



# TUESDAY NIGHT TRIAGE

## Is Democracy Going to Make It?

1. Emergency Assessment
2. Prognosis
3. Prioritization/Treatment

# Objective Assessment:



We are in the middle of a political revolution: President Donald Trump’s attempt to systematically dismantle the checks on his power, capture the machinery of government, and weaponize it against his enemies. (“Eurasia Group; Top Risks 2026”)

- Erosion of “norms” vs. erosion of “checks”
- Whether Trump’s revolution succeeds or fails, there is no going back to what came before
- Key Question: Will Trump’s revolutionary actions be effectively checked in 2026? (Can we “save” the patient?)

# Signs of a Weakening Patient:



- Global instability –
  - The US itself is unwinding its own global order
  - For other countries, the US has become unpredictable and unreliable:
    - “French President Emmanuel Macron saying the US is ‘breaking free from international rules’ and ‘gradually turning away’ from some of its allies.”
    - “German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier went further, saying America was destroying the world order. ‘Then there is the breakdown of values by our most important partner, the USA, which helped build this world order,’ he said. ‘It is about preventing the world from turning into a den of robbers, where the most unscrupulous take whatever they want, where regions or entire countries are treated as the property of a few great powers.’”  
(Metro.co.uk)

# Signs of a Weakening Patient:



## All the initiatives Trump has pulled the U.S. out of -

- 24/7 Carbon-Free Energy Compact, Colombo Plan Council, Commission for Environmental Cooperation, Education Cannot Wait, European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Forum of European National Highway Research Laboratories, Freedom Online Coalition, Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, Global Counterterrorism Forum, Global Forum on Cyber Expertise, Global Forum on Migration and Development, Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research, Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals, and Sustainable Development, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, International Cotton Advisory Committee, International Development Law Organization, International Energy Forum, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, International Lead and Zinc Study Group, International Renewable Energy Agency, International Solar Alliance, International Tropical Timber Organization, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Pan American Institute of Geography and History, Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation, Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia, Regional Cooperation Council, Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century, Science and Technology Centre in Ukraine, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program, Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, Department of Economic and Social Affairs U.N. Economic and Social Council, or ECOSOC — Economic Commission for Africa, ECOSOC — Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECOSOC — Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, ECOSOC — Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, International Law Commission, International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, International Trade Centre, Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Fund, Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, U.N. Alliance of Civilizations, U.N. Collaborative Program on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries, U.N. Conference on Trade and Development, U.N. Democracy Fund, U.N. Energy, U.N. Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, U.N. Human Settlements Program, U.N. Institute for Training and Research, U.N. Oceans, U.N. Population Fund, U.N. Register of Conventional Arms, U.N. System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, U.N. System Staff College, U.N. Water, U.N. University

**(Yep, 66 of them.)**

# Signs of a Weakening Patient:



- Measured in direct cost of human lives
  - USAID –
    - USAID funding helped save **91 million lives over the past 20 years**—new analysis warns that recent U.S. aid cuts could now put that progress at risk
    - The Trump administration’s decision to shut down USAID has resulted in **hundreds of thousands of deaths** from infectious diseases and malnutrition according to Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health’s Atul Gawande
    - A study co-authored by a UCLA Fielding School of Public Health researcher finds that recent U.S. foreign aid cuts may lead to more than **14 million additional deaths globally by 2030, including more than 4.5 million children under five**

# Signs of a Weakening Patient:



- Direct cost of human lives
  - Venezuelan Boat Strikes –
    - Recent US military strikes in Venezuela targeting alleged drug traffickers, part of "Operation Southern Spear," have resulted in significant casualties (though specific, official casualty figures for all incidents remain complex and debated):
    - Initial Strike (Sept 2025): The first reported airstrike killed all 11 people aboard a Venezuelan boat, confirmed by the US and reported by Venezuelan sources on September 1, 2025.
    - Overall Operations (by Dec 2025): **At least 115 people died in strikes on 36 vessels**, with at least 35 such strikes occurring.

# Signs of a Weakening Patient:



- Direct cost of human lives
  - Maduro “arrest” –
  - **Venezuelan Reports:**
    - **~100 dead:** Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello stated over 100 died, with a similar number injured, though this figure includes military, Cuban personnel, and civilians.
      - **24 Security Officers:** The Venezuelan military reported 24 of its security officers killed.
      - **32 Cubans:** Cuba reported 32 of its military and intelligence personnel killed.
  - **U.S. Assessments:**
    - **75-80 killed:** U.S. officials estimate the total death toll at around 75 to 80, including Venezuelan and Cuban forces.
  - **U.S. Casualties:**
    - **7 injured:** Seven U.S. troops were injured (gunshot and shrapnel), but five have returned to duty.



