It's natural to wonder what kinds of protest have actually worked in practice — especially in our modern era of hyperpartisan politics.

The answer is that many of the most successful pressure campaigns have not centered on mass marches at all. They've relied on boycotts, sit-ins, coordinated calls and letters, targeted walkouts, regulatory complaints, procurement threats, shareholder pressure, and innovative forms of digital activism. Different tactics. Different targets. Different outcomes.

The case studies ... show how organizers identified leverage points, coordinated action, and translated moral claims into consequences decision-makers could not ignore.

(<https://thepreamble.com/p/rallies-and-marches-arent-the-only>)

Organizations & Their Advice

- [PeoplePower.org](https://peoplepower.org): “People Power is the ACLU's platform for grassroots action, where volunteers like you mobilize communities across the country to defend and advance civil liberties and civil rights for all.”
- <https://indivisible.org/resource/guide>: Indivisible: A Practical Guide to Democracy on the Brink: Strategies, Tactics, and Tips for How Everyday Americans Can Fight Back Together Wherever We Live
 - “Our democracy is in grave peril, but it's not lost. We have two options before us: Surrender to the forces of autocracy, bigotry, xenophobia, and minoritarian rule. Or organize the pro-democracy majority to reclaim its power. We choose to organize.”
- <https://choosedemocracy.us/what-can-i-do/>: What can I do to fight this coup?
- <https://www.fiftyfifty.one/>: 50 protests. 50 states. One movement.
- <https://5calls.org/>: “5 Calls makes it easy for you to reach your members of Congress and make your voice heard. 5 Calls is the easiest and most effective way for U.S. constituents to make a political impact.”
- <https://www.womensmarch.com/>: Women's March. “Women's March is building a base of feminists to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” Women's March organized *Kick out the Clown's* events around the country on June 14, when Trump had his parade in Washington, D.C. (“No Kings, No Clowns: A Festival of Resistance”).

- <https://refusefascism.org/>: Refuse Fascism is on a mission to unite all who can be united into the largest nonviolent mass mobilization in US history to drive out the Trump Fascist Regime. RefuseFascism.org works to unite all who can be united, from many different backgrounds and political perspectives, to join in mass, nonviolent protest and resistance in the streets and throughout society.

Choose Democracy

The advice from Choose Democracy is excellent, and provides many details in each of these three areas (text below is verbatim from <https://choosedemocracy.us/what-can-i-do/>):

1. Get with Others to Act: When you're alone it's too easy to freeze. While keyboard warriors and protest attenders are important — you'll feel the greatest strength if you gather with others semi regularly to plan together, share together, and act together.
2. Pressure a pillar of support to defect: Coups only are successful when society bows to the orders of the autocrat. These are “pillars of support” (military, media, corporations). Pick a pillar you want to pressure and **each day** do at least one small thing to get them to defect.
3. Devote yourself to a long-term project: All of us cannot only be on defense. There are many productive projects you might want to be part of that help address underlying problems of the coup. We're following Daniel Hunter's categorization from [10 ways to be prepared and grounded now that Trump has won](#) [follow this link!].

Actions in each category are listed by difficulty. For example:

- Easy to do: Flood the “DEI” snitch line (as [reported here](#)).
- Medium to do: Join protests; join boycotts called by reputable groups.
- Harder to do: Organize workplace strikes and shut downs; set up picket lines outside of stores.

Number 1 above, Get With Others to Act, is especially important. Consider what Noam Chomsky writes in his book *On Anarchism* in response to this question: “What is your advice for people who have the same concerns...and who want to be engaged in opposition?” Chomsky's answer:

The same as the factory girls in the Lowell textile plant 150 years ago: they joined with others. [Chomsky had previously talked about how the factory girls in Lowell ran a popular press, and although unschooled, came up with some of the same ideas on “wage slavery” as Marx and Bakunin.] To do these things alone is extremely hard, especially when you're working fifty hours a week to put food on the table. Join with others, and you can do a lot of things. It's got a big multiplier effect. That's why unions

have always been in the lead of development of social and economic progress. They bring together poor people, working people, enable them to learn from one another, to have their own sources of information, and to act collectively. That's how everything is changed – the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the solidarity movements, the worker's movements.

The Indivisible Guide

The Indivisible Guide is also excellent (<https://indivisible.org/resource/guide>). Here's a summary of Chapter 2 from this 28-page document:

Chapter 2: A Quick Primer on Constituent Power. Trump wants us to believe that the presidency is all-powerful. It ain't true. Political power in our democracy overlaps between local, state, and federal electeds [unusual, but a real word!]. Your power comes from your ability to be a source of support (or a pain in the ass) to those electeds. You can use this power to get them to stand up to Trump 2.0 or face political consequences. We review the basics of constituent power — what it is, how it works, and how yours can do the most good in this moment where you live.

When People Do Not Obey, Rulers Have No Power

It is worth repeating the message above: the presidency is not all powerful. From the Anti-Authoritarian Handbook: “Gene Sharp, one of the foremost analysts of power and resistance, stated that any power structure relies upon the subjects' obedience—when people do not obey, rulers have no power.” It is disturbing that people and companies and organizations are now allowing Trump to exercise power; this is unfortunately the case because “most of the power of the autocrat is freely given”:

An ironic aspect of authoritarianism is that most of the power of the autocrat is freely given. The owners of the Washington Post and Los Angeles Times were not forced by Donald Trump to rescind endorsements of Kamala Harris that their editorial teams had wanted to publish before the 2024 presidential election. Those were acts of pre-emptive obedience to placate a presidential candidate who had threatened retribution against his opponents. (Anti-Authoritarian Handbook, <https://zenodo.org/records/15696097>)

Timothy Snyder's lesson number 1 in his article on Twenty Lessons for Fighting Tyranny is *Do not obey in advance*. See Appendix 3 for the other 19 lessons for fighting Tyranny.

See also the section below on Civil Resistance and Waging Nonviolence, which includes the actions leading to the “3.5% rule,” which is not really a rule, but just a rough estimate from the historical literature on revolutions and protest movements against autocratic leaders: when 3.5% of the population mobilizes against the government, it can rarely stay in power (see Appendix 2 for Chenoweth’s description of the 3.5% rule).

10 Rules of Resistance for #ICEOut

On January 21, 2026, Rivera Sun published the following article in Waging Nonviolence: *10 rules of resistance for #ICEOut: Americans can learn from the anti-Nazi leaflet “10 Commandments for Danes” by denying ICE everything it needs to function* (<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2026/01/10-rules-of-resistance-for-iceout/>). The article starts by describing what ICE has done and then described what Denmark did to resist Nazi occupation:

This armed, violent, lawless agency has terrorized one city after another since the immigration crackdown started in early 2025. ICE agents and the federal agents assisting them have shot 17 people, killed at least four, injured countless more, allowed at least 37 immigrants to die in custody, fired tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters, conducted midnight raids by helicopter, smashed car windows to haul passengers out, kicked in doors of private residences, snatched people off the streets and thrown them in unmarked vans, left children abandoned in cars and on sidewalks, detained teenagers for weeks, beaten and abused arrested individuals, splintered families, illegally deported detainees to gulags in El Salvador, set up a prison camp in tents in a swamp, arrested people at immigration courts, arrested elected officials for exercising their lawful right of oversight, and continuously misled and lied to the public about it all.

....

When the Nazis invaded and occupied Denmark in 1940, a 17-year-old named Arne Sejr printed a flier called “10 Commandments for Danes.” Circulated through the Danish resistance, it went viral. It served as a framework of resistance for Denmark’s populace as they withstood Nazi occupation. Despite severe repression, they rescued 7,800 Jews from certain death in concentration camps. They also denied their occupiers significant resources, such as preventing the construction of any new warships for the Germans.

Here are Arne Sejr’s 10 Commandments for Danes:

1. You must not go to work in Germany and Norway.
2. You shall do a bad job for the Germans.
3. You shall work slowly for the Germans.
4. You shall destroy important machines and tools.
5. You shall destroy everything which may be of benefit to the Germans.
6. You shall delay all transport.
7. You shall boycott German and Italian films and papers.
8. You must not shop at Nazis' stores.
9. You shall treat traitors for what they are worth.
10. You shall protect anyone chased by the Germans.

Sun then describes how we can update these commandments to create ten rules of resistance for #ICEOut. See the article for details on each of these rules:

1. No silence.
 - a. A church marquee in Minneapolis: "Blessed are the whistle blowers for they play the music of salvation."
2. No selling.
3. No service.
4. No hotel rooms.
5. No entry.
6. No informing.
7. No looking away.
8. No collaboration.
9. No transporting.
10. No detention centers.

Arne Sejr's 10 Commandments for Danes worked because people shared them widely — printing more copies, passing them hand to hand and talking about them with trusted friends. Each person did what they could from the list, often braving severe risks and sacrifices to do so.

<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2026/01/10-rules-of-resistance-for-iceout/>

Pass along this information!

Framing is Important

From an article on *Protests as Democracy* by Clara Lindholm

<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/articles/protests-as-democracy/>), "When people reduce democracy to the act of casting a vote, it's not a stretch to frame actions outside of

elections as illegitimate....That leaves mass demonstrations vulnerable to being framed as un-American or undemocratic. And at a time when law enforcement and the military are being used to suppress dissent, we need to do everything we can to help people see protest as a key form of democratic participation.”

See also the longer paper, *By and For the People? Cultural Mindsets of Democracy and the US Political System: A Culture Change Project Report*

(https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/app/uploads/2023/12/FWI_CCP-2023-Democracy-v2c-12.15.pdf).

How to Protest Safely and Know Your Rights

The Trump administration is coming after its perceived enemies. It may also come after you, even if you are just exercising your free speech rights and protesting legally and peacefully. Here is information on how to stay safe and understand your rights.

- <https://www.hrc.org/resources/tips-for-preparedness-peaceful-protesting-and-safety>
- <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights>
- <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/how-protest-safely>
- <https://linktr.ee/protestsafetyprep?akid=22638.3811953.wGr84G&rd=1&t=3>

In addition, see also *A Workbook for Action Peacekeepers or Event Marshals*, by Daniel Hunter and Eileen Flanagan:  [Peacekeeper Training Workbook.pdf](#)

The National Lawyers Guild (NLG) is an excellent organization.

For over 80 years, the NLG has acted as the legal arm of social movements and the conscience of the legal profession. The NLG is dedicated to the need for basic change in the structure of our political and economic system. The NLG is anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist and we strive to bring in anti-oppressive practices to all aspects of our organization.

See their page on Know your Risks/Rights (KYRs),

<https://www.nlg.org/know-your-rights/>

Digital Security

Most people reading this document have a gmail account, and most probably use two-factor authentication. Few, however, probably use Google’s Advanced Protection Programme, which “safeguards users with high visibility and sensitive information from targeted online attacks. New protections are automatically added to defend against today’s wide range of threats” (https://landing.google.com/intl/en_in/advancedprotection/). I’m now considering it, and you may want to also. Here are other aspects of digital security:

Digital security includes leaving cell phones outside of meeting rooms, ensuring that information is stored on internal servers instead of relying on a cloud system, and only sending digital information over encrypted channels.

Trusting third parties with our information has become second nature, but it's a risky habit. When the state wants access to our data, it often doesn't need to hack or infiltrate. Judicial warrants compel companies like Google, WhatsApp and Telegram to hand over information without much resistance — something that becomes even easier when the state is also using criminalization tactics. If we're serious about protecting ourselves and our movements, we must rethink what information we store, publish and entrust to these platforms.

(<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2025/06/lessons-in-courage-care-and-collective-action-from-the-international-accompaniment-movement/>)

Security in a Box

If you are serious about doing resistance work, even if it is legal and nonviolent (and I advocate for both), you need to study this website: Security in a Box (<https://securityinabox.org/en/>). There are over 30 sections covering areas in Communication, Passwords, as well as your phones, computers, Internet connection, and files. For example, in the section, Protect the privacy of your online communication, there are these sections, each with multiple subsections:

- Make a communication plan; e.g.,
 - Talk with your contacts. Propose, discuss and agree upon a specific plan for how you are (and are not) going to communicate.
 - Consider developing code language you can use to avoid openly mentioning names, addresses, specific actions, etc.
- Create multiple disposable accounts
- Use Tor Browser, Tails, or a trusted VPN
- Use email more safely
- Video and audio chat more safely; e.g.,
 - Check the identities of everyone on the call by asking them to speak or to switch on their camera.
 - Confirm in another channel (like secure chat or email) that the person in a call is who their screen name says they are.
 - Take screenshots or record unwanted participants to collect evidence for later analysis and legal actions.
- Use secure chat

- Take identifying information out of your photos and other files
 - Use Obscuracam, Scrambled Exif, MetaX, or Exifcleaner

There is a similarly detailed section on how to *Create and protect multiple online identities*.

Follow the Money

Money has corrupted democracy in the United States. With a few hundred thousand dollars (or more!) you can influence policy and elections. You can follow the political donations made by both individuals and companies at the websites of the following organizations:

- Federal Election Commission: <https://www.fec.gov/>
- Open Secrets: <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/>
- Follow the Money: <https://www.followthemoney.org/>
- MapLight: <https://www.maplight.org/>
- LittleSis: <https://littlesis.org/>

Popular Information, by Judd Legum (<https://popular.info/>), often has investigative reporting on money in politics and Trump's corruption.

