

Gaslit Nation, Episode 007 Transcript

Kavanaugh Catastrophe and the Death of Checks and Balances

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[Female protesters [confronting Jeff Flake in Senate elevator](#)]

That's what you're telling all women in America, that they don't matter, they should just keep it to themselves, because if they have told the truth, you're just going to help that man to power, anyway. That's what you're telling all of these women, that's what you're telling me right now. Look at me when I'm talking to you, you're telling me that my assault doesn't matter.

That what happened to me doesn't matter, and that you're going to let people who do these things into power. That's what you're telling me when you vote for him. Don't look away from me, look at me and tell me that it doesn't matter what happened to me. That you'll let people like that go into the highest court of the land, and will tell everyone what they can do to their bodies.

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Sarah Kendzior: Hi, I'm Sarah Kendzior, I'm a journalist and scholar of authoritarian states, with a focus on the former Soviet Union.

Andrea Chalupa: I'm Andrea Chalupa, writer, filmmaker, and activist. And we're going to do this entire episode snarling like Brett Kavanaugh.

Sarah Kendzior: Yes, we're going to scream incoherently and rant, and talk about beer, and vow our revenge. And men will just line up to praise us, and to defend us, and it'll be like the political authoritarian version of Beyonce's, *If I Were A Boy*. But, yeah, not so much.

Yeah, so, welcome to this very special episode of Gaslit Nation, which is going to concern the [Kavanaugh hearings](#), and all of the horrible interrelated things. If you're new to *Gaslit Nation*, we're a podcast that covers corruption in the Trump administration, as well as rising authoritarianism throughout the US. This is a big week for that. This episode is basically our "Death of Checks and Balances" episode, part of a continuing theme.

We started this show because one of our main concerns throughout 2016, was that the election of Trump would ultimately lead to America becoming an authoritarian state. This concern of ours was dismissed as alarmist, at the time, despite evidence ranging from the obvious lessons of history, with Trump mirroring demagogues, both in the US and abroad, to the transnational alliance of dictators, and oligarchs, and white supremacists backing Trump, and using new technology to rig elections around the world. To the growing extremism and lawlessness of the Republican Party, a party which now overtly seeks one party rule. Which is perhaps best exemplified before the election, by the refusal to hold hearings for Supreme Court nominee, [Merrick Garland](#). And to the already weakened conditions of America's political and economic institutions, which left the country ripe for a hostile takeover.

Since Trump was elected, Andrea and I have been asked, over and over, how we know whether America has become an authoritarian state, or how close it is to becoming one. Well, obviously, we're not an authoritarian state, or we wouldn't be able to have this conversation on a podcast. But progress towards authoritarianism can be difficult to quantify, since there are so many variables. But the main thing you need to do, in this case, is look at checks and balances. So, let's review that.

We have the Executive Branch, which is, of course, dominated by Trump and his lackeys. We have the Legislature, which should act as a check on Trump, but is dominated by a corrupt and lawless GOP, effectively neutering Democratic opposition. We have the Judiciary, which has been the strongest bulwark against unconstitutional policies. You may remember a number of Executive Orders struck down as unconstitutional during Trump's first year, but this is now changing. Trump is packing the courts with [unqualified, ultra-conservative judges given lifetime appointments](#). The most powerful of these appointments is, of course, the Supreme Court, and that's one of the reasons we're spending most of the show talking about Brett Kavanaugh.

Other checks on executive power and abuse of executive power include the media, which, like the judiciary, is now failing in its obligation to act as a check on power, and inform the people of the United States of corruption. Unlike the judicial system, however, this betrayal seems voluntary. And later in the show, we're going to go into some, I would say unprecedented abuses of power within mainstream publications. In particular, the New York Times, acting as a propaganda arm of the White House. I don't know another way to put it. And then, finally, you have the check, or the purported check of the intelligence services and agencies that handle matters of criminal justice, like the FBI, which are particularly important, given Trump's own criminal acts, and his associations with organized crime.