# Signs of a Weakening Patient:



- Direct cost of human lives
  - ICE Actions –
    - An investigation last year by Business Insider and The Trace found that ICE agents had been involved in 59 shootings between 2015 and 2021, with 23 of those leading to fatalities. Shootings by ICE agents are investigated internally by that agency or the Department of Homeland Security’s inspector general
    - Since Trump announced his immigration crackdown in June 2025, gun violence has followed:
      - 16 incidents in which immigration agents opened fire and another 15 incidents in which agents held someone at gunpoint since the crackdown began
      - **3 people have been shot observing or documenting immigration raids**
      - **5 people have been shot while driving away from traffic stops or evading an enforcement action**
      - **Renee Good was one of 4 people who have been killed. Another seven people have been injured**

# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



## Illustrative Foreign Incident –

- Maduro “Arrest” (it’s not about narco-terrorism)
  - Law enforcement vs. Military action
    - They used to be different from one another
    - How an indictment works
  - Meaning of “precedent” in this context
  - Under U.S. law, it doesn’t matter whether the “arrest” was illegal under International Law (Ker-Frisbie Doctrine)
  - Where’s Congress?
    - Article I powers: Congress can hold the President accountable
    - Congress is essentially giving the President permission

# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



## Illustrative Domestic Incident –

- The killing of Renee Good:
  - Justified?
  - Legitimate?
  - Excessive force?
  - Murder?
  - Manslaughter?
- To start, lets look at:
  - Under what **authority**
  - Comport with **training/guidelines**
  - Is there a **pattern**?

# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



## Authority:

ICE was formed as part of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, creating the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), with ICE as one of its subsidiary agencies, and its authority is mainly codified in Title 8 of the U.S. Code.

To arrest – Its agents have the power to stop, detain and arrest people they suspect of being in the US illegally. They can detain US citizens in limited circumstances, such as if a person interferes with an arrest, assaults an officer, or ICE suspect the person of being in the US illegally.

To use force - Under the US constitution, law enforcement *can only use deadly force if the person poses a serious danger to them or other people*, or the person has committed a violent crime. A DHS policy memo from 2023 states that *federal officers "may use deadly force only when necessary" when they have "a reasonable belief that the subject of such force poses an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury" to themselves or another person.*



# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



## Use of Force **Guidelines:**

DHS guidelines for fleeing subjects says, "**Deadly force shall not be used solely to prevent the escape of a fleeing subject. However, deadly force is authorized to prevent the escape of the fleeing subject where the LEO has a reasonable belief that the subject poses a significant threat of death or serious physical harm to the LEO or others and such force is necessary to prevent escape.**"

“Reasonableness” test: "the reasonableness" of an officer's use of force must be judged "from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight."

The DHS use-of-force policy further states officers "should always avoid intentionally and unreasonably placing themselves in positions in which they have no alternative to using deadly force."



# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



Inquiry: Why did Agent Ross draw and fire his weapon?

- Was it solely to prevent Good’s escape?
  - If so, it’s outside the DHS guidelines:
    - The DHS Use of Force policy discourages officers from shooting at moving vehicles, reminding officers to “take into consideration the hazards that may be posed...by an out-of-control conveyance.”
- Was it self-defense, or defense of others?
  - If so, was it “reasonable” from Ross’ perspective that Good posed a significant threat of death or serious physical harm to –
    - himself?
    - others?

# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



To answer those questions you look at the totality of the circumstances:

- Where the officer was standing in relation to the vehicle not just at the time he began shooting, but at the time every shot was fired?
- When did he draw his weapon?
- If the officer *was* in front of the vehicle, that raises another question: why?
  - For decades, per the IACP Model Policy on Motor Vehicle Stops, officers have been trained to *avoid putting themselves into a vehicle's path of travel*.
  - A 2014 “Use of force” internal review found that Border Patrol agents intentionally and unnecessarily stepped in front of moving cars to justify using deadly force against vehicle occupants.
- Did the other officers react the same way?

# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



## Pattern:

- The Minneapolis shooting is not the first time an individual has been injured by gunfire during an immigration enforcement operation.
- There were two incidents in Los Angeles in October in which agents shot at drivers, the Los Angeles Times reported. DHS said in both instances that the drivers had threatened the officers with their vehicles.
- Border Patrol agents have intentionally and unnecessarily stepped in front of moving cars to justify using deadly force against vehicle occupants.
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) specifically: A data compilation by the nonprofit newsroom The Trace linked federal immigration agents to 14 shootings as of January 2026 under the current Trump administration, resulting in four deaths and five injuries. In some cases, body-camera footage has reportedly contradicted official accounts that officers were in danger.