Elon Musk, since 2022, has spent at least \$420 million on U.S. political campaigns. "At least" because he funneled some money through nonprofits and "dark money" channels that do not have to disclose donors. Super PACs can receive unlimited contributions but have to spend independently from campaigns. Musk created the super PAC America PAC in May, 2024 and gave it over \$200 million dollars.

Civil Resistance and Waging Nonviolence

If the courts, and congress, and the Democrats, and a falling stock market, and days of protest can't stop Trump, and he continues to whittle away at the rule of law, ignoring court rulings and acting outside of his legal authority and the constitution, then there may be few options to fight against the transition to dictatorship and fascism other than civil resistance. The article below on general strikes by Brecher is excellent, pointing out how effective general strikes have been in other countries, even if they have been rare in the U.S. (the article is listed in the section below on *Organizations and Websites*). This is one of the tactics advocated by Chenoweth, whose books (described below) should now be required reading.

198 Nonviolent Actions

There are many ways to act. The Albert Einstein Institution's mission "is to advance the worldwide study and strategic use of nonviolent action in conflict." On its website, you

can find 198 methods of nonviolent action, divided into three broad groups: nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation (social, economic and political) and nonviolent intervention (<https://www.aeinstein.org/198-methods-of-nonviolent-action>). “A description and historical examples of each can be found in volume two of *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* by Gene Sharp.”

Training for Nonviolent Resistance

The Albert Einstein Institution developed and recently released the People-Powered Training Platform, “a growing set of interactive courses and tools that enable people to build practical skills in strategic nonviolent action.”

There are currently four free courses, with more in development.

1. Fundamentals of Nonviolent Action (7 chapters)
2. Democratic Transitions
3. Nonviolent Discipline
4. Repression

<https://training.aeinstein.org/>¹²

International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC)

<https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/>

“ICNC focuses on how ordinary people wage nonviolent conflict to win rights, freedom and justice.” See their Resource Library and webinars. You can download their publications; here is the most recent publication:

Merriman et al. (2025). *Toward a People’s Peace: A Task for Activists, Peacebuilders, and Allies: Framing Essays for the 2025 Copenhagen People Power Conference*.

(https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ICNC_TowardsAPeoplesPeace_INTERACTIVE_Final.pdf). It includes first-hand experiences and insights from activists and peacebuilders from the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Palestine, Lebanon, and Ukraine.

From the forward by Tim Whyte:

In these challenging times, social movements offer a beacon of hope. As international actors retreat, we must build on local resources and agency that have been overlooked for too long. When civil society is under attack, social movements provide citizens with opportunities to engage and advocate for peace. As governments increasingly turn towards militarism and narrowly defined national interests, global solidarity and peace and

¹² Also see

<https://wagingnonviolence.org/aei/2026/07/01/democratizing-training-for-nonviolent-resistance/>

justice movements present an alternative form of strategic coordination at both global and regional levels.

Other books you can download from ICNC include these two:

- Marovic, I. (2021, second edition). *The Path of Most Resistance: A Step-by-Step Guide to Planning Nonviolent Campaigns*.
- Chase, S. (2021). *How Agent Provocateurs Harm Our Movements*.

Chenoweth's Books

Here is the publisher's description of Chenoweth's 2011 book with Stephen: "For more than a century, from 1900 to 2006, campaigns of nonviolent resistance were more than twice as effective as their violent counterparts in achieving their stated goals. By attracting impressive support from citizens, whose activism takes the form of protests, boycotts, civil disobedience, and other forms of **nonviolent noncooperation** [emphasis mine; noncooperation can be a very powerful tactic], these efforts help separate regimes from their main sources of power and produce remarkable results, even in Iran, Burma, the Philippines, and the Palestinian Territories."

Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict (Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare) August 9, 2011
by Erica Chenoweth & Maria Stephan

A more recent book:

Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know®, 2021
Erica Chenoweth

Governor Newsom of California, during the LA protests, mentioned that when just 3.5% of the population protests, this can have a dramatic effect. This refers in part to Chenoweth's work; note that 3.5% of the U.S. population is slightly over 12 million people. From Google AI (and accurate from my reading of Chenoweth):

Chenoweth's research has provided empirical support for the specific 3.5% figure. Here are the key actions that can lead to this phenomenon and potentially result in the overthrow of autocratic governments:

- **Mass Participation:** Mobilizing a substantial portion of the population, even seemingly small at 3.5%, creates immense pressure on the government. This level of engagement demonstrates widespread dissent and makes it harder for the regime to ignore or suppress the movement.

- **Nonviolent Tactics:** Chenoweth's research indicates that nonviolent campaigns are significantly more successful than violent ones in achieving political change. Nonviolent actions, such as protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience, can attract broader participation and support, including from diverse sectors of society.
- **Sustained Action:** While a peak event is important, successful movements often require sustained efforts, not just one-time demonstrations. This can involve persistent strategic pressure applied across multiple channels, creating momentum for change.
- **Strategic Disruption:** Noncooperation tactics, like strikes and boycotts, can disrupt the government's ability to function and exert economic pressure.
- **Building Broad Coalitions:** Bringing together diverse groups under a common goal strengthens the movement and makes it more resilient to repression.
- **Undermining Pillars of Support:** Successful movements can weaken autocratic regimes by encouraging defections from key institutions like the military, police, and business elites.
- **Public Sympathy and Support:** A large mobilized group likely indicates broader public sympathy, which can translate into growing political pressure on the government to concede or step down.

In Appendix 2, Chenoweth lists common questions about the 3.5% rule, and provides answers, comments, and an update.

Nonviolent Noncooperation

Here's one example of nonviolent noncooperation. The Trump administration's attempt to silence Jimmy Kimmel was a part of its attack on free speech and the media. It seemed successful, at first, when Disney/ABC "indefinitely suspended" Jimmy Kimmel. However, after a strong backlash and the start of a boycott, Disney backed down. The title of this article by Joe Worthy summarized what happened: *Jimmy Kimmel's reinstatement shows the power of noncooperation: Disney's reversal on Jimmy Kimmel's suspension wasn't an act of corporate consciousness — it was a strategic retreat forced by coordinated pressure.* (September 23, 2025, <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2025/09/jimmy-kimmel-movement-victory/>).

Protests are Increasing

Consider the findings reported in a recent article by Chenoweth, Hammam, Pressman, and Shay: *American Spring? How nonviolent protest in the US is accelerating: Contrary to conventional wisdom, the size and scale of anti-Trump protests this year have*

dwarfed those in 2017, and they have been extraordinarily peaceful (June 12, 2025, <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2025/06/american-spring-nonviolent-protest-accelerating/>).

Chenoweth et al. write that “protests in the U.S. have been quite robust since Trump took office the second time. Our ongoing research on protests in the United States reveals that within the first two weeks of the second Trump administration, protest activity surpassed that of 2017. By the end of March 2025, there had been three times as many protests as had taken place in 2017. Protest has been surging since, with large boosts coming from major, multi-location actions in April and May.” Note that the mass protests during the second No Kings rallies in October continued the trends of both increasing participation and wider and more diverse geographical participation.

The protests have also been extraordinarily nonviolent: “Overall, in over 99.5 percent of protests in April and May, we recorded no injuries, arrests or property damage — an unprecedentedly tiny fraction for a movement of this size and geographic dispersion. Contrary to officials’ hyperbolic claims of a disorderly movement attempting to sow chaos, at least through April and May, protesters associated with the anti-Trump movement were extraordinarily nonviolent in their tactics.” The No Kings protests in October were also extraordinarily nonviolent.

These data come from the Crowd Counting Consortium (CCC), which “collects publicly available data on political crowds reported in the United States, including marches, protests, strikes, demonstrations, riots, and other actions” (<https://ash.harvard.edu/programs/crowd-counting-consortium/>).

Protests can have an enormous impact

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orban banned Budapest Pride, but people showed up anyway, despite the danger. Before the parade started, it wasn’t clear whether many people would show up. But they did, filling the streets for miles. From an article in the Washington Post (<https://wapo.st/4nqNvwr>):

The community wanted to resist, but the danger was real. Police set up facial recognition cameras and threatened fines of nearly \$600 for marchers and possible arrest for organizers. Authorities, meanwhile, granted permits to antigay protesters to gather on a narrow bridge, maximizing the likelihood of confrontation, even violence.... Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s effort to ban Pride backfired, drawing a huge throng in support of LGBTQ+ rights and hurting him and his party ahead of elections next year.

Pride's success alone won't topple Orban, said Balint Ruff, a campaign strategist who hosts a podcast on Hungarian politics. But it undermined Orban's image of invincibility, an aura vital to any aspiring autocrat.

"This won't be the end of him, but in Hungarian history there have been these tipping points," Ruff said. He cited mass gatherings in 1989 that foreshadowed the fall of the communist regime. "People just say, 'Okay, we've had enough.'"

Although no official count was given, Hungarian media estimated the final crowd at more than 100,000.

The International Accompaniment Movement

Groups in the U.S. are now adopting some of the principles and techniques of the international accompaniment movement. The name "accompaniment" describes what happens. International volunteers accompany activists, community leaders, union organizers, lawyers, and others who are being intimidated, harassed, or attacked by the state or by non-state actors. "International accompaniment provides a protective presence, using international volunteers to deter violence and support grassroots struggles for justice."

International accompaniment has been shown to reduce the risk of attack against human rights defenders due to the immediate shaming and intimidation invoked by the presence of a "high-status" outsider. This is further supported by the political pressure that comes with the accompanier being connected to an international network. By accompanying threatened activists, journalists, lawyers, community leaders and organizers in their day-to-day work — especially in high-risk situations — accompaniers can deter attacks and demonstrate solidarity with the human rights defender and their work.

...

This is a powerful and proven strategy in and of itself. It serves as a deterrent — sending a clear message to potential aggressors that those being accompanied are not alone, and that the eyes of the world are watching. It also importantly fosters deep, lasting relationships rooted in solidarity, principled action, and a shared commitment to justice. (Birss & Kandler, *Lessons in Courage, Care and Collective Action* from the International Accompaniment Movement, <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2025/06/lessons-in-courage-care-and-collective-action-from-the-international-accompaniment-movement/>).

Volunteers working for these organizations travel to other countries after training, and do not work in their own countries. An exception is Nonviolent Peaceforce, which recently started working in the United States with volunteers from the United States.

Organizations:

- Peace Brigades International (PBI) (<https://peacebrigades.org/en>).
 - “We provide protection, support, and recognition to local human rights defenders who work in areas of repression and conflict and have requested our support.
 - Non-partisanship is a fundamental principle of PBI for both philosophical and practical reasons. We believe it is inappropriate for us as outsiders to influence the decisions of the organisations we accompany. Our mandate is to provide the protection that will enable them to solve their problems nonviolently in their own way.
 - For reasons of non-partisanship and security volunteers cannot join PBI teams in their own countries. The first reason for this ‘own country rule’ is that PBI teams need to maintain a distance from the organisations they accompany so that local pressures don’t influence their work. The second reason is security. In order to provide effective protection for the organisations we work with we need to maximise the security of our own volunteers.
 - All projects cover the following costs: travel to country of work, accommodation, food, internal travel, insurance, repatriation and a stipend to cover additional costs.”
- Nonviolent Peaceforce (<https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/>)
 - “The United States finds itself at a time of instability and upheaval characterized by political and social divisions, record gun sales, and an increase in hate groups and violence against targeted marginalized communities. With this upheaval comes a need to reimagine safety and security. Nonviolent Peaceforce has partnered with local communities to offer the tools and methods of unarmed civilian protection to keep people safe, interrupt cycles of violence, and build bridges across polarized communities.
 - We’ve ensured people’s safety at protests in Minneapolis and New York, de-escalating threats of violence at festive neighborhood celebrations, and provided protective presence and accompaniment for human rights defenders at the frontlines here in the United States.”
- FOR Peace Presence (<https://peacepresence.org/>)

Volunteers from these organizations have accompanied people in Columbia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, South Sudan, and other countries. *It is very disturbing to realize that international accompaniment is now needed in the United States.*

The Anti-Autocracy Handbook

A Scholars' Guide to Navigating Democratic Backsliding

Published on June 19th, 2025 by 19 authors from around the world, this 31-page handbook is an amazing document and I recommend it highly. You can find it here:

<https://zenodo.org/records/15696097>.

Here is the abstract describing the handbook:

The Anti-Autocracy Handbook is a call to action, resilience, and collective defence of democracy, truth, and academic freedom in the face of mounting authoritarianism. It tries to provide guidance to scholars navigating the growing global trend of democratic backsliding and autocratization, in particular in the U.S.