We know that the FBI seemed somewhat compromised before the election, I would regard this as more an internal division than some sweeping force. We remember the bizarre behavior of Comey, we know of Trump in Giuliani's alleged sway over the New York FBI. Trump has threatened FBI officials, and threatened to weaponize FBI documents, while Christopher Ray and other top FBI officials have said nothing and let it happen. This is both bad on its own, and a fairly dire indicator for the Mueller probe, its ability to continue, and its effectiveness.

And so, what are we left with? Well, we're left with ourselves. Citizens are now the greatest check on the Trump administration, and the fate of the country, to a large extent, will be determined by the midterm elections. So, we'll be discussing the ramifications of that, as well. But, to sum it up, this has been a historic week. It's been a historic *hellish* week, particularly for women, but also for democracy itself, that may well be remembered, in hindsight, as a definitive moment in the death of American democracy.

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Sen. Patrick Leahy: What is the strongest memory you have? The strongest memory of the incident, something that you cannot forget. Take whatever time you need.

Christine Blasey Ford: Indelible, in the hippocampus, is the laughter. The uproarious laughter between the two, and they're having fun at my expense.

Sen. Patrick Leahy: You've never forgotten that laughter? You never forgotten them laughing at you?

Christine Blasey Ford: They were laughing with each other.

Sen. Patrick Leahy: And you were the object of the laughter?

Christine Blasey Ford: Yeah, I was underneath one of them while the two laughed. Two friends having a really good time with one another.

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Sarah Kendzior: So, Andrea, how are you doing?

Andrea Chalupa: I'm doing great. [Laughs]

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, doing good?

Andrea Chalupa: No, not at all. And so, basically, Sarah and I have been on the phone, for the last two hours or so, just coming up with every single delay or excuse to push back recording the podcast.

Because this one is just, we're taking one for the team on this one. It's just, all of us have known Brett Kavanaugh's, growing up in the workplace, and it's just, this is not ...

No one should be subjected to a Brett Kavanaugh on the Supreme Court. It's just, you want to know something hilarious? Do you remember when people, so called credible experts, kept saying that the GOP Congress will hold Trump ... they'll check Trump, do you remember that?

Sarah Kendzior: Oh, yeah.

Andrea Chalupa: It was- [Laughs]

Sarah Kendzior: I'm sorry, this is the laughter of rage. The laughter that I-

Andrea Chalupa: I have it in writing, from some experts who were like, "Oh, don't worry, the Congress is going to hold them in check." Yeah.

Sarah Kendzior: It's up there at 'the presidential pivot', 'checks and balances', 'he'll grow into the role'. And even over the last couple weeks, there have been the same legal experts that emerge from the same D.C. culture, which *is* a swamp. That's the one thing that Trump has

correct, however, he's the ultimate swamp creature. But they were insisting Kavanaugh will probably withdraw, or this can't go forward, or the GOP will check him, or the FBI will do its job.

Sarah Kendzior: I've always said there's a difference between expecting autocracy and accepting it, and I still hold true to that. That we should not accept it. But I think that these expectations of institutional norms, and of people competently and honorably doing their job, trust has to be earned. I don't see any reason to bestow certain entities in our political body with our trust, in particular, obviously, the GOP.

So, yeah, this is a tough show for us to do. It's one thing to talk about authoritarianism, although we both have personal experiences with that, but rape culture is another thing, it's a tougher call. And I think, also, maybe you can comment on this more Andrea, but the misogyny of the moment, the fact that the questioning of Ford's credibility, of the other accusers' credibility, there's the implication of a blanket questioning of credibility for all women, where we are on the defensive, despite having done nothing wrong.

And to have our words just innately doubted because of our gender. This is something that's always been true, but it feels particularly sharp now. It feels sharp like a razor blade getting pushed into your heart. It's sharp like Occam's razor slitting your throat, I don't know, you may have some commentary on that.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, I went to the driving range this weekend, and I hit 129 golf balls, with the driver, and I just slammed into that thing, [laughs] over and over and over again.

