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# Trump Is Getting Weaker, and the Resistance Is Getting Stronger

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It has been a gruesome year for those who see Donald Trump's kakistocracy clearly. He returned to office newly emboldened, surrounded by obsequious tech barons, seemingly in command of not just the country but also the zeitgeist. Since then, it's been a parade of nightmares — armed men in balaclavas on the streets, migrants sent to a torture prison in El Salvador, corruption on a scale undreamed of by even the gaudiest third-world dictators and the shocking capitulation by many leaders in business, law, media and academia. Trying to wrap one's mind around the scale of civic destruction wrought in just 11 months stretches the limits of the imagination, like conceptualizing light-years or black holes.

And yet, as 2025 limps toward its end, there are reasons to be hopeful.

That's because of millions of people throughout the country who have refused to surrender to this administration's bullying. When Trump began his second term, conventional wisdom held that the resistance was moribund. If that was ever true, it's certainly not anymore. This year has seen some of the largest street protests in American history. Amanda Litman, a founder of Run for Something, a group that trains young progressives to seek local office, told me that since the 2024 election, it has seen more sign-ups than in all of Trump's first four years. Just this month, the Republican-dominated legislature in Indiana, urged on by voters, rebelled against MAGA efforts to intimidate them and refused to redraw their congressional maps to eliminate Democratic-leaning districts.

While Trump "has been able to do extraordinary damage that will have generational

effects, he has not successfully consolidated power,” said Leah Greenberg, a founder of the resistance group Indivisible. “That has been staved off, and it has been staved off not, frankly, due to the efforts of pretty much anyone in elite institutions or political leadership but due to the efforts of regular people declining to go along with fascism.”

In retrospect, it’s possible to see several pivot points. One of the first was a Wisconsin Supreme Court race in April. Elon Musk, then still running rampant at the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, declared the contest critical and poured more than \$20 million into the race. Voters turned out in droves, and the Musk-backed conservative candidate lost by more than 10 points. Humiliated, Musk began to withdraw from electoral politics, at one point breaking with Trump. The tight bond between the world’s richest man and the most powerful one was eroded.

In June, Trump’s military parade, meant as a display of dominance, was a flop, and simultaneous No Kings protests all over the country were huge and energetic. A few months later, Charlie Kirk was assassinated, a tragedy that the administration sought to exploit to silence its opponents. When the late-night comedian Jimmy Kimmel made a distasteful comment on ABC that seemed to blame the right for Kirk’s killing, Disney, the network’s parent company, gave in to pressure to take Kimmel off the air. It was a perilous moment for free speech; suddenly America was becoming the kind of country in which regime critics are forced off television. But then came a wave of cancellations of Disney+ and the Disney-owned Hulu service, as well as a celebrity boycott, and Disney gave Kimmel his show back.

Trump has thoroughly corrupted the Justice Department, but its selective prosecutions of his foes have been thwarted by judges and, more strikingly, by grand juries. Two grand juries refused to indict Letitia James, New York’s attorney general, whom the administration has accused of mortgage fraud, with no credible evidence. After Sean Dunn, a Justice Department paralegal, tossed a sandwich at a Customs and Border Protection officer during a protest in Washington, the administration sent a team of agents in riot gear to arrest him. But grand jurors refused to indict him on a felony charge. Dunn was eventually charged with a misdemeanor, only to be acquitted by a jury. Jeanine Pirro, the former Fox News personality whom Trump made U.S. attorney in Washington, tried three times to secure a federal indictment for assault against a protester who struggled while being pushed against a wall by an immigration agent. Three times, grand juries refused.

Granted, all these grand juries were in liberal jurisdictions, but their rejections of prosecutors’ claims are still striking, since indictments are usually notoriously easy to secure. “I think you’re seeing reinvigorated grand jury processes,” said Ian Bassin, a founder of the legal and advocacy group Protect Democracy. “Nobody actually knows what’s going on in those grand juries, but the outcome of them seems to suggest that

people are actually holding the government's feet to the fire and being unwilling to simply be a rubber stamp.”

Trump ends the year weak and unpopular, his coalition dispirited and riven by infighting. Democrats dominated in the November elections. During Joe Biden's administration, far-right victories in school board races were an early indication of the cultural backlash that would carry Trump to office. Now, however, Democrats are flipping school board seats nationwide.

Much of the credit for the reinvigoration of the resistance belongs to Trump himself. Had he focused his deportation campaign on criminals or refrained from injuring the economy with haphazard tariffs while mocking concerns about affordability, he would probably have remained a more formidable figure. He's still a supremely dangerous one, especially as he comes to feel increasingly cornered and aggrieved. After all, by the time you read this, we could well be at war with Venezuela, though no one in the administration has bothered to articulate a plausible rationale for the escalating conflict.

But it's become, over the past year, easier to imagine the moment when his mystique finally evaporates, when few want to defend him anymore or admit that they ever did. “I think it's going to be a rocky period, but I no longer think that Trump is going to pull an Orbán and fundamentally consolidate authoritarian control of this country the way that it looked like he was going to do in March or April,” said Bassin, referring to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary. If Bassin is right, it will be because a critical mass of Americans refused to be either cowed or complicit.

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