

# The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher

DEAN BAQUET, Executive Editor  
JOSEPH KAHN, Managing Editor  
TOM BODKIN, Creative Director  
SUZANNE DALEY, Associate EditorJAMES BENNET, Editorial Page Editor  
JAMES DAO, Deputy Editorial Page Editor  
KATHLEEN KINGSBURY, Deputy Editorial Page EditorMARK THOMPSON, Chief Executive Officer  
STEPHEN DUNBAR-JOHNSON, President, International  
JEAN-CHRISTOPHE DEMARTA, Senior VP, Global Advertising  
ACHILLES TSALTAS, VP, International Conferences  
CHARLOTTE GORDON, VP, International Consumer Marketing  
HELEN KONSTANTOPOULOS, VP, International Circulation  
HELENA PHUA, Executive VP, Asia-Pacific  
SUZANNE YVERNÈS, International Chief Financial Officer

## PROTECT DEMOCRACY BY PRACTICING IT

Democracy is not self-activating. It depends on citizens getting involved and making themselves heard.

“Donald Trump winning the presidency — I feel kind of responsible for that,” said Ashenafi Hagezom, a 27-year-old from Las Vegas who hasn’t voted in any election since becoming eligible nine years ago. Not in 2012, when young and minority voters — Mr. Hagezom’s parents are Ethiopian immigrants — showed up in record numbers to re-elect President Barack Obama. Not in 2014, when not so many showed up, and Republicans took back the Senate. And not in 2016, when Mr. Trump won the White House on a platform of white grievance and anti-immigrant spite.

That last one still stings, and it inspired Mr. Hagezom to participate in this year’s midterms. “I think I may have been registered before,” he said. “Honestly, I’m not too sure. But this is my first time actually paying attention, knowing the candidates. Doing my job as a citizen.”

With Election Day around the corner, Mr. Hagezom’s transformation — from nonvoter to voter — serves as a useful lesson about the dangers of political disengagement in America, where voter turnout consistently ranks near the bottom of turnout in modern democracies.

Early voting data from Nevada to Texas to North Carolina to Maine show that Americans are voting at unusually high rates for a midterm election. But those rates are still far below what they ought to be.

The obstacles to voting are real. The worst are those put in place by Republican legislators and officials to depress or neutralize turnout by minorities and other Democratic-leaning groups. Strict registration laws, bogus voter-fraud prosecutions, aggressive purges of the rolls, polling place closures and the like echo the poll taxes and literacy tests of earlier generations.

Many other voters discover that, through the dark art of gerrymandering, they aren’t picking their politicians so much as they are being picked by them. Other voters are thwarted not by malice but by incompetence — poorly run polling places, bureaucratic snafus, confusing ballots and more.

In Kansas, officials moved the only polling place in Dodge City, which has a Latino majority, outside city limits and far from public transportation. And in Georgia, where the Democratic nominee for governor is an African-American woman, the Republican nominee, Brian Kemp, who is currently secretary of state, suspended the registrations of 53,000 citizens — the overwhelming majority of them African-American — for discrepancies between registration and government identification information. Many of the discrepancies are minor, like a dropped hyphen or an obvious typographical error.

Finally, there are the millions of eligible voters who are their own worst enemies. They may be unhappy with the choices before them or unconvinced that their votes will make a difference. Either way, they sit out Election Day.

Whether or not the cynics believe it, every vote really can make a difference. An election in 2017 for a legislative seat in Newport News, Va. — a seat that happened to determine control of the state’s House of Delegates — was effectively decided by a single vote, out of more than 23,000 cast.

Still think voting doesn’t matter?

This message is especially important for young people like Mr. Hagezom, who lean strongly Democratic and yet are notoriously bad about showing up to the polls. In 2014, the turnout rate for voters under age 30 was less than 20 percent. This year’s numbers, so far, are looking much better, and they will very likely remain high in 2020, when President Trump will be on the ballot. But beyond that, the struggle to keep young voters politically engaged will continue.

No matter who wins, higher turnout is a good thing. It reaffirms the essence of the democratic process, and it tends to help candidates who are both more reasonable and more representative of the public at large.

It’s also true that when more people vote, the electorate becomes more liberal. If Americans voted in proportion to their actual numbers, a majority would most likely support a vision for the country far different from that of Mr. Trump and the Republicans in Congress. This includes broader access to health care, higher taxes on the wealthy, more aggressive action against climate change and more racial equality in the criminal justice system.

Republicans are aware of this, which is why the party has gone to such lengths to drive down turnout among Democratic-leaning groups. A recent example: In North Dakota, the Republican-led Legislature changed the law to make it harder for Native Americans to cast a ballot.