I did it all over Lindsey Graham. [Laughter] Actually, when I was thinking about Ivanka Trump, that's when my ball actually went the farthest. I mean, remember Ivanka Trump, the moderating daughter who is an official advisor to the president of United States, and she's absolutely complicit in all of this. It's so funny, because I put that on Twitter, that I raged at Chelsea Piers - at the driving range, and I tagged Lindsey Graham in that - and Chelsea Piers retweeted it. I don't know if they realized, but they picked up on it, but thank you for doing that.

What makes the show so hard for us, and what makes just reporting in the Trump age incredibly difficult, especially for survivors is, as women, Sarah and I, we don't like to be the token woman on the foreign policy panel. As a filmmaker, no woman wants to be in the category of like, "Oh, and here are the Academy Awards for the best film directed by a woman." Women don't like to be ghettoized. We all grow up admiring pretty much the same filmmakers, the same films. Just, we all grow up, as journalists, reading and idolizing some of the great writers, journalists of our time. And so, we don't like to be stuffed into a certain category just because of our gender, and having that limited role.

For our podcast, for instance, I mean, yes, we launched it with DAME Magazine, and we appreciate all their support there. And we did it because we knew those women would take us seriously, from the get-go, and they did. It was just easy to do, through them. But, ultimately, this is not a show about two women, it's a show about geopolitics, it's a show about democracy in America. We almost called the podcast, *Democracy in America*.

And so, what's really hard is that when you have a rapist in the White House ... remember Ivana Trump said, when they were married, Trump raped her. When you have a rapist who is accused by dozens of women for alleged sexual assault, you're forced to put your gender there, front and center, and you're forced to pull from your own expertise of being essentially treated like a second class citizen in America, of being essentially invisible. Which is largely why a lot of our warnings on Trump and Russia, very early on, weren't taken seriously.

It's just this being forced just to relive what was done to you. Your experience, your own Kavanaugh, in your closet, and having to take *him* out and face *him* by doing a show like this, by talking about it openly. What's really chilling is that, I think people think that we're being extreme, or, I don't know, playing the gender card, or this is all politicized. But the reality is, the reaction I'm seeing from a lot of white males of privilege, that's extreme. The paranoia that I'm hearing from people that I know, even, that, "Oh, well, what if they come after me one day, for something some woman imagines I did to her, 10, 20 years ago?"

This isn't a witch hunt, by any means. Brett Kavanaugh is an *extreme case*, he tried to rape a woman. He's accused of gang rape, there's multiple witnesses, that he shoved his penis in a woman's face at a party. And this is a pattern of abusive behavior, and somebody like this, who just absolutely broke down, foaming at the mouth, screaming about a wide ranging conspiracy against him, driven by the Clintons, this is somebody that is like a ... He belongs on Fox News, he doesn't belong on the Supreme Court. He's just so extreme and polarizing.

And that stupid speech that Trump gave on election night, another said that, "Oh, wow, he's going to unify the country, that was the most presidential speech. He's going to be such a unifying force." This is as low as you could get, as a Supreme Court pick, and Trump is very much doing it, treating Brett Kavanaugh as his own human shield. By having a rapist on the Supreme Court, that normalizes Trump's own history of sexual assault. By having somebody that lacks such morals, you know that Kavanaugh is going to be protecting Trump and his family, should a major decision in the Trump-Russia investigation go to Supreme Court.

So, this is all about Trump putting Trump before country. And this is all about the Republican Congress, for whatever reason, putting Trump before country. It's not even their own party, the Republicans have shown they don't care about their party. They're letting it die, they're letting it be held hostage, by this total narcissist. I just can't think of a lower moment that we've had in recent US history than this.

For any male out there, especially a white male, privileged, listening and thinking, "Well, I think some of this Me Too movement has gone too far, where does it end? Can I hug a woman, now, at work?" Or, et cetera. We just simply, we just don't want somebody as disgraceful, and with a history of clear abuse of power on the Supreme Court. It's a very simple basic demand, there's nothing extreme about it.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, absolutely. It is frustrating to hear those criticisms, because, like you said, Kavanaugh is an extreme case. There's a difference between making a sexist remark, or a

crude gesture. Trying to rape someone, dragging someone into a bedroom and blaring music, and locking the door, and laughing about it as that person flees. I would say the vast majority of men have *not* done that, and other women are not accusing men of doing that. So, it's *concerning* to me that so many are reacting as if they are in his shoes, as if they can be Kavanaugh and relate to him.