# Specific Examples of “Organ Failure”



On the question of determining “reasonableness” it is fair to look for evidence of what is going on in the mind of the shooter –

- For example, Minnesota’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Degree Manslaughter statute criminalizes causing death “by...culpable negligence whereby the person creates an unreasonable risk, and consciously takes chances of causing death or great bodily harm to another” and may require assessing the agent’s history:
  - Recent reporting suggests Ross was previously dragged by a vehicle (per Vice President JD Vance the agent was “a little sensitive about being rammed by an automobile.”)
  - But, recent reporting also suggests Ross “is a hardcore MAGA supporter”; that “until recently Ross had been flying pro-Trump flags and a ‘Don’t Tread on Me’ Gadsen flag, an emblem of the MAGA movement” in his yard; and was a Christian conservative and apparent Proud Boys supporter, according to his family.
  - And, there’s the post-shoot comment...

# Prognosis



- Trump and MAGA view Project 2025 not as an assault on democracy but as its restoration - a necessary purge of a political system captured by a deeply corrupt establishment that had already weaponized government against them.
- The Trump administration has moved to politicize the state accordingly:
  - Career civil servants were purged for political rather than performance-related reasons
  - Inspectors general, ethics watchdogs, and independent agency leaders were sacked
  - The Justice Department and the FBI have become fully political arms of the White House
  - Media companies, law firms, and universities faced investigations, lawsuits, and threats designed to force compliance

# Prognosis



- Checks have been weaker than expected. Congress largely went along with the administration's policies
- The Democratic Party, divided and leaderless, struggled to mount effective resistance
- Most would-be Republican dissenters were cowed by the threat of primary challenges and political exile
- The corporate media, fearful of retaliation, self-censored and softened its coverage, normalizing behaviors that would have seemed outrageous in 2017
- Large media and tech firms chose to pay Trump millions to settle winnable lawsuits rather than face retaliation
- And the Supreme Court, one of the most effective and powerful checks on executive power, has further empowered rather than restrain Trump



# Prioritization of Treatments



What can we do?



# Prioritization of Treatments



Individuals can defend democracy by actively participating in elections (voting, poll working), engaging with officials (contacting them, attending meetings), combating misinformation (healthy info diet, speaking out), strengthening local communities (grassroots groups, conversations), and supporting related organizations (donating, volunteering) to protect voting rights and civic norms.



# Prioritization of Treatments



- **Participate in Elections & Governance**
  - **Vote**: Vote in every election, including local ones, and encourage others to do the same.
  - **Volunteer as a poll worker**: Help ensure elections run smoothly and fairly.
  - **Contact Officials**: Reach out to your representatives about issues within their jurisdiction.
  - **Attend Meetings**: Go to local government meetings to stay informed and speak up.

# Prioritization of Treatments



- **Strengthen Information & Discourse**
  - **Combat Misinformation**: Cultivate a healthy information diet and be aware of disinformation.
  - **Speak Up**: Write letters to the editor, use social media, and have conversations across political divides.
  - **Build Community**: Strengthen local connections and engage in discussions about important issues.

# Prioritization of Treatments



- **Support Democratic Institutions & Norms**
  - **Join Grassroots Groups**: Band together with others through organizations like the League of Women Voters or Indivisible...or the PDC!
  - **Support Legal & Advocacy Groups**: Donate to or volunteer with organizations like the ACLU that protect rights.
  - **Learn About Key Issues**: Understand topics like redistricting and voting laws in your state.

# Prioritization of Treatments



- **Take Direct Action**

- **Organize & Protest**: Participate in peaceful demonstrations to show visible support for democratic principles.
- **Support Election Officials**: Help build trust in the electoral process through communication and vigilance.
- **Be Courageous**: Stand up for democratic values and don't give in to bullying or intimidation.

# Conclusion



- Honestly, it's not likely the patient will fully recover in our lifetimes, but it is still alive.
- The extent and speed of the patient's recovery will depend on how much more damage will be done to it, and how much of the spread of disease can be stemmed, and ultimately stopped before it expires.
- Oddly, the most likely “ultimately effective treatment” will be the petulant impulsiveness of Trump. However, where that will lead is uncertain at this point.
- Our job is to keep the patient alive and limit the damage until then.