To this end, it sets out how autocracies often follow a common playbook, built around the “3 Ps”: populism, polarization, and post-truth. Leaders present themselves as voices of “the people” against “corrupt elites”, inflame societal divisions, and undermine facts to avoid accountability. This leads to a cascade of dangers for scholarship, including censorship, restrictions on funding and research collaboration, and even violence. The Trump administration serves as a contemporary example, with policies that curtail international scientific cooperation, revoke research grants, and suppress studies related to public health, climate change and minority issues. Because open inquiry and dissent are central to science and academia—qualities antithetical to authoritarian control—academia is often among the first targets of autocrats. To help scholars resist authoritarian developments, the handbook highlights both historic and contemporary measures aimed at attacking scholars, their institutional environments, and their scholarship.

The handbook also sets out a framework for action based on personal risk level—low, medium, high, or extreme. This is designed to help scholars think about their own risk and purposefully choose actions in line with it. The handbook considers tools for enhancing digital safety and highlights the importance of ongoing documentation, preserving imperilled data, and creating distributed archives as a defence against erasure. It also calls on scholars to tell their stories—publicly or anonymously—to inspire others, maintain accountability and preserve a historical record.

“As developments unfold, we endeavour to maintain and update a crowd-sourced resource that is linked to this handbook”:

https://wiki.savescience.eu/index.php?title=Main_Page

How to Stay Informed: Substack and other Sources

I strongly suggest reading Heather Cox Richardson, Paul Krugman, and Timothy Snyder. Heather Cox Richardson is a historian and the most popular individual substack writer, with almost three million readers. She summarizes current political events and

typically places them in a historical context. Paul Krugman is a Nobel prize-winning economist who wrote op-eds for the NYTimes for 20 years. He moved to Substack when they started irritating him by editing his columns. He clearly explains both the economic and political situation, and if you want gory details, he sometimes interviews other experts at great length. Timothy Snyder is an expert on authoritarianism. He has been spending a lot of time in Ukraine, and often writes about that war during his visits. All three have both free and paid options.

Heather Cox Richardson

<https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/>

<https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/archive?sort=new>

If you only read one thing, read this!

Also, see her series of very short videos: *Journey to American Democracy*:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2dS6uX1RkUyIQKUhl72xmstYGNpN_k1B

Richardson is becoming more and more concerned with Trump's illegal activities and corruption, and is writing more forcefully. In her post on July 1, 2025 she wrote, "Once a new system of detention facilities and ICE agents is established and the idea that a Republican president can legitimately attack his political opponents is accepted, a police state will be in place."

Paul Krugman

<https://paulkrugman.substack.com/>

Note that both Richardson and Krugman provide links and sources for their newsletters, so it's easy to start with their newsletters and then find dozens of other good sources of information.

Timothy Snyder: <https://substack.com/@snyder>

Author of *On Tyranny*, which is listed below in the section on Relevant Books.

Snyder has visited and written about the war in Ukraine, and also the student protests in Serbia (*Youth Protests in Serbia: And some thoughts for America*,

<https://snyder.substack.com/p/youth-protest-in-serbia>, where he chronicles his observations).

Snyder is now releasing a ten-lecture course he taught at the University of Toronto in 2025 called "Hitler and Stalin Today."

Throughout the ten lectures, I examine the Nazi and Soviet responses to the new globalized world they shared. The course begins with the colonial background that made totalitarianism possible, and which remains an essential element of our politics now. Their ideologies are described as worldviews and as practical politics, with an emphasis on the reasons for

their appeal. Attention to their policies of mass killing, essential events of twentieth-century history, instructs us about how “it” can happen here.

(<https://snyder.substack.com/p/new-lecture-series-for-the-public>)

Other good blogs and newsletters

The Preamble: <https://thepreamble.com/about>

A daily newsletter by Sharon McMahon and a few other people.

Judd at Popular Information: <https://popular.info/>

Judd Legum, founder and editor of ThinkProgress, was Hilary Clinton’s Research Director in 2008. Excellent!

Steady State: <https://steadystate1.substack.com/>

The 330+ members of the Steady State are former national security officials who remain committed to their oaths to “defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic.”

The Authoritarian Stack: <https://www.authoritarian-stack.info/>

How tech billionaires are Building a post-democratic American – and why Europe is next. This project maps the "Authoritarian Stack"—a network of firms, funds, and political actors turning core state functions into private platforms.

Monica Tranel: <https://monicatranel.substack.com/>

Tranel has twice been a candidate for congress from Montana but lost both times to Ryan Zinke. Her posts are very interesting because she explains in detail how the DOGE cuts and Trump administration policies are having a devastating effect on people, farmers, outdoor activities, and scientific research in Montana.

Meditations in an Emergency: <https://www.meditationsinanemergency.com/>

By Rebecca Solnit

Excellent commentators

Fareed Zakaria: <https://fareedzakaria.com/columns>

There are also excellent commentators writing for the NYTimes, The Washington Post, The Atlantic, the New Yorker, and other sources.

Misinformation

Learn how to spot misinformation. The techniques for denying science used by climate change deniers are very general, and used repeatedly by Trump and those in his administration. They can be summarized by the acronym FLICC: Fake experts, Logical fallacies, Impossible expectations, Cherry picking, and Conspiracy theories. This is from

Skeptical Science, which lists and defines 30 techniques as well as organizing them into a taxonomy; <https://skepticalscience.com/history-flicc-5-techniques-science-denial.html>.

There is, of course, a large literature now on misinformation, how to spot it, and techniques for countering it, and I will not try to summarize it here.

How to Stay Informed: “Mainstream Media” & Independent News Organizations

Richardson, Krugman, and many other writers and websites opposing Trump frequently quote or refer to investigative journalism by the NY Times, the Washington Post, and other mainstream media. (Who did Noam Chomsky quote to support his arguments 20 and 30 years ago? The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times! He took the information from these mainstream outlets but he interpreted it very differently.) Many of these publications are behind a paywall, but some provide free articles; e.g., The New York Times allows non-subscribers to read 10 articles per month.

- The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/>
- The Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>
- The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/us>
- Politico: <https://www.politico.com/>
- Vox: <https://www.vox.com/>
- Axios: <https://www.axios.com/>
- Talking Points Memo: <https://talkingpointsmemo.com/>
- NOTUS: <https://www.notus.org/> (NOTUS: News of the United States)
- The Atlantic: <https://www.theatlantic.com/>
- The New Yorker: <https://www.newyorker.com/>

The news website Vox has a series of articles on *America After Trump: How democracies fall — and how they can come back*, from February, 2026: <https://www.vox.com/politics/479423/america-after-trump-democracy>. Unfortunately, they may be behind a paywall. Here are three of the articles:

1. *How to stop a dictator: I spent months studying how authoritarians like Trump lose. The answer is shockingly simple.*
<https://www.vox.com/politics/479924/democracy-us-brazil-south-korea-poland-ba-cksliding-resilience>
2. *What American democracy can learn from 1930s Finland: How Finland almost fell to fascism — and didn't.*
<https://www.vox.com/videos/477541/what-american-democracy-can-learn-from-1-930s-finland>
3. *How one country stopped a Trump-style authoritarian in his tracks: What Brazil got right that America got wrong.*

<https://www.vox.com/politics/479290/brazil-democracy-trump-bolsonaro-multiparty>

Media Bias

<https://adfontesmedia.com/>

“The information landscape is vast and noisy. We’re here to help you sort through it by rating sources for reliability and bias.” See Appendix 1 for their media bias chart.

Relevant Books

It is, of course, very unfortunate that these books are now very relevant.

In addition to the ICNC and Chenoweth books listed above, consider these:

On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century

Timothy Snyder, 2017

How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them

Jason Stanley, 2018

The Anatomy of Fascism

Robert O. Paxton, 2004

Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present

Ruth Ben-Ghiat, 2020

How Democracies Die

Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt, 2018

The Politics of Nonviolent Action

Gene Sharp, 1973

Amazon description: Gene Sharp’s *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* is a landmark study of nonviolent action in three volumes: *Power and Struggle*, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*, and *The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*. *Power and Struggle* begins with an analysis of the nature of political power. *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* examines in detail 198 specific methods of this technique - broadly classed as nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation (social, economic and political) and nonviolent intervention. *The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action* examines the complex operation of this technique against a violent repressive opponent.

And also see this more recent article by Levitsky and Way:

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2025, February). The Path to American Authoritarianism. *Foreign Affairs*. [Note that you can read several articles before having to pay.]

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/path-american-authoritarianism-trump>

The NYTimes had an article and video interview titled, [We Study Fascism. And We're Leaving the U.S.](#), by Marci Shore, Timothy Snyder, and Jason Stanley (authors of two of the books above). In the video, Jason Stanley said, "I'm leaving to the University of Toronto because I want to do my work without fear that I will be punished." Then Marci Shore added, "The lesson of 1933 is you get out sooner rather than later." And at the end, Stanley concluded by saying, "You know you're living in a fascist society when you're constantly going over in your head the reasons why you're safe. What we want is a country where none of us have to feel that way."

From the article:

Professor Shore, who has spent two decades writing about the history of authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe, is leaving because of what she sees as the sharp regression of American democracy. "We're like people on the Titanic saying our ship can't sink," she said. "And what you know as a historian is that there is no such thing as a ship that can't sink."

The Presidents and the People: Five Leaders Who Threatened Democracy and the Citizens Who Fought to Defend It

Corey Brettschneider, 2024

From an excellent review:

Brettschneider's argument is a timely reminder that America's most powerful political office has not only been occupied by the unworthy before, but that more than once in our history the immense power of that office has been wielded in a manner that imperiled American democracy.

Yet this power was resisted. Not always by courts or Congress, but by citizens acting, speaking, writing, and organizing to defend the Constitution. Ordinary citizens—or, more aptly, extraordinary citizens who held no official or prominent office—helped build political coalitions that worked to secure constitutional government against presidential overreach.

(<https://www.thebulwark.com/p/surviving-bad-presidents-constitution-asks-of-us-review-corey-brettschneider>)

Organizations and Websites

ACLU: <https://www.aclu.org/>

“In the first seven months of the Trump administration, ACLU attorneys filed 75 lawsuits and took 81 additional legal actions. We boast an 80 percent success rate in our cases where we sought preliminary relief”(Fall 2025 Impact Report). During the first Trump administration, the ACLU “fought his unlawful policies more than 400 times.”

ProPublica: <https://www.propublica.org/>

Common Cause: <https://www.commoncause.org/>

Indivisible: <https://indivisible.org/>

Alliance for Justice: <https://afj.org/about/>

Democracy Forward: <https://democracyforward.org/>

Democracy Now: <https://www.democracynow.org/>

The website Waging Nonviolence has many excellent articles (<https://wagingnonviolence.org/>). Here are two:

Calls for a general strike in the US are growing. It's important to understand how to organize one, given their key role in overcoming tyrants around the world.

Jeremy Brecher April 8, 2025

<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2025/04/what-would-general-strike-in-the-us-look-like/>

Some argue that it is likely that Trump will invoke the Insurrection Act. I agree, and here's a good article on how this might unfold and how to respond: *With the Insurrection Act looming, now is the time to learn how it might unfold and the strategic ways to respond — including the power of ridicule.*

Daniel Hunter April 4, 2025

<https://wagingnonviolence.org/2025/04/what-to-do-if-the-insurrection-act-is-invoked/>

Autocracy and Fascism

Definitions

Search Labs | AI Overview [Do a web search for multiple references]

Autocracy refers to a form of government where power is concentrated in a single individual or a small group, ruling with absolute authority.

Fascism, while also an autocratic form of government, is characterized by additional traits like extreme nationalism, militarism, suppression of dissent, and a cult of personality around the leader.

Wikipedia:

Fascism is a far-right, authoritarian, and ultranationalist political ideology and movement. It is characterized by a dictatorial leader, centralized

autocracy, militarism, forcible suppression of opposition, belief in a natural social hierarchy, subordination of individual interests for the perceived interest of the nation or race, and strong regimentation of society and the economy. Opposed to communism, democracy, liberalism, pluralism, and socialism, fascism is at the far right of the traditional left–right spectrum.

A New Open Letter Against the Return of Fascism

More than 400 scholars from over 30 countries, including 32 Nobel laureates, published an open letter on June 14, 2025 in multiple newspapers across the world

(<https://stopreturnfascism.org/english/>).

On May 1st 1925, with Mussolini already in power, a group of Italian intellectuals publicly denounced Mussolini's fascist regime in an open letter. The signatories —scientists, philosophers, writers, and artists— took a stand in support of the essential tenets of a free society: the rule of law, personal liberty, and independent thinking, culture, art, and science. Their open defiance to the brutal imposition of the fascist ideology—at great personal risk— proved that opposition was not only possible, but necessary. Today, a hundred years later, the threat of fascism is back — and so we must summon that courage and defy it again.

More from this new open letter (verbatim):

Fascism emerged in Italy a century ago, marking the advent of modern dictatorship. Within a few years, it spread across Europe and the world, taking different names but maintaining similar forms. Wherever it seized power, it undermined the separation of powers in the service of autocracy, silenced opposition through violence, took control of the press, halted the advancement of women's rights, and crushed workers' struggles for economic justice. Inevitably, it permeated and distorted all institutions devoted to scientific, academic, and cultural activities. Its cult of death exalted imperial aggression and genocidal racism, triggering the Second World War, the Holocaust, the death of tens of millions of people, and crimes against humanity.

...