There are a lot of things that he's been accused of, but the hearing was about Christine Ford. I don't think that there's been anybody who has come forth and said that she's not a credible person, and that she's not a credible witness. There was one little attempt, again, by the New York Times, who during the hearing tried to have a Twitter poll, of whether people found her credible, and everyone was so revolted by that, that they had to remove it.

Andrea Chalupa: That was so bizarre.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa: That was really weird. Like James Bennet's opinion section in The New York Times never misses an opportunity to embarrass itself. It just-

Sarah Kendzior: - and an opportunity for just such extreme callousness. You know, the last show, we were talking about their use of the phrase "peaceful ethnic cleansing". It is such cruelty, it's so callous, it's so irresponsible. But at the same time, I mean, people found her to be credible. And what the issue that's happening here, is that even those who do believe her, and who do find her credible, they don't care. They just don't care. It's worth it to push this monster through, anyway.

The part of her testimony which I can't get out of my mind is when she talked about how when Kavanaugh and his friend, Mark Judge, were attempting to rape her, the uproarious laughter between the two, because that's the kind of political culture that we're dealing with. Is a culture of people who find this funny, it's such venality, it's so spiteful, it's so ... I don't know, I'm having trouble talking about it.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, it's the 'locker room talk', in the most prestigious spaces in our country, like the Supreme Court. I do think, if there's anything that ... and I will repeat this over and over again, I think one of the most important things to come out of all of this, this shared trauma we're forced to undergo, yet again, as a nation under Trump, is the importance of educating people about the long-term impact of sexual assault. And that's really what is very much also at the center of this, is educating people about that. Because one of the stupid ignorant criticisms I've heard is, "But why would she come forward all these years later?" And that's because it never goes away, it's something you live with.

I want to read from the Globe and Mail, Zosia Bielski, she wrote a piece about this enduring effect of sexual assault. And it goes, "*The immense personal costs are hinted at in the pivotal New York magazine profile, of Noreen Malone and Amanda Demme, of 35 women who allege comedian Bill Cosby drugged and sexually assaulted them over four decades. The women*

spoke of pained self-recrimination, shattered self-esteem, an inability to form real relationships with partners, depression and substance abuse. One woman described the after-effects as a "secret tumor".

Trauma for victims of sexual assault is individual and unpredictable, the symptoms appearing in pulses over the years. Directly after an attack, there is often shock and visceral fear. Particularly when a victim knows the rapist, there can be guilt and self-doubt. Another layer to contend with is the physical trauma, which can include injuries, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy.

The emotional damage can take a longer time to emerge and can include anxiety, long-term insomnia, a sense of alienation and thoughts of suicide. While some women get hyper-vigilant, others start taking risks. Especially if women experience victim-blaming, the assault can leave them feeling worthless and turning to harmful coping strategies.

A 2015 meta-analysis found that trauma causes neural changes and has a measurable and enduring effect on brain function, including regions involved in emotional regulation. For victims of sexual violence, trauma can live in the body as a chronic condition."

So, Dr. Ford was a child, she was in high school when this happened. The human brain doesn't stop ... really, the rational part of a person's brain doesn't fully develop until the age of 25. This was done to her when she was still a child. And so, of course, she's going to have a vivid memory of some moments of this trauma. Experts on sexual assault, neuroscientists have confirmed to outlets, like The LA Times had a great piece on this, [interviewing various experts who examined her testimony](#). That this is all normal, everything she's ... She checks all the boxes of a trauma survivor.

When you commit sexual assault, when you objectify somebody, just like a rush of pleasure, a rush of power, whatever release of anger, whatever demented reason there is for doing something like that, which will shatter a person's inner sense of self and agency, it's like that ... you're marking them for life. That's, really, the conversation that parents should be having with their children, both boys and girls, just so they understand that this is very serious, "If this should happen to you, or you should do this to someone, you should ... And if it should happen to you, absolutely have no shame and immediately seek *help*."