It comes down to this: Democracy isn’t self-activating. It depends on citizens getting involved and making themselves heard. So if you are an American and haven’t yet cast a ballot, get out and do it on Tuesday, or earlier if your state allows early voting. Help your family, friends and neighbors do the same. Help a stranger. Vote as if the future of the country depends on it. Because it does.

# The news is bad in Hungary

Pamela Druckerman  
Contributing Writer

**BUDAPEST** If you’re wondering what attacks on the news media around the world mean for the future of democracy, it’s worth a trip to Budapest. Consider it a cautionary-tale vacation.

When I visited Hungary recently, I knew I was entering a waning democracy that’s become increasingly authoritarian. I knew that Prime Minister Viktor Orban won a third term in April by convincing voters that a phantasmic combination of Muslim migrants, the Hungarian-born billionaire George Soros and European Union bureaucrats was coming to get them.

But I only understood how Mr. Orban pulled this off when I spoke to Hungarian journalists. They explained that Mr. Orban first criticized the press for being biased against him. Then he and his allies took over most of it, and switched to running stories that promote Mr. Orban’s populist agenda and his party, Fidesz.

This happened fast. The investigative website Atlatzso estimates that more than 500 Hungarian media titles are now controlled by Mr. Orban and his friends; in 2015, only 23 of them were. Loyalty trumps experience: Hungary’s biggest media mogul is a former pipe fitter from Mr. Orban’s hometown.

In some cases, Orban allies bought publications and shut them down. One morning in 2016, journalists at Nepszabadsag, one of Hungary’s biggest dailies, were simply locked out of their offices. Its new owner, an Austrian businessman, claimed financial prob-

lems; the paper had just run a series of articles exposing government corruption. Other news organizations were bought and transformed from within. Some now reportedly take their talking points directly from the government.

Recent headlines at Origo — once a respected online news site — were a numbing assortment of articles about migrants wreaking havoc on various European cities and conspiracies about Mr. Soros.

Headlines were strikingly similar on the website of Lokai, co-founded in 2015 by one of Mr. Orban’s top advisers. Its free print version, handed out at train and bus stations, is now Hungary’s highest-circulation newspaper.

There’s still independent news online, but most Hungarians don’t see it. And when one of these websites exposes corruption, Orban-friendly publications align to attack it.

“This is what the government would like to teach society — that there are no reliable sources at all among those who criticize the government,” explained Attila Batorfi, who tracks the Hungarian media for Atlatzso.

Hungary was especially vulnerable to this kind of takeover. The country became a democracy only in 1989. And government advertising for everything from the national lottery to the state opera is still a key source of revenue for media companies, and has long been doled out to friends.

Still, journalists I met in Budapest were struck by how quickly the press had changed, and that all it took to break

this pillar of democracy was a combination of money and fear. “It’s not Russia,” Csaba Lukacs told me. “No one thinks that someone will be shot. Everyone thinks that he will lose his job. It’s enough.”

Mr. Lukacs was a senior reporter at Magyar Nemzet, an 80-year-old daily newspaper that closed in April. (Its government advertising evaporated after its owner broke with Mr. Orban.)

In May, Mr. Lukacs and two dozen former colleagues started a weekly called Magyar Hang (Hungarian Voice), which operates out of a one-room Budapest storefront. Most of its issues have no advertisements, because companies fear drawing the government’s ire by association, Mr. Lukacs said. The paper is printed across the border in Slovakia, because no Hungarian printer would do it. “One of the biggest problems is that people are afraid to be subscribers,” he added. Its journalists worked unpaid for the first two months. Now they sell enough copies — just under 10,000 per week, mostly at newsstands — to pay themselves the minimum wage.

Magyar Hang is a conservative, center-right newspaper — no more radical than The Wall Street Journal. Some of its writers, including Mr. Lukacs, used to support Fidesz. But because they’re willing to criticize the ruling party and report on official malfeasance, the government hasn’t credited its reporters, so they can’t attend its news conferences and question officials there, Mr. Lukacs said. And no state entity responds to their calls.

“If we ask someone from the governmental hospital, ‘How many cases of infections?’ they will not answer us,” he said. “For Fidesz, it’s not enough to be

loyal, you have to be servile. You have to follow their instructions without questions, without any doubt.”

The news media isn’t Mr. Orban’s only victim. On Oct. 25, Central European University, co-founded by Mr. Soros, announced that, barring a last-minute deal, it will move its main operations from Budapest to Vienna, because of the government’s attacks.

But the media is a special target for autocracies and waning democracies everywhere. Brazil’s president-elect, Jair Bolsonaro, has threatened to pull state advertising from Folha de São Paulo. The Brazilian newspaper ran an exposé describing how supporters of Mr. Bolsonaro financed a WhatsApp misinformation campaign to help him win. Donald Trump regularly claims that articles critical of him are simply made up, and calls journalists the “enemy of the people.” And Saudi Arabia’s government apparently masterminded the murder of its critic Jamal Khashoggi, a columnist for The Washington Post.