Fascism never vanished, but for a time it was held at bay. However, in the past two decades we have witnessed a renewed wave of far-right movements, often bearing unmistakably fascist traits: attacks on democratic norms and institutions, a reinvigorated nationalism laced with racist rhetoric, authoritarian impulses, and systematic assaults on the rights of those who do not fit a manufactured traditional authority, rooted in

religious, sexual and gender normativity. These movements have re-emerged across the globe, including in long-standing democracies, where widespread dissatisfaction with political failure to address mounting inequalities and social exclusion has once again been exploited by new authoritarian figures. True to the old fascist script, under the guise of an unlimited popular mandate, these figures undermine national and international rule of law, targeting the independence of the judiciary, the press, institutions of culture, higher education, and science; even attempting to destroy essential data and scientific information. They fabricate “alternative facts” and invent “enemies within”; they weaponise security concerns to entrench their authority and that of the ultra-wealthy 1%, offering privileges in exchange for loyalty.

...

As in 1925, we scientists, philosophers, writers, artists and citizens of the world, have a responsibility to denounce and resist the resurgence of fascism in all its forms. We call on all those who value democracy to act:

- Defend democratic, cultural and educational institutions. Call out abuses of democratic principles and human rights. Refuse preemptive compliance.
- Join collective actions, locally and internationally. Boycott and strike when possible. Make resistance impossible to ignore and costly to repress.
- Upload facts and evidence. Foster critical thinking and engage with your communities on these grounds.

Trump & His Administration: An Overview

Here’s my own personal summary. The following may seem extreme, but it’s not hard to provide good evidence for each of the characteristics in this overview:

Trump is an incompetent, mentally ill (a malignant narcissist – see the definition below), pathological liar who is also a convicted felon, a conman, a serial sexual predator, and fascist. He doesn't believe in the rule of law or following the constitution, tried to overthrow the fairly elected government of the United States, and now surrounds himself with sycophants.



This is an official photo, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/donald-j-trump/>

Other descriptions of Trump

“His every executive function exists to satisfy his ego. He is a covetous person consumed by an insatiable desire for acquisition, a man who seems to take the seven deadly sins as a seven-day challenge. He sees every relationship as a game of dominance and seems to reject the very idea of a mutually beneficial transaction. He treats everyone around him, from employees and political allies to members of his own family, as tools to use and then discard. To cozy up to Trump is to sacrifice your dignity to his cravings and desires.” Jamelle Bouie, “*Trump Promised Retribution. Turns Out He Had a Very Big Target in Mind,*” The New York Times, March 5, 2025.

Trump’s Illegal, Unconstitutional, and Disastrous Actions

“The Trump Administration is breaking the law and undermining the Constitution every day by illegally stealing funds for the programs that help American families and businesses, firing career civil servants without cause, and dismantling agencies created by acts of Congress.” House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro

(<https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/president-trump-actively-destroys-rule-law-he-claims-be-restoring>).

Historians and legal scholars point to Trump’s actions that “they say blatantly broke the law, such as freezing trillions of dollar in federal spending and dismissing members of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and Equal Employment Opportunity

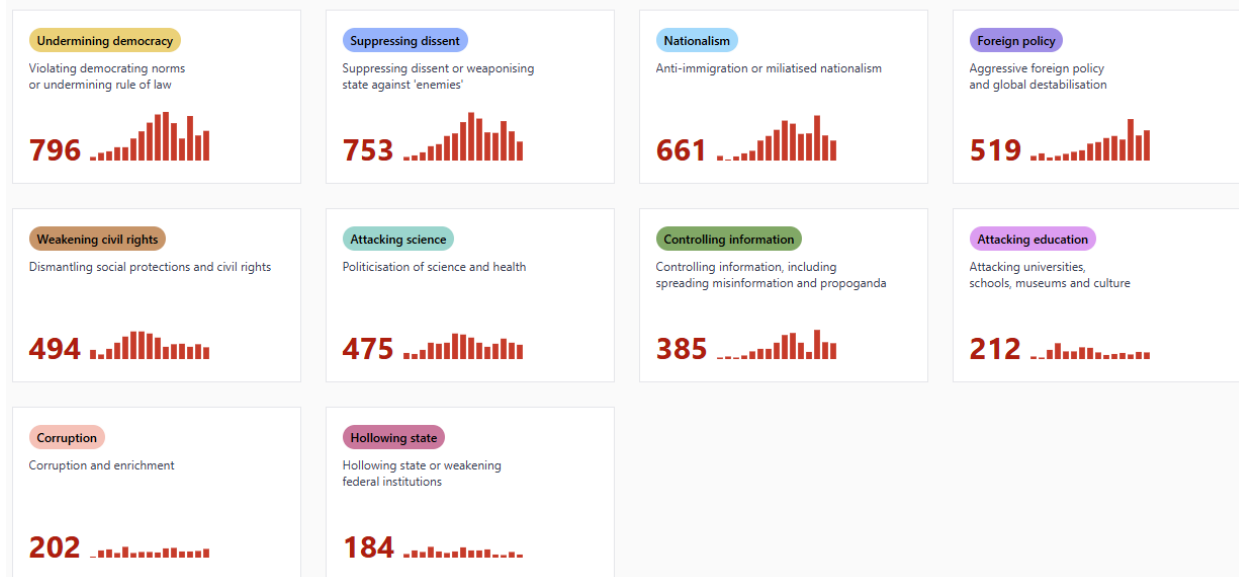
Commission (EEOC), even though they were confirmed by the Senate and had several years left in their terms”

(<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/01/trump-executive-orders-constitution-law>).

Trump Action Tracker

Here is information from the Trump Action Tracker, which is produced by Professor Christina Pagel in the UK and some volunteers. The tracker documents “the actions, statements, and plans of President Donald Trump and his administration that may pose a threat to American democracy, since the start of his second term in January 2025. Each action is mapped to one or more of five broad domains of authoritarianism, helping to make sense of a deeply concerning political trajectory. Every entry includes a source link and date. You can filter the actions by domain, by date, or by free text search” (<https://www.trumpactiontracker.info/>; screenshot below was taken on April 19, 2026).

Actions by domain



The First 100 Days

“For no clear purposes, Trump has destabilized the global economy, alienated allies, laid waste to vital government agencies, deported hundreds of people (nearly all of whom have no criminal record) to a Salvadoran gulag, and waged a war of intimidation against dozens of scholarly, commercial, and legal institutions. This is not primarily a matter of competence or a clash over policy, but a coördinated assault on the country’s first principles.” David Remnick, The New Yorker

(<https://www.newyorker.com/newsletter/the-daily/covering-donald-trumps-national-assault>).

[The New Dark Age: The Trump administration has launched an attack on knowledge itself](#). Adam Serwer, The Atlantic, May 27th, 2025.

The following section is from the beginning of this article (the link above should work for non subscribers), which documents the attack on colleges and universities, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and of course the NIH and NSF.

The Trump administration has launched a comprehensive attack on knowledge itself, a war against culture, history, and science. If this assault is successful, it will undermine Americans' ability to comprehend the world around us. Like the inquisitors of old, who persecuted Galileo for daring to notice that the sun did not, in fact, revolve around the Earth, they believe that truth-seeking imperils their hold on power.

By destroying knowledge, Trumpists seek to make the country more amenable to their political domination, and to prevent meaningful democratic checks on their behavior. Their victory, though, would do much more than that. It would annihilate some of the most effective systems for aggregating, accumulating, and applying human knowledge that have ever existed. Without those systems, America could find itself plunged into a new Dark Age.

Past the First 100 Days: Devastation Continues

On August 4, 2025, Heather Cox Richardson summarized some recent Trump actions:

President Donald J. Trump's firing of the commissioner of labor statistics on Friday for announcing that job growth has slowed dramatically has drawn a level of attention to Trump's assault on democracy that other firings have not. Famously, authoritarian governments make up statistics to claim their policies are working well, even when they quite obviously are not.

Yesterday former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers told George Stephanopoulos of *This Week* on ABC News: "This is the stuff of democracies giving way to authoritarianism.... [F]iring statisticians goes with threatening the heads of newspapers. It goes with launching assaults on universities. It goes with launching assaults on law firms that defend clients that the elected boss finds uncongenial. This is really scary stuff." In *The Bulwark*, Bill Kristol called out the open assault "on the truth, on the rule of law, on a free society" as "part of the broader pattern of the

transformation of government information into pure propaganda.”
(<https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/p/august-4-2025>)

“Poolgate”: The Reflecting Pool Fiasco

It is not surprising that there is algae in the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. The water comes from the Tidal Basin and has excessive nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus). The pool is shallow, sunlit, and slow moving. The climate is warming, and warm weather makes algae blooms more likely. Given the design, where the water comes from, and the weather, algae is common, but Trump wanted it beautiful and blue for the 250th July 4th celebration. After spending \$14 million dollars it was worse (one reason is that the new darker blue bottom may absorb more heat), and as Heather Cox Richardson writes, the situation represents the Trump administration perfectly.

Observers are noting that the reflecting pool fiasco, in which Trump created the idea there was an emergency, ignored experts, bypassed normal procedures to give a wildly inflated contract to a crony, bragged about his success, ignored the problems, claimed his enemies had sabotaged him, and finally stationed troops around the landmark he had turned into a swamp, represents the Trump administration perfectly.
(<https://heathercoxrichardson.substack.com/p/june-27-2026>)

Also consider Charlie Warzel’s article in the Atlantic, *The 13 Steps of a Trump Fiasco: The Reflecting Pool drama says everything about how the administration operates*. Warzel describes the renovation of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool as “scoring a tax-payer-funded, \$14 million-over-budget own goal in the form of a cracked and peeling, green-algae-riddled, potentially duck-killing militarized zone in the nation’s capital. One of the firms hired for the renovation is named Greenwater Services.... [Poolgate is] a textbook example of how the Trump administration operates. It’s a way that one can explore the anatomy of Trump debacles, which tend to unfold in a (roughly) 13-step process.” I strongly suggest reading Warzel’s description of this process.¹³

Will the Military Yield Also?

From Tom Nichols, a staff writer at the Atlantic (October 7, 2025):

To capture a democratic nation, authoritarians must control three sources of power: the intelligence agencies, the justice system, and the military. President Donald Trump and his circle of would-be autocrats have made rapid progress toward seizing these institutions and detaching them from the Constitution and rule of law. The intelligence community has effectively

¹³ <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/2026/06/reflecting-pool-america-250-trump/687716/>

been muzzled, and the nation's top lawyers and cops are being purged and replaced with loyalist hacks.

Only the military remains outside Trump's grip. Despite the firing of several top officers—and Trump's threat to fire more—the U.S. armed forces are still led by generals and admirals whose oath is to the Constitution, not the commander in chief. But for how long? ["Not long" is the answer, as by June 2026 Hegseth had fired more than 25 senior military leaders who he thought were not sufficiently loyal and in the MAGA camp.]

...
The greatest crisis of American civil-military relations in modern history is now under way.

...
In deploying troops to American cities, he has set up a confrontation in which military commanders may soon have to choose between obeying the president and obeying the law. "This is a nation of Constitutional law, not martial law," Judge Karin Immergut—a conservative Trump appointee—wrote last week when she blocked Trump's attempt to send troops to Portland.

Deaths from USAID Cuts

From Heather Cox Richardson, May 30, 2025:

"Musk's destruction of the United States Agency for International Development [USAID], slashing about 80% of its grants, is killing about 103 people an hour, most of them children. The total so far is about 300,000 people, according to Boston University infectious disease mathematical modeller Dr. Brooke Nichols. Ryan Cooper of The American Prospect reported today that about 1,500 babies a day are born HIV-positive because Musk's cuts stopped their mothers' medication."

See also <https://www.bu.edu/articles/2025/mathematician-tracks-deaths-from-usaid-medicaid-cuts/>

Here is the PEPFAR Program Impact Tracker (PEPFAR is The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief; unfortunately, the tracker was frozen in early 2026). The PEPFAR program supported 20 million people living with HIV across 55 countries (<https://pepfar.impactcounter.com/>). The following are figures for deaths related to HIV due to the cancellation of the PEPFAR program, whereas the numbers above for USAID include deaths from famine and other causes.

The numbers for today, October 24, 2025 at 10:30 am:

- Estimated adult deaths: 119,080 (incrementing every 3.3 minutes)
- Estimated child deaths: 12,676 (incrementing every 31 minutes)

From all tracked programs, here are the 1-year projected deaths from funding discontinuation:

- Adult Deaths: 262,915
- Child Deaths: 518,428

(<https://www.impactcounter.com/dashboard?view=table&sort=title&order=asc>)

See also this Washington Post article: *In Sudan, where children cling to life, doctors say USAID cuts have been fatal: The Trump administration's cuts to USAID had an immediate and deadly impact in war-ravaged Sudan, according to civilians, doctors and aid officials.* Katharine Houreld & Hafiz Haroun, June 29, 2025

(<https://wapo.st/3GjK8qn>). From the article:

When U.S.-supported soup kitchens were forced to close, babies starved quietly, their mothers said, while older siblings died begging for food. Funding stoppages meant that critical medical supplies were never delivered, doctors said. The lack of U.S.-funded disease response teams has made it harder to contain cholera outbreaks, which are claiming the lives of those already weakened by hunger.

