

# America Is Not Yet Lost



**Paul Krugman** DEC. 25, 2017

Many of us came into 2017 expecting the worst. And in many ways, the worst is what we got.

Donald Trump has been every bit as horrible as one might have expected; he continues, day after day, to prove himself utterly unfit for office, morally and intellectually. And the Republican Party — including so-called moderates — turns out, if anything, to be even worse than one might have expected. At this point it's evidently composed entirely of cynical apparatchiks, willing to sell out every principle — and every shred of their own dignity — as long as their donors get big tax cuts.

Meanwhile, conservative media have given up even the pretense of doing real reporting, and become blatant organs of ruling-party propaganda.

Yet I'm ending this year with a feeling of hope, because tens of millions of Americans have risen to the occasion. The U.S. may yet become another Turkey or Hungary — a state that preserves the forms of democracy but has become an authoritarian regime in practice. But it won't happen as easily or as quickly as many of us had feared.

Early this year the commentator David Frum warned that the slide into authoritarianism [would be unstoppable](#) “if people retreat into private life, if critics grow quieter, if cynicism becomes endemic.” But so far that hasn't happened.

What we've seen instead is the emergence of a highly energized resistance. That resistance made itself visible literally the day after Trump took office, with the [huge women's marches](#) that took place on Jan. 21, dwarfing the thin crowds at the inauguration. If American democracy survives this terrible episode, I vote that we make pink pussy hats the symbol of our delivery from evil.

This obviously goes for Trump himself, who is clearly a dictator wannabe, with no respect whatsoever for democratic norms. But it also goes for Republicans in Congress, who have demonstrated again and again that they will do nothing to limit his actions. They have backed him up as he uses his office to enrich himself and his cronies, as he foments racial hatred, as he attempts a slow-motion purge of the Justice Department and the F.B.I.

In fact, there has been a strange dynamic over the past few months: The worse things look for Trump, the more closely Republicans tie themselves to him. One might have expected recent electoral defeats to give G.O.P. moderates a bit more backbone. Instead, senators like John McCain and Susan Collins, who won widespread praise for standing up against

Obamacare repeal during the summer, went along meekly with a monstrously awful tax bill.

And the growing evidence that the Trump campaign colluded with Russia doesn't seem to have induced any prominent Republicans who weren't already anti-Trump to take a stand. Instead, we've seen erstwhile critics like Lindsey Graham become obsequious toadies [promoting Trump properties](#).

So we can't count on the consciences of Republicans to protect us. In particular, we need to be realistic about the likely results of Robert Mueller's investigation. The best bet is that no matter what Mueller finds, no matter how damning and no matter what Trump does — even if it involves blatant obstruction of justice — Republican majorities in Congress will back up their president and continue to sing his praises.

In other words, as long as Republicans control Congress, constitutional checks and balances are effectively a dead letter.

So it's going to be up to the American people. They may once again have to make themselves heard in the streets. They'll certainly have to make their weight felt at the ballot box.

It's going to be hard, because the game is definitely rigged. Remember, Trump lost the popular vote but ended up in the White House anyway, and the midterm elections will be anything but fair. Gerrymandering and the concentration of Democratic-leaning voters in urban districts have created a situation in which Democrats could win a large majority of votes yet still fail to take the House of Representatives.

And even if voters rise up effectively against the awful people currently in power, we'll be a long way from restoring basic American values. Our democracy needs two decent parties, and at this point the G.O.P. seems to be irretrievably corrupt.

Even at best, in other words, it's going to take a long struggle to turn ourselves back into the nation we were supposed to be. Yet I am, as I said, far more hopeful than I was a year ago. America is not yet lost.