Hungary shows that under the right circumstances, attacks on the press can keep getting worse. And voters might respond by just tuning everything out. A Pew survey this year that looked at 10 European countries found that Hungarians were least likely to closely follow local and national news.

Near the end of my trip I spoke with Gyorgy Zsombor, the editor in chief of Magyar Hang. “We couldn’t imagine 10 years ago that it would happen in Hungary,” he told me. “We thought democracy was stronger.”

PAMELA DRUCKERMAN lives in Paris and is the author of “There Are No Grown-Ups: A Midlife Coming-of-Age Story.”



Protesters demanding a free press at a rally in Budapest in April.

## Why aren’t Democrats walking away with the midterms?



Bret Stephens

The night Donald Trump was elected was supposed to be, for most liberals and a few conservatives, the beginning of the end of the world. The economy would surely implode. The U.S. would probably blunder into a catastrophic war. The new American president would be blackmailed into conducting foreign policy as Putin’s poodle.

None of that has happened — not yet, at any rate. On Friday, The Wall Street Journal reported the fastest rate of annual wage hikes in almost a decade, depriving Democrats of one of their few strong arguments about the true state of the economy. Unemployment is at its lowest rate since Vince Lombardi coached his last game in December 1969. The North American Free Trade Agreement has been saved with minor modifications and a new name.

Oh, and: The Islamic State is largely defeated. Tehran has not restarted its nuclear programs despite America’s withdrawal from the Iran deal. U.S.

sanctions on Russia are still in place. Democrats badly damaged their chances of taking the Senate with their over-reaching and polarizing crusade to stop Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation to the Supreme Court. What more could Trump ask for?

In normal presidencies, good news, along with your opponents’ mistakes, is good politics. It’s your Topic A. In normal presidencies, the politics of cultural anxiety, social division or ethnic scare-mongering — that is, of proposing the end of birthright citizenship and demonizing elite media and militarizing the U.S. border — is Plan B. It’s what you turn to first when you don’t have enough to say for yourself otherwise.

But that’s not how the Trump presidency rolls.

In this campaign, fear is what’s on the Republican menu.

Peace and prosperity? Mere side dishes.

The mystery of Donald Trump is what impels him to overturn the usual rules. Is it a dark sort of cunning or simple defects of character? Because the president’s critics tend to be educated and educated people tend to think that the only kind of smarts worth having is the kind they possess — superior powers of articulation combined with deep stores of knowledge — those critics generally assume the latter. He’s a bigot. He’s a con artist. His followers are dumb. They got lucky last time. They won’t be so lucky again.

Maybe this is even right. But as Trump’s presidency moves forward, it’s no longer smart to think it’s right. There’s more than one type of intelligence. Trump’s is feral. It strikes fast. It knows where to sink the fang into the vein.

This has been Trump’s consistent strength from the moment he entered the Republican race until the second he got wind of the migrant caravan. Yes, his administration doesn’t even have an ambassador in Honduras, and if the U.S. has any kind of coherent Central American policy it would be news to me. Also, the idea of deploying thousands of U.S. troops to repel and even fire on the caravan is repellent, fascistic and probably unlawful.

Still, several thousand people are pushing their way to the U.S. border with the idea that they will find a way to push their way through it. If they do, tens or even hundreds of thousands more will surely follow. It’s perfectly reasonable for fair-minded voters to wonder how the U.S. will vet and then absorb even a fraction of them (though I think we easily can), and what doing so will mean for our wider immigration system.

To which the Democratic response is — what, exactly? If it’s “compassion,” it’s a non-answer.

It’s to abolish ICE, it’s a dereliction of responsibility for governance. If it’s to open the border, it is an honest form of political suicide. If it’s more trade and foreign aid for Central America, that’s a solution for the too-long term.

The truth is that there is no easy fix to the challenge of the caravan, which is why Trump was so clever to make the issue his own and Democrats have been so remiss in letting him have it. The secret of Trump’s politics is to mix fear and confidence — the threat of disaster and the promise of protection — like salt and sugar, simultaneously stimulating and satisfying an insatiable appetite. It’s how all demagogues work.

I have written previously that the real threat of the Trump presidency isn’t economic or political catastrophe. It’s moral and institutional corrosion — the debasement of our discourse and the fracturing of our civic bonds. Democrats should be walking away with the midterms. That they are not is because they have consistently underestimated the president’s political gifts, while missing the deeper threat his presidency represents.

There’s a lesson here worth heeding. Our economic GDP may be booming, but our moral GDP is in recession. The tragedy of Pittsburgh illustrates, among other things, that the president cannot unite us, even in our grief.

Whatever happens on Tuesday, Democrats will only win in 2020 if they find a candidate who can.