The World Health Organization says an estimated 5 million Sudanese people may lose access to lifesaving health services as a result of the U.S. cuts.

14 Million Additional Deaths by 2030

An article in the Lancet is now (in early July, 2025) getting a lot of attention. The focus is on the 14 million number in the title of this section, but there's a lot more to the article than that highlight:

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to evaluate the impact of USAID funding—including all areas of its humanitarian and development assistance—on mortality, both overall and disaggregated by age and cause, over the past two decades and with projections to 2030. Our findings show that USAID-supported efforts have helped to prevent more than 91 million deaths across all age groups, including 30 million deaths among children. High levels of USAID funding were associated with a 15% reduction in all-age and all-cause mortality, a 65% reduction in mortality from HIV/AIDS, a 51% reduction from malaria, and a 50% reduction from neglected tropical diseases. Substantial decreases were also observed in mortality from tuberculosis, nutritional deficiencies, diarrhoeal diseases, lower respiratory infections, and maternal and perinatal conditions. By age group, the most pronounced reductions were

seen in children younger than 5 years (32%). According to the forecasting models, the current steep funding cuts—coupled with the potential dissolution of the agency—could lead to more than 14 million additional deaths by 2030, averaging more than 2.4 million deaths per year. These deaths include 4.5 million among children younger than 5 years, or more than 700 000 deaths annually.

([https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(25\)01186-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(25)01186-9/fulltext))

ICE, Secret Police and Concentration Camps

As Paul Krugman points out, ICE has become a secret police force. They “assault and kidnap people, accuse them of trumped-up crimes, hold them incommunicado from legal representation and their families, and fail to give them proper medical care or food.” Some are sent to the concentration camp in Florida called Alligator Alcatraz, where there have been many reports of inhumane conditions including lack of water, denial of religious rights, overcrowding, and unsanitary conditions, in addition to the lack of food and medical care mentioned by Krugman. Most people sent there do not appear to have a criminal record, and very, very few have committed any type of violent crime. As Krugman goes on, “Trump seeks to dehumanize immigrants, by calling them rapists, murderers and thieves. Yet, in fact, immigrants are on average more law-abiding than native-born Americans.” (<https://paulkrugman.substack.com/p/the-economics-of-immigration-and>).

As reported in the Los Angeles Times,

Alligator Alcatraz will place detainees in life-threatening conditions. The site consists of heavy-duty tents and mobile units, in a location known for intense humidity and sweltering heat. Tropical storms, hurricanes and floods pass through the area regularly. On a day when the president visited, there was light rain and parts of the facility flooded. This is not a safe place for the support staff who will be working there, nor is it for detainees.

(<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2025-07-14/alligator-alcatraz-florida-immigration-detention>)

CBS News quotes detainees:

"I don't know their motive for doing this, if it's a form of torture. A lot of us have our residency documents and we don't understand why we're here," he added.

A third detainee, who said he is Colombian, described deteriorating mental health and lack of access to necessary medical care. "I'm on the edge of losing my mind. I've gone three days without taking my medicine," he said. "It's impossible to sleep with this white light that's on all day."

(<https://www.cbsnews.com/miami/news/alligator-alcatraz-detainees-allege-inhumane-conditions-at-immigration-detention-center/>)

“Ice Goes Masked for a Single Reason,” by David Wallace-Wells:

“ICE goes masked for a single reason — to terrorize Americans into quiescence,” a federal judge, William Young, wrote in a blistering 161-page First Amendment ruling handed down last week. “In all our history we have never tolerated an armed masked secret police,” he continued. The judge, a Reagan appointee, compared immigration agents to “cowardly desperados and the despised Ku Klux Klan” and declared that federal efforts to deport outspoken protesters amounted to a “full-throated assault” on freedom of speech. “Carrying on in this fashion, ICE brings indelible obloquy to this administration and everyone who works in it.” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/08/opinion/ice-masks-immigration.html>)

A New McCarthyism

From the Anti-Autocracy Handbook:

The current democratic backsliding is far from unique in American history. The 1940s and 1950s saw similar attempts to silence inconvenient voices under the guise of investigating “un-American activities”. This came to be associated with the term McCarthyism. The term connotes the erosion of civil liberties, politicization of institutions, a culture of fear, and the chilling effect of repression that selective targeting, arbitrary investigations, and accusations untethered from evidence instilled among industries and communities. (<https://zenodo.org/records/15696097>)

Attacks on Higher Education

From The Talk of the Town in the New Yorker, June 2, 2025, by Jelani Cobb

Ellen Schrecker, a historian and the author of “No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities,” taught at both Columbia and Harvard and retired as a professor at Yeshiva University, emphasized the severity of the current climate. “I’ve studied McCarthyism’s impact on higher education for fifty years,” she said. “What’s happening now is worse.”

Declaring “Emergencies”

As Elise Labott writes in a guest post on The Preamble on June 11, 2025

(<https://thepreamble.com/p/trumps-los-angeles-gambit>):

The troop deployment [in Los Angeles] follows a pattern in Trump’s presidency: declaring emergencies or crises where others see manageable situations and then using those declarations to justify

sweeping unilateral actions. Trump has already declared eight separate emergencies since taking office — far more than other recent presidents.

They include an economic emergency declared to justify global tariffs even though US trade deficits have been around for decades; an energy emergency declared to justify new oil and gas leasing and the rollback of environmental regulations, despite healthy domestic supplies; and a fentanyl emergency at the Canadian border declared to justify tariffs on our northern neighbor, despite minimal drug flow from that direction. These declarations granted him extraordinary powers to bypass normal government processes and congressional oversight.

Gabe Fleisher also writes about Trump's use of emergency decrees. "Forty-Eight Emergencies and Counting" is the title of his article, with this subtitle: "If a president can call anything an emergency, does the word have any meaning at all? And who, if anyone, can stop them?" Fleisher writes:

The United States is in a constant state of emergency, at least according to President Trump. The southern border is "under attack." Trade deficits pose an "unusual and extraordinary threat." A Venezuelan gang has "invaded" the country. And the nation's capital is overrun with "lawlessness."

Since returning to office in January, Trump has repeatedly sought to expand his authority by taking advantage of a suite of laws that give the president enhanced powers in times of crisis or emergency. Chief among them is the National Emergencies Act, which Trump has invoked nine times in 2025, more than any previous president used it in a single year.

...we are currently living under no less than 48 active national emergencies. The longest-running dates back to November 1979, when Jimmy Carter declared a national emergency — renewed annually by every president since — in response to the Iran hostage crisis, allowing him (and his successors) to impose financial penalties on Tehran.

(Gabe Fleisher, August 20, 2025,

<https://thepreamble.com/p/forty-eight-emergencies-and-counting>)

There is a bipartisan bill to reform the current emergency powers (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/3988/text>). "Under the bill, every national emergency declaration would last 30 days unless Congress extended it. The measure

would also require the president to transmit a report to Congress for every emergency, with a specific explanation of the circumstances that required the emergency.” The bill was approved by a House committee before Trump took office, but was (unsurprisingly) never voted on.

Restricting Free Speech

See <https://popular.info/p/the-state-of-free-speech-in-trumps> for a list of all the ways in which Trump has restricted free speech.

“Trump's recent actions in Los Angeles are part of a sustained, multi-pronged attack on freedom of speech, targeting anyone who does not share Trump's political ideology. A Popular Information investigation identified 22 actions taken by the Trump administration that undermine the principle of freedom of speech.”

Here are just the headings for these 22 actions:

1. Trump retaliates against the Associated Press for using disfavored terminology
2. Department of Justice announces it will target journalists who "undermine" Trump's agenda
3. FCC targets media companies over content Trump doesn't like
4. ICE arrests immigrants who expressed support for Palestinians
5. State Department revokes visas of foreign students who participated in pro-Palestine protests
6. Department of Defense bans hundreds of books from Naval Academy
7. Department of Education threatens to revoke school funding for lessons about racism
8. Trump administration punishes Harvard after university rejects speech restrictions
9. Trump threatens to pull funding for colleges and universities that permit protests
10. Departments of Veterans Affairs and State ban rainbow flags
11. Department of Defense bans books, instruction about race and gender
12. State Department will block Fulbright scholarships that relate to diversity or inclusion
13. Trump administration defunds NPR and PBS for alleged "bias"
14. Trump administration guts Voice of America over disfavored speech
15. Trump bans federal funds for grants that use certain terms related to gender
16. Trump administration will deny applications of prospective immigrants based on social media posts
17. Trump administration denies entry to air traveler critical of Trump, quizzes others on political views
18. Trump administration censors 250 words and phrases from government websites
19. Trump administration pulls grant funding for American Bar Association after the group criticized Trump

20. Trump pulls security clearances from law firms that represented his political opponents
21. Trump yanks funding for scientific research that includes banned words and phrases
22. Trump administration targets medical journals, accusing them of "political bias"

Trump's Corruption

The Editorial Board of the New York Times wrote an editorial on June 7, 2025 titled "A Comprehensive Accounting of Trump's Culture of Corruption." This is a paywall-free version: [Trump's Corruption](#). (See also Appendix 6: The Ultimate Corruption: A \$1.8 Billion Slush Fund.) From the NY Times editorial: "As the historian Matthew Dallek [recently put it](#), 'Trump is the most brazenly corrupt national politician in modern times, and his openness about it is sui generis.' He is proud of his avarice, wearing it as a sign of success and savvy." The clearest form of corruption is selling tours of the White House and private diners, plus providing various favors and services to people who invest in one of his cryptocurrency ventures. Trump has reportedly already made about \$1 billion dollars from cryptocurrency, and will continue to benefit no matter how the price fluctuates because he receives commissions on sales. Individuals, companies, and foreign governments can curry his favor and influence government policy by doing the following:

- Buying \$Trump coins
- Attending MAGA fundraisers
- Facilitating Trump Organization projects
- Spending up to \$500,000 to join Executive Branch, a private club Donald Trump Jr. is opening
- And those who donated to Trump's inaugural committee have already benefited.

In exchange for various contributions, services, political support and fealty, Trump has already done the following:

- Paused lawsuits against companies and individuals by the Securities and Exchange Commission
- Shut down a Justice Department team that investigated illegal uses of cryptocurrency.
- Dropped several federal investigations
- Nullified an IRS rule
- Changed government policies to help particular companies
- Pardoned multiple people who had pleaded guilty to crimes, including pardoning the son of a woman who attended a \$1 million dollar MAGA fundraiser

- A recent article by Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington is titled, “Trump has granted clemency to 16 corrupt politicians – so far” (see this [CREW article](#) from June 2, 2025)

Other countries can get favored policy changes or reduced tariffs by advancing Trump family business interests. For example:

- Vietnam is facilitating a \$1.5 billion golf complex outside Hanoi, plus a Trump skyscraper in Ho Chi Minh City.
- The Trump Organization has six real estate projects planned in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.
- Serbia is facilitating the development of a Trump International Hotel in Belgrade.
- The Saudi-backed LIV golf circuit paid the Trump family to hold a tournament at one of Trump’s golf courses.

“The message seemed obvious enough,” the NY Times writes, “People who make Mr. Trump richer regularly receive favorable treatment from the government he runs.”

Corruption Update

Judd Legum writes, on October 27, 2025, about “*3 Scandals in 4 Days That Would Define Any Other Presidency*” (<https://popular.info/p/3-scandals-in-4-days-that-would-define>).

“During the second Trump administration, corruption scandals that would typically define a presidency receive a day or two of coverage To put the scope of the problem in context, consider the corruption scandals that have emerged just over the last week”:

- **After \$2 billion transaction with Trump cryptocurrency, convicted felon receives pardon**
 - In November 2023, Binance’s founder and CEO, Changpeng Zhao, pled guilty to willfully violating anti-money laundering laws. According to the Department of Justice, his actions “allowed money to flow to terrorists, cybercriminals, and child abusers” through Binance. Zhao, known as CZ, served four months in federal prison and agreed to resign as CEO. The company’s conduct was brazen Since the 2024 election, CZ and Binance have generated millions in profits for Trump by conducting transactions with companies linked to Trump and his family. Most significantly, in May, Binance accepted a \$2 billion investment from a state-backed UAE investment fund using the cryptocurrency USD1. The USD1 token, a so-called stablecoin, had just been created by World Liberty Financial (WLF). Trump and his family members own about 38% of WLF. Binance’s transaction gave USD1 immediate legitimacy and liquidity. It is expected to generate tens of millions in annual profits for WLF. Further, according to Bloomberg, Binance “wrote the basic code to power USD1” and “promoted USD1 to its 275 million users, a sought-after benefit among stablecoin issuers.” In other words, the entire USD1 project appears to be a gift from CZ to Trump. Binance provided the technical expertise for its creation, promoted it, and is the largest holder of the token. It is “unclear” if Binance or CZ “received any payment from World Liberty in return.” ... On Thursday, Trump pardoned CZ, which CZ had requested. The move could open the door for CZ to return as CEO and for Binance to begin operating in the United States.

- **Pentagon awards major drone contract to company linked to Trump Jr.**
 - In November 2024, a few weeks after Trump won the presidential election, an obscure drone company, Unusual Machines, brought on Trump Jr. as an advisor. Trump Jr., who has no notable experience with drones or military contracting, was granted 200,000 shares in the company, a stake worth millions. Trump Jr. later “helped screen candidates for top jobs at the Pentagon on behalf of his father after the election.” In the September 18 edition of Trump Jr’s podcast, Triggered, he admitted that he sought out people who wanted to shift more spending into drones. ... On Friday, the Financial Times reported that Unusual Machines “won its largest contract from the Pentagon.” The company “said the US Army had contracted it to manufacture 3,500 drone motors, alongside various other drone parts.” The Army also “indicated it planned to order an additional 20,000 components from” Unusual Machines next year.
- **Trump seeks \$230 million payment from Justice Department officials he appointed**
 - Last Tuesday, the New York Times reported that Trump is “demanding that the Justice Department pay him about \$230 million in compensation.” Trump filed the claims in 2023 and 2024 under the Federal Tort Claims Act, claiming he had “been persecuted by various federal investigations, including the Russia probe, the Mar-a-Lago search, and the classified-documents prosecution.” In general, the federal government is immune from civil lawsuits. But the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) creates a narrow exception for official misconduct. Under the FTCA, a claimant does not immediately file a lawsuit. First, the claim must be submitted to the federal government, which may either reject it or issue a payout. Nearly all claims filed under the FTCA are unsuccessful. Trump would ordinarily have an even harder case because all the conduct occurred in the course of official investigations and, in many cases, was approved by a judge. Prosecutors have broad discretion to conduct investigations as they see fit within the bounds of the law. The fact that Trump was not ultimately convicted in some cases does not make him eligible for compensation under the FTCA. But in Trump’s case, the officials in charge of deciding whether to issue a payment “are Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, who represented Trump in his hush money trial, and Associate Attorney General Stanley Woodward, who represented Trump’s co-defendant in the classified documents prosecution.” Trump went even further, claiming he would personally decide whether the federal government should pay him \$230 million. “I’m the one that makes the decision, and that decision would have to go across my desk, and it’s awfully strange to make a decision where I’m paying myself,” Trump said. “It sort of looks bad, I’m suing myself, right?” Such a payment would also be illegal, because the Constitution prohibits the president from receiving compensation from the government other than a salary. (<https://popular.info/p/3-scandals-in-4-days-that-would-define>)

As Paul Krugman writes, “beginning around 1980, inequality surged, leading to the incredibly high levels we see today not only have the top 1% in the income distribution pulled away from the remaining 99%, but within the top 1% the top 0.1%, the top 0.01% and the top 0.001% are pulling even further away. And this concentration of wealth at the top is corrupting our politics. Elon Musk’s claim that Trump would not have won in 2024 without him is quite plausible, while those currying favor with Trump by giving millions to his inaugural fund and buying his crypto-coins are clearly receiving

favorable treatment” (Krugman, June 8,
<https://paulkrugman.substack.com/p/understanding-inequality-part-ii>)

A Malignant Narcissist

I like describing Trump as a malignant narcissist, which was used often during his first term, and describes his behavior very accurately (see description below). Narcissistic psychopath is also appropriate, as is antisocial personality disorder with a psychopathic subtype (antisocial personality disorder is an official diagnosis in DSM-5). Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) is described by Google AI overview as “a mental health condition characterized by a long-term pattern of manipulating, exploiting, or violating the rights of others. Individuals with ASPD often disregard social norms, lack empathy, and can be deceitful and manipulative.”

Search Labs | AI Overview [Search for “Malignant Narcissist” for a number of references]

A malignant narcissist is a term used to describe individuals with a combination of narcissistic traits and antisocial personality features, often exhibiting a lack of empathy, manipulation, and a desire for control and power. While not a formal diagnosis, it's a descriptive term for individuals who demonstrate a darker, more aggressive side to their narcissism.

Here's a more detailed breakdown:

Key Characteristics:

- **Inflated sense of self-worth:** [Trump? Yes.]
They have a grandiose view of their abilities and importance, often exaggerating their accomplishments.
- **Need for admiration:** [Trump? Yes.]
They crave attention and validation from others, seeking praise and recognition.
- **Lack of empathy:** [Trump? Yes.]
They have difficulty understanding or sharing the feelings of others, showing little regard for their needs.
- **Manipulation and exploitation:** [Trump? Yes.]
They are adept at using others for their own benefit, often through charm, flattery, or deceit.
- **Aggression and abuse:** [Trump? Yes.]
They may engage in verbal, emotional, or even physical abuse, often without remorse.
- **Lack of remorse:** [Trump? Yes.]
They do not feel guilty or regret for their actions, even when they cause harm to others.
- **Paranoia:** [Trump? Yes.]
They may experience unfounded suspicions and feel threatened or persecuted by others.
- **Sadism:** [Trump? Yes.]
They may derive pleasure from causing pain or suffering to others.
- **Control and power:** [Trump? Yes.]
They are driven by a need to control others and assert their dominance.

Trump is also a perfect example of the “dark triad,” a cluster of three very negative personality traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy.

Miscellaneous

On Immigrants

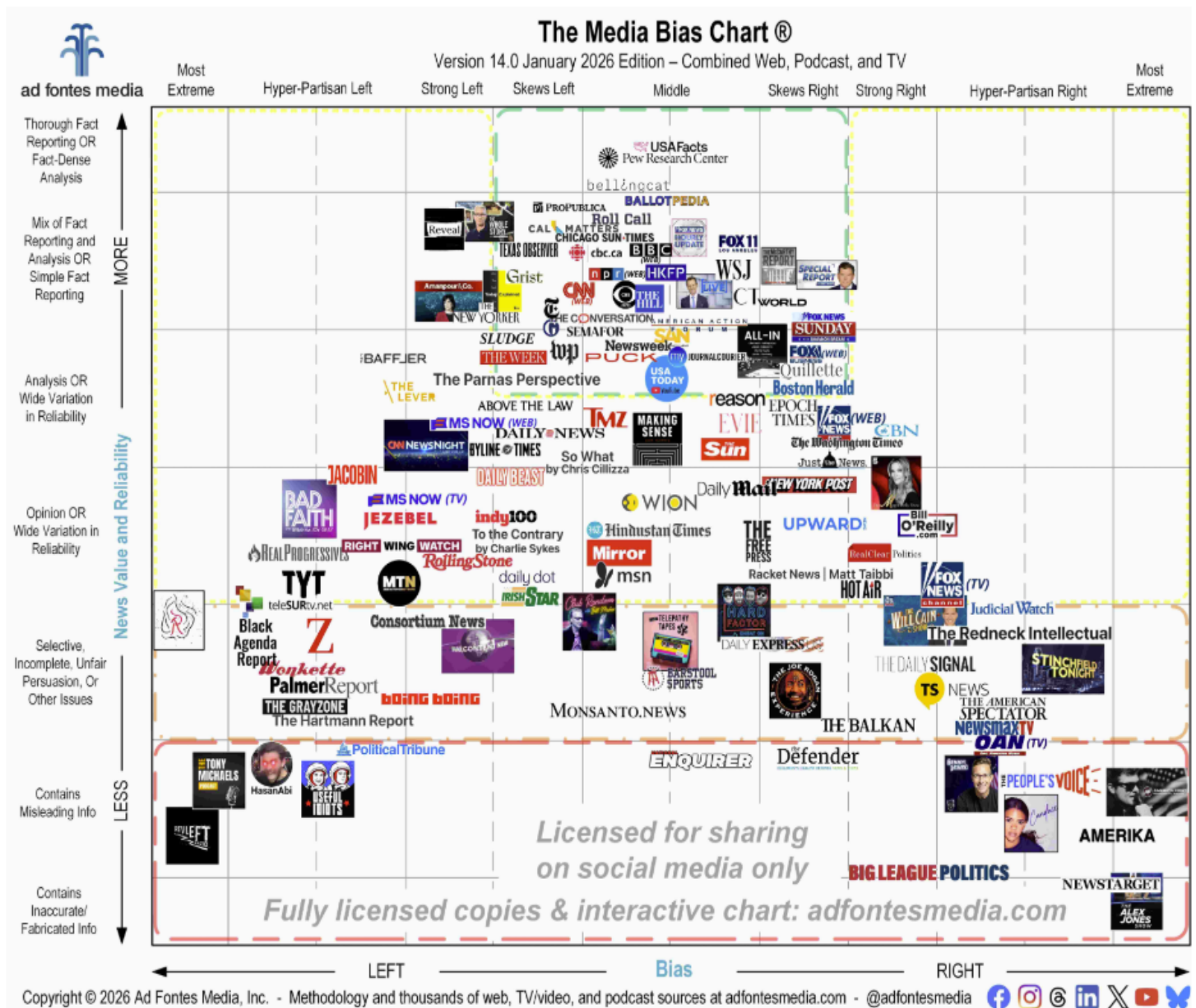
E.L. Doctorow: “It is the immigrant hordes who keep this country alive, the waves of them arriving year after year.... Who believes in America more than the people who run down the gangplank and kiss the ground?”

A headline from the Washington Post on June 20, 2025:

As Trump shuts out migrants, Spain opens its doors and fuels economic growth: Defying the anti-immigrant trend in the U.S., Spain is reaping economic benefits by granting citizenship to tens of thousands of newly-arrived workers.

Appendix 1: Media Bias Chart

Available at <https://adfontesmedia.com/static-mbc/>



If you're interested in the methodology, it is described in both text and video in great detail here: <https://adfontesmedia.com/methodology/>.

Their Content Analysis Methodology Paper:

<https://adfontesmedia.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Methodology-Paper-April-2025.pdf>.

Appendix 2: The 3.5% Rule & an Interview with Chenoweth

The following is from an article by Chenoweth in 2020: *Questions, answers, and some cautionary updates regarding the 3.5% rule*. Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School,
https://www.hks.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/2024-05/Erica%20Chenoweth_2020-005.pdf.

The “3.5% rule” refers to the claim that no government has withstood a challenge of 3.5% of their population mobilized against it during a peak event. In this brief paper, I address some of the common questions I have received about the 3.5% rule, as well as several updates from more recent work on this topic.

Four key takeaways are as follows:

- The 3.5% figure is a descriptive statistic based on a sample of historical movements. It is not necessarily a prescriptive one, and no one can see the future. Trying to achieve the threshold without building a broader public constituency does not guarantee success in the future.
- The 3.5% participation metric may be useful as a rule of thumb in most cases; however, other factors—momentum, organization, strategic leadership, and sustainability—are likely as important as large-scale participation in achieving movement success and are often precursors to achieving 3.5% participation.
- New research suggests that one nonviolent movement, Bahrain in 2011-2014, appears to have decisively failed despite achieving over 6% popular participation at its peak. This suggests that there has been at least one exception to the 3.5% rule, and that the rule is a tendency, rather than a law.
- Large peak participation size is associated with movement success. However, most mass nonviolent movements that have succeeded have done so even without achieving 3.5% popular participation.

Why would it only take a small minority of the population engaging in active resistance to create change?

There are three major explanations:

1. **Disruption.** Mark Lichbach speculates that few governments could withstand a challenge from an activated minority because of how disruptive this would be to the status quo. Large-scale mobilization can tank an economy, shut down cities and neighborhoods, and put massive political pressure on leaders to resolve a crisis. 3.5% may sound like a small number, but it’s a large absolute number of participants, even in small countries. In the U.S. today, 3.5% would be well over 11 million people. To put this in recent context, the largest single-day

demonstration in U.S. history was the Women's March in January 2017. That event drew over 4 million people—between 1 and 1.6% of the U.S. population—into active participation across hundreds of locations. Double or triple the scale of the 2017 Women's March's participation, and that would approach the 3.5% threshold.

2. **Public sympathy and support.** If a movement can mobilize 3.5% of the population to participate, there are likely much larger proportions of the population that sympathize with and support the movement. Over time, such sympathy and support can translate into growing political pressure for the incumbent to leave office—even in autocracies— as has happened in scores of cases in the postwar period.
3. **Defections.** A key pathway to success for nonviolent movements is the ability to create defections on the government side. This means that economic, business, political, cultural, and media elites stop supporting the status quo; they may even join the movement. This tends to happen most often when a movement has built a critical mass, which generates a sense of inevitability about their success. Elites who don't want to be left behind begin to shift their public loyalties, and this can lead to a cascade of defections as others follow.

An Interview, October 25, 2025

The following is from an interview of Chenoweth by Paul Krugman. He asks how you can get significant defections from the existing power structure and she answers as follows:

Chenoweth: This comes from observations made by people from Hannah Arendt, to Jean Sharpe, to Mahatma Gandhi, to George Lakey. About the fact that every tyrant, no matter how tyrannical they are or where they are in the process of consolidating their power, they rely on a huge number of people to pull it off. So the people that have to go along with it in order for it to be pulled off often include people who are powerful, influential people in the society, in the business sector, or even small business chambers of commerce, and formations. Labor can be a really important pillar of the faith community, educational institutions, important multi-sectoral domains of power, like law, then professional associations and things like that. Basically, within civil society, there's this huge range of formations, sectors and institutions that are either going to help the consolidation happen by going along with it or they're just not going to cooperate. In other cases, where there have been acute backsliding episodes even recently in places like South Korea, the behavior of those pillars and the way they interacted with the elites surrounding the aspiring autocrat are what proved to be the most decisive and, to put it concretely, like in South Korea just a few months ago when the president declared martial law in the middle of the night and tried to have an auto coup, the kind of federated trade unions across the country quickly called for people to go to the parliament and protest immediately. And they did, and then in the middle of the night, they said by declaring martial law, this president has declared the end of his presidency. He's no longer fit to serve. By the morning, they were able to announce credibly that they could initiate a

general strike in the country. That was enough to make the generals and those around the president say, “this is not going to work,” and he called off martial law. That could have been the end of this story, and he could still be there trying to seize power. But as a matter of fact, that wasn’t where the movement stopped. They said, “we meant it when we said you’re no longer fit to serve. You can’t continue being the president. We’re going to impeach you.” They used a variety of methods to make sure that even politicians in his own party showed up and formed a quorum for the impeachment proceedings. They impeached him, and he’s no longer in office.

What do “defections” in the U.S. look like? Chenoweth gives these examples:

- The archbishop of Chicago released a statement basically saying, “absolutely not, the current administration’s policy toward immigrants in the city is intolerable and we’re not going to go along with it.”
- The Chamber of Commerce sued the Trump administration over its H-1b policy, on the basis of it being unconstitutional; “he doesn’t have the right to do this.”
- Many airports refused to run Kristi Noem’s TSA commercial.

Is the resistance failing or succeeding? What is actually happening here?

Chenoweth: I had a conversation with my colleague Steve Levitsky about this on Monday on a webinar that we did, and I asked him this question, “where would you put us right now?” He said, “there’s no precedent for where we are.” I think I largely agree with him because here’s what we’re dealing with: we are in a global period where we’ve seen around the world a democratic recession year over year for every year in the past 17 or 18 years in a row, there have been fewer democracies and more autocracies and hybrid regimes in the world and last year was a pretty big jump in that because the year 2024 was the year of elections around the world. For the first time in world history, in every election and in every established democracy in the world, the incumbent lost vote share. It’s not always the right that lost vote share, the left. But for the most part, this elevated or empowered far right parties around the world. We’re part of that trend.

... We’re now at a place that I think the country arguably has never been before, which is to say that that particular version of the country’s authoritarianism has captured the arms of the federal power, and is seemingly not respecting federalism in the same way that one might have expected.

...

This is just to say, I think that where we are in kind of uncharted territory, I also think the fundamentals of what we know about how to arrest backsliding probably remain the same. I also believe that the United States has everything, our population has all of the ingredients to do what many other populations around the world have been doing and what people in our country have done in the past which is to build and strengthen the civil society response to what’s happening, to uphold the institutions that need upholding, and to renew and improve the institutions that need renewal and improvement without bloodshed. I truly believe that we have the capacity to do that. It’s up to us to decide whether we can organize ourselves to deliver on that.

(<https://paulkrugman.substack.com/p/talking-with-erica-chenoweth>)

Appendix 3: Twenty Lessons for Fighting Tyranny

This is a summary of the twenty lessons for fighting tyranny in Timothy Snyder's 2017 book *On Tyranny* (from <https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/twenty-lessons-fighting-tyranny/>).

1. **Do not obey in advance.** Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do.
2. **Defend institutions.** It is institutions that help us to preserve decency. They need our help as well. Do not speak of "our institutions" unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves. So choose an institution you care about and take its side.
3. **Beware the one-party state.** The parties that remade states and suppressed rivals were not omnipotent from the start. They exploited a historic moment to make political life impossible for their opponents. So support the multiparty system and defend the rules of democratic elections.
4. **Take responsibility for the face of the world.** The symbols of today enable the reality of tomorrow. Notice the swastikas and other signs of hate. Do not look away, and do not get used to them. Remove them yourself and set an example for others to do so.
5. **Remember professional ethics.** When political leaders set a negative example, professional commitments to just practice become important. It is hard to subvert a rule-of-law state without lawyers, or to hold show trials without judges. Authoritarians need obedient civil servants, and concentration camp directors seek businessmen interested in cheap labor.
6. **Be wary of paramilitaries.** When the men with guns who have always claimed to be against the system start wearing uniforms and marching around with torches and pictures of a leader, the end is nigh. When the pro-leader paramilitary and the official police and military intermingle, the end has come.
7. **Be reflective if you must be armed.** If you carry a weapon in public service, God bless you and keep you. But know that evils of the past involved policemen and soldiers finding themselves, one day, doing irregular things. Be ready to say no.

8. **Stand out. Someone has to.** It is easy to follow along. It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease, there is no freedom. Remember Rosa Parks. The moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow.
9. **Be kind to our language.** Avoid pronouncing the phrases everyone else does. Think up your own way of speaking, even if only to convey that thing you think everyone is saying. Make an effort to separate yourself from the Internet. Read books.
10. **Believe in truth.** To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights.
11. **Investigate.** Figure things out for yourself. Spend more time with long articles. Subsidize investigative journalism by subscribing to print media. Realize that some of what is on the Internet is there to harm you. Learn about sites that investigate propaganda campaigns (some of which come from abroad). Take responsibility for what you communicate to others.
12. **Make eye contact and small talk.** This is not just polite. It is part of being a citizen and a responsible member of society. It is also a way to stay in touch with your surroundings, break down social barriers, and understand whom you should and should not trust. If we enter a culture of denunciation, you will want to know the psychological landscape of your daily life.
13. **Practice corporeal politics.** Power wants your body softening in your chair and your emotions dissipating on the screen. Get outside. Put your body in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. Make new friends and march with them.
14. **Establish a private life.** Nastier rulers will use what they know about you to push you around. Scrub your computer of malware. Remember that email is skywriting. Consider using alternative forms of the Internet, or simply using it less. Have personal exchanges in person. For the same reason, resolve any legal trouble.
15. **Contribute to good causes.** Be active in organizations, political or not, that express your own view of life. Pick a charity or two and set up autopay.

16. **Learn from peers in other countries.** Keep up your friendships abroad, or make new friends abroad. The present difficulties in the United States are an element of a larger trend. And no country is going to find a solution by itself. Make sure you and your family have passports.
17. **Listen for dangerous words.** Be alert to the use of the words extremism and terrorism. Be alive to the fatal notions of emergency and exception. Be angry about the treacherous use of patriotic vocabulary.
18. **Be calm when the unthinkable arrives.** Modern tyranny is terror management. When the terrorist attack comes, remember that authoritarians exploit such events in order to consolidate power. Do not fall for it.
19. **Be a patriot.** Set a good example of what America means for the generations to come.
20. **Be as courageous as you can.** If none of us is prepared to die for freedom, then all of us will die under tyranny.

Inspired by Timothy Snyder, Dr. Sunita Sah wrote Ten Ways to Defy Today, which you can find here: <https://sunitasah.substack.com/p/ten-ways-to-defy-today>.

Appendix 4: Stopping Trump at the Ballet Box

What are the most competitive races in this year's midterm elections? And where will a political donor get the most strategic value from relatively small contributions to a campaign? To answer this question, I had GPT-5.4/Deep research and Anthropic's Claude Sonnet 4.6 both prepare a report on April 5, 2026. Google Gemini, rather than providing a report, listed ten websites with articles on 2026 races. The prompt I used is below, and I recommend using this, or one like it, for updated results as we get closer to the election.

Note that GPT, in the section on Methodology, Assumptions, and Limitations, writes that, "Our ranking reflects a blend of: how tight the race is (based on margins, CPVI [Cook Partisan Voting Index], and ratings) and the *marginal utility of small-dollar donations*." Similarly, Claude writes that, "Races are ranked by a combination of competitiveness and the potential impact of additional grassroots financial contributions.... A race rated Likely Democrat, for example, does not appear here because the Democratic candidate is unlikely to need help winning. Similarly, a race where the Democratic candidate has a 5-to-1 fundraising advantage has lower marginal value for additional contributions than one where the race is financially close."

Prompt

Using current, reputable sources, identify U.S. House and Senate races in the 2026 elections in which a Democratic candidate or likely Democratic nominee has a realistic chance to defeat a Republican candidate or hold an open seat currently favoring Republicans. Focus on races where additional grassroots financial support could plausibly matter. For each recommended race, provide:

1. the candidate's name;
2. the office and state or district;
3. whether the seat is open or held by a Republican;
4. a short explanation of why the race is competitive;
5. reasons why the candidate appears to be a worthwhile target for small-dollar Democratic contributions; and
6. any important cautions or uncertainties, such as weak fundraising, limited name recognition, a difficult political environment, or lack of polling.

Rank the recommendations by a clear standard, such as a combination of competitiveness and the likelihood that additional contributions could make a meaningful difference. Use recent evidence where available, including polling, fundraising, candidate quality, district or state partisanship, prior election results, retirements, and ratings from credible election analysts. Cite sources for factual claims. Do not assume that every competitive race is equally worthy of support; instead, make a

reasoned judgment about where a Democratic donor would most likely get strategic value from contributing. The results:

GPT-5.4

House

Rebecca Bennett, New Jersey, 7th
Manny Rutinel, Colorado, 8th
Bridget Brink, Michigan, 7th
Denise Powell, Nebraska, 2nd
Ammar Campa-Najjar, California, 48th

Senate

Roy Cooper, North Carolina
Janet Mills, Maine
Mary Peltola, Alaska
James Talarico, Texas

Claude Sonnet

House

New Jersey, 7th
Colorado, 8th
Michigan, 7th
Iowa, 1st
Virginia, 2nd

Senate

Roy Cooper, North Carolina**
Mills/Platner, Maine*
Sherrod Brown, Ohio*
Turek/Wahls Iowa+

** : Highest priority

* : High priority

+ : Longer shot

The full report is available here:

[Stopping Trump at the Ballot Box](#)

Large language models like GPT-5.4 and Claude Sonnet and Opus make mistakes and sometimes fabricate information, so it's important to validate what they suggest and do additional research. To help you with your own research, I've also listed websites below that should help you. If you have suggestions for websites to add, please send them to me.

Other Sources of Information

Force Multiplier

<https://www.forcemultiplierus.org/>

“Force Multiplier, an independent, all-volunteer organization, can help you maximize the impact of your political investments of time and money. We guarantee that 100% of your donations goes directly to the candidates and groups you choose to support.”

Oath

<https://app.oath.vote/>

“The smartest way to do your political giving. Oath empowers donors to give more strategically by making data-driven recommendations about where your dollars have maximum impact.”

A House United

<https://ahouseunited.org/>

“This website was formed as a tool to help Americans wishing to express their political voice as donors in the mid-term elections, in assistance with the goal of **flipping the House in 2026**. With the stakes higher than ever, many active and engaged voters are looking for ways to help take control of the House of Representatives from the Republican party. But very few people know where to donate their money to get the biggest impact on the elections for their money.”

The screenshot below is from A House United on May 2, 2026.

Click the links below to land on the **Donate** pages of these “Toss-Up” candidates, ranked by **Highest Impact** for your money, by combining the **Tightest-rated** races with the lowest funds raised - **Most Affordable** – out of 435 House districts.

TOP DONATION IMPACT US HOUSE RACES

		TIGHTNESS* # of Toss-Up Ratings	AFFORDABILITY District Affordability Index	IMPACT SCORE
TX-34 Vicente Gonzalez, Jr.	secure.actblue.com/donate/vg-ahouseunited	3	74%	414
AZ-06 JoAnna Mendoza	joannamendoza.com	3	98%	311
IA-03 Sarah Trone Garriott	sarahforiowa.com	2	71%	287
IA-01 Christina Bohannon	bohannonforcongress.com	3	108%	280
PA-10 Janelle Stelson	janellestelson.com	2	80%	255
WI-03 Rebecca Cooke	cookeforwisconsin.com	2	119%	170

* Those 2026 House races ranked as “Toss-Up” by at least two of these three professional political polling consultancies: *Cook Political Report*, *Inside Elections*, *Sabato's Crystal Ball*; will later include *The Hill*, when ratings begin to be published. Tightness is the number of “Toss-Up” ratings for each race.

Note: Average toss-up = 100%; lower is more affordable.

Appendix 5: “The Trump Administration is in a Psychotic State”

This is the title of an opinion piece in the New York Times published on April 10, 2026 by Jonathan Rauch and Peter Wehner. President Trump has a disorganized mind and a disordered personality, they write, and “What the past few months and especially the past few weeks have brought into focus is how his pathologies have cascaded downward and outward through his administration. They have become institutionalized. The reason the administration so often does not act coherently is that it cannot. The world faces something new and baffling and frightening in Mr. Trump’s second term: a psychotic state.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/10/opinion/trump-iran-psychotic-state-institutions.html>

The following are some sections from the article, reprinted verbatim.

The issue is that the administration as a whole lacks a consistent attachment to reality and the ability to organize its thinking coherently. Mr. Trump’s grandiosity, impulsivity, inconsistency and outright breaks with reality have become state policy.

On the Iran war:

The Trump administration chose to wage a war without deciding on its aims, mapping out a strategy, planning for contingencies or even being able to explain itself. The goal was regime change — until it wasn’t. The demand was unconditional surrender — until it wasn’t. Deadlines were issued and then erased. Threats of total destruction were made and then pulled back. Iran’s nuclear program was a casus belli in February, despite the fact that we were told by Mr. Trump that it was “obliterated” last June. The president called for an international coalition to open the Strait of Hormuz, then said the United States could go it alone, then said the waterway would somehow “open itself.” He claimed that the United States had already won the war, that the war would end soon and that the war would end “when I feel it, feel it in my bones.”

...

Normal administrations set up policy processes that assemble evidence from varied sources, collate viewpoints and priorities across multiple agencies and ensure rational deliberation before options reach the president.... The policy review process can be tortuous and sometimes mistaken. It can’t substitute for wise presidential judgment. But it is vital. It asks hard questions and assesses competing arguments. It ensures expert input in specific domains, anticipates how policies may ramify and prepares for contingencies.

In all those ways, the systematic review of policy amounts to an institutional mind: a cognitive process that organizes the government’s deliberations to keep them rational and anchored in reality. You might think of it as the government’s equivalent of the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for high-level executive functions

such as impulse control and long-term planning. In Mr. Trump's second term, those functions still exist, but they can be disrupted, circumvented or just plain abandoned at any moment on the say-so of the president and his senior officials. In that respect, the Trump administration is mindless.

Policy judgments should be made by the president, not by subordinate agencies and experts. But irrational processes produce inexplicable outcomes, and that is what we have seen, again and again. The only rhyme or reason is the principle that Mr. Trump proclaimed when explaining his policy toward Cuba: "I think I can do anything I want with it." That is the principle by which his administration governs.

Understandably, scholars, journalists and politicians have attempted to fit Trump 2.0 into any number of at least somewhat rational frameworks: populism, isolationism, unilateralism, nationalism, transactionalism, the madman theory, spheres of influence, imperialism and more. Some of those frameworks can help illuminate the president and the people around him. As one of us has argued, he is a patrimonialist — a leader who believes the state is his personal property. And both of us have said that his administration displays hallmarks of fascism. Ultimately, however, institutional psychosis defies rational categories. Predicting this administration's behavior is impossible under any framework. And if Mr. Trump becomes more desperate as he grows more unpopular, the danger only increases.

Which leaves everyone wondering: What are the implications if the administration of the world's most powerful country is chaotic in its thinking, unpredictable in its actions and not reliably in touch with reality? It's impossible to know. America and its allies have dealt with a lot of presidential imperfections and failings, but there is no precedent or even category for the institutional psychosis displayed by the second Trump administration. Precisely because the psychotic state is so unpredictable, setting up systems to manage it will not work.

...

Institutional psychosis is ultimately self-defeating and unsustainable. Reality checks will return because reality always reasserts itself. But severe damage will have been done, damage that may take a generation or more to repair.

As the Trump era winds down, the country may relearn something that never should have been forgotten. Institutions need to be reformed, not destroyed; governing well requires skill and careful attention to detail rather than leaders acting on impulse and ignorance; and character and mental stability matter perhaps most of all.

Appendix 6: The Ultimate Corruption: A \$1.8 Billion Slush Fund

Donald Trump proposed a \$1.8 billion fund that will compensate people who claim they were victims of political persecution. It's an "anti-weaponization" fund that even some Republicans have described as a slush fund. The fund stemmed from an agreement between Trump, his family, and the IRS to settle his \$10 billion lawsuit over the leak of his tax returns. The nearly \$1.8 billion fund would "provide a systematic process to hear and redress claims of others who suffered weaponization and lawfare," according to the DOJ (see the DOJ press release below). It is, in my opinion, unlikely to be implemented in its current form, but the audacity to attempt this is breathtaking; it means that Trump thinks that there is no limit to what he can do as president – the constitution and the other branches of government be damned.

Here is how NY Times columnist David French describes this fund as part of a discussion with other columnists:

I think it might be the most purely monarchical thing that he's done yet in an already monarchical presidency.... Now, I fully recognize that this is also a man who unilaterally launched a war on a foreign country. He's been able to look back at past presidential misbehavior in that arena to justify this, and he tries to do that here by looking back at prior presidents who, when friendly groups had filed litigation, had entered into favorable settlements with friendly groups. Now, this is a practice called "sue and settle." And a lot of those settlements I didn't like. They were too favorable, for example.

But that is not this. Let's break down what this is. So, this is Donald Trump suing his own I.R.S. — the I.R.S. that he controls — for alleged misconduct that was committed when — dot, dot, dot — he controlled the I.R.S. in his first term. So he's suing an agency he controls for alleged misconduct that occurred under his watch. Then, the defending agency is supposed to be the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice is also under his control.

So, here you have it: He's filing a lawsuit against an entity he controls. This is absurd. And so, when a federal judge looks at this and goes: Wait a minute, is this even an adversarial process? Is this a real case and controversy? I mean, this is one side suing itself. And so, then what happens is, the Trump administration, seeing the looming legal disaster, drops the case, or Trump drops the case. Then his own administration enters into a unilateral agreement with

him. That doesn't just create a slush fund for non-parties to the case, in other words, people who weren't even parties to this at all.

There's no judicial oversight. The slush fund is going to be conducted entirely at his own discretion, according to his own procedures with the people that he selects. And then, to top it all off, this same agreement grants him, his family, all the parties to this lawsuit, this sort of in perpetuity, or a version of a civil pardon.

In other words, it has a release of liability against Trump and his family that is extraordinarily broad. And why is this so important? Because Trump has the power to pardon, but the power to pardon only applies to crimes. It doesn't apply to civil lawsuits. So, if he violated the law as president, he would be subject to civil litigation, even if he pardoned himself, so, now he and parts of his family are immune from civil lawsuits brought on matters arguably unrelated to this very case.

And I know it's a lot less consequential than a war in Iran. But as far as a matter of assuming power, just grabbing power and using it just entirely to settle scores, to pay off friends and allies — I mean, this one absolutely takes the cake.

And this is an administration so corrupt that, as I was talking in an interview this week, I said the Gilded Age guys are angry right now that they were born in the wrong century, because if they really wanted some grift and graft, now is the time in this administration, and this stands out even in that milieu.¹⁴

The Press Release from the U.S. Department of Justice

The following is from the Office of Public Affairs of the U.S. Department of Justice (verbatim):

Part of settlement agreement in President Donald J. Trump v. Internal Revenue Service
The U.S. Department of Justice today announced that as a part of the [settlement agreement](#) in *President Donald J. Trump v. Internal Revenue Service*, the Attorney General [established](#) "[The Anti-Weaponization Fund](#)" to provide a systematic process to hear and redress claims of others who suffered weaponization and lawfare.

The plaintiffs in the case, President Donald J. Trump, Donald J. Trump, Jr., Eric Trump, and the Trump Organization, LLC, filed suit against the Treasury and IRS in Southern District of Florida federal court following the leak of their tax returns. Per the settlement, plaintiffs will receive a formal apology but no monetary payment or damages of any

¹⁴https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/23/opinion/trump-slush-fund-republicans.html?unlocked_article_code=1.kIA.YIYv.XZCGGZdEzdK7&smid=url-share

kind. They have agreed, in exchange for the creation of this fund, to drop their pending lawsuit with prejudice, and also withdraw two administrative claims including for damages resulting from the unlawful raid of Mar-a-Lago and the Russia-collusion hoax.

“The machinery of government should never be weaponized against any American, and it is this Department’s intention to make right the wrongs that were previously done while ensuring this never happens again,” said Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche. “As part of this settlement, we are setting up a lawful process for victims of lawfare and weaponization to be heard and seek redress.”

“The use of government power to target individuals or entities for improper and unlawful political, personal, or ideological reasons should not be tolerated by any Administration,” said Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General Trent McCotter.

The Fund will have the power to issue formal apologies and monetary relief owed to claimants. Submission of a claim is voluntary. There are no partisan requirements to file a claim. Any money left when the Fund ceases operations will revert to the Federal Government.

The Fund will receive \$1.776 billion and will come from the judgment fund, which is a perpetual appropriation allowing DOJ to settle and pay cases. On a quarterly basis, the Fund shall send a report to the Attorney General outlining who has received relief and what form of relief was awarded.

At the Attorney General’s direction, the Fund can be audited. The Fund must take steps to protect private information and avoid fraud. The Fund shall cease processing claims no later than December 1, 2028.

There is legal precedent for such a Fund, most notably the “*Keepseagle*” case where the Obama Administration created a \$760 million fund to redress various claims alleging racism against the federal government over a period of decades.

In *Keepseagle*, hundreds of millions of dollars remaining in the fund were distributed to non-profits and NGOs that never made claims, whereas any money remaining in The Anti-Weaponization Fund will revert to the federal government. The Obama DOJ settled by putting \$680 million from the judgment fund into a bank account for a single claims administrator to dole out. In *Keepseagle* the remaining money—which ended up being over \$300 million—was distributed to the entities that had not even submitted claims.

The Fund will consist of five members appointed by the Attorney General. One Member will be chosen in consultation with congressional leadership. The President can remove

any member, but a replacement must be chosen the same way as the replaced member was selected.¹⁵

May 18, 2026, Updated May 19, 2026

¹⁵ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-anti-weaponization-fund>

Appendix 7: Accelerating Autocratization and the Loss of Liberal Democracy

“For the first time in 50 years, the USA loses its long-term status as a liberal democracy.”

The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute produces a yearly democracy report. “V-Dem produces the largest global dataset on democracy with over 32 million data points for 202 countries and territories from 1789 to 2025. Involving over 4,200 scholars and other country experts, V-Dem measures over 600 different attributes of democracy.”¹⁶

Methodology

V-Dem uses innovative methods to aggregate expert judgments and thereby produce estimates of important concepts. We use experts because many key features of democracy are not directly observable. For example, it is easy to observe whether or not a legislature has the legal right to investigate an executive. However, assessing the extent to which the legislature actually does so requires evaluation by experts with extensive conceptual and case knowledge.

V-Dem typically gathers data from five experts per country-year observation, using a pool of over 4,000 country experts who provide judgment on different concepts and cases. Experts hail from almost every country in the world, allowing us to leverage diverse opinions.¹⁷

Democracy

V-Dem offers a unique approach to conceptualizing and measuring democracy. The V-Dem dataset includes five core indices of democracy: electoral, liberal, egalitarian, participatory, and deliberative.

Electoral democracy is at the core of any type of democracy. It exists when elections are free, fair, and recurring; elected officials wield political power de facto; suffrage is universal; political parties and candidates can form and compete freely; and there is a reasonably level playing field around elections in terms of freedoms of speech, media, and civil society.

¹⁶ https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.v-dem.net/about/v-dem-project/methodology/>

The Democracy Report mostly centers on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI). It combines the above core institutions of electoral democracy with the liberal dimension: well-functioning checks and balances on the executive power by the legislature and the judiciary, and a strong rule of law ensuring that equal civil liberties are respected.¹⁸

Results from the Democracy Report 2026

For the first time in 50 years, the USA loses its long-term status as a liberal democracy.

“Liberal democracy, also called Western-style democracy, is a form of government that combines the organization of a democracy with ideas of liberal political philosophy. Common elements within a liberal democracy are: elections between or among multiple distinct political parties; a separation of powers into different branches of government; the rule of law in everyday life as part of an open society; a market economy with private property; universal suffrage; and the equal protection of human rights, civil rights, civil liberties, and political freedoms for all citizens.”

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberal_democracy)

Here are some of the highlights of the Democracy Report (verbatim):

The scale and speed of autocratization under the Trump administration are unprecedented in modern times. Within one year, the USA's LDI [Liberal Democracy Index; see below] score has declined by 24%; its world rank dropped from 20th to 51st place out of 179 nations.

- In 2025, the derailment of democracy is marked by executive overreach undermining the rule of law, along with far reaching suppression and intimidation of media and dissenting voices.
- The speed with which American democracy is currently dismantled is unprecedented in modern history.
- Legislative Constraints – the worst affected aspect of democracy – is losing one-third of its value in 2025 and reaching its lowest point in over 100 years.
- Civil Rights and Equality before the Law are also rapidly declining, falling to late 1960s levels.
- Freedom of Expression is now at its lowest level since the end of WWII.

¹⁸ https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf

- Electoral components of democracy remain stable. Election-specific indicators are re-assessed only in electoral years, and the 2025 scores are based on the quality of the 2024 elections.¹⁹

The LDI

The LDI is made up of eight sub-indices: the share of adult citizens who have the right to vote, elected officials, free and fair elections, freedom of expression, freedom of association, legislative constraints on the executive, judicial constraints on the executive, and individual rights. In total, the LDI is based on 71 indicators that capture liberal and electoral aspects of democracy.

¹⁹ Nord, Marina, David Altman, Tiago Fernandes, Ana Good God, and Staffan I. Lindberg (2026). *Democracy Report 2026: Unraveling The Democratic Era?* University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute. https://www.v-dem.net/documents/75/V-Dem_Institute_Democracy_Report_2026_lowres.pdf