Because studies have also pointed to the fact that when a victim does come forward and seek help, however he or she is received by that first person can really deepen the damage. That first critical moment of reaching out is insanely, is absolutely critical. I think what we need further, to come out of this, is increased education.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah. No, absolutely. And I'm glad you brought all that up. This is hard to talk about. It's probably-

Andrea Chalupa: This is tough. This is *hell*. Sarah and I are in hell right now. This is a hell episode.

Sarah Kendzior: And honestly-

Andrea Chalupa: [Laughter] We thought we were going to do a Halloween themed episode, but this is it. It's early. Halloween's early this year.

Sarah Kendzior: And probably, it feels like I shouldn't let people hear me sound like this. Because people, they're not accustomed to it. Even people I know aren't used to hearing me sound like this, because there's the obligation to be strong, and be persistent, and all of those things.

Andrea Chalupa: You should start losing your shit like Kavanaugh-

Sarah Kendzior: I should, yeah, that's the thing. [Laughs]

Andrea Chalupa: ...you start foaming at the mouth, like you're gargling beer. [Laughter]

Sarah Kendzior: I should-

Andrea Chalupa: Just spit beer at the microphone.

Sarah Kendzior: I mean, I feel like people need to know ... I don't know, they need to know a lot of things, most of which you just specified when you were reading that quote. But I think people do need to know that it does change you forever. That what women, or anyone, men too, who are sexually assaulted, are left with is only the prospect of going forward. You lose a part of yourself when that happens, and it's gone. You become a different person. And so, all you can do is try to move on with your life, and as Andrea mentioned, you often don't fully understand it for years, because you're actively suppressing that memory.

One of the things that was so shattering about watching Ford's testimony, and also reading articles about her, is that she tried so hard to move, in every sense.

Physically, and in terms of her, I don't know, self-identification, and everything in her life, to move away from this horror, and this trauma. She moved across the country, she reinvented herself. This is a typical thing, and then she is forced back into that place. She's forced back into that bedroom, and then has to relive that trauma on a national stage. There is absolutely no woman who would want to go through the hell of what she's going through right now.

There's no one who would want to go through that on a private level, but to have to do it publicly, and to have to be subject to this inquisition, to this unrelenting hostility, and to the sense that you're nothing as a human being, you're nothing more than an obstacle for a privileged entitled man to get what he wants, you know? And he tried to get what he wanted, 35 years ago, and now he's still going. And there's been no repercussions, and there's been no justice. Now, he will become the arbiter of justice if he does ascend to this position of power. I can't imagine a more horrifying situation than that.

And so, I'm grateful to her, people. I think, ultimately, there may be some sense of, "Oh, it didn't matter if he gets confirmed." And at this point, I do think he will be, despite all of this evidence, but it does matter. It mattered when [Anita Hill](#) spoke out, it matters when Christine Ford speaks out.

Andrea Chalupa: All of us are a lot more powerful than we realize, and no one can take that power from you, except for yourself. That's it, and don't forget that.

[Media Clip]

Amy Klobuchar: *Drinking is one thing, but the concern is about truthfulness. And in your written testimony you said, sometimes you had too many drinks. Was there ever a time when you drank so much that you couldn't remember what happened, or part of what happened the night before?*

Brett Kavanaugh: *No, I remember what happened, and I think you've probably had beer, Senator, and so, as part-*

Amy Klobuchar: *So, you're saying there's never been a case where you drank so much that you didn't remember what happened the night before, or part of what happened?*

Brett Kavanaugh: *You're asking about, yeah, a blackout, I don't know, have you?*

Amy Klobuchar: *Could you answer the question, Judge, I just ... So, that's not happened, is that your answer?*

Brett Kavanaugh: *Yeah, and I'm curious if you have.*

[End Media Clip]

Andrea Chalupa: It's just dehumanizing. All of it is so dehumanizing. You have [Rachel Mitchell](#), a career prosecutor from Arizona, who the GOP Senators hid behind, to do this questioning of Dr. Ford, as though Dr. Ford was on trial. It was victim shaming, there's no other way to describe it, but victim shaming.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, and they didn't even let her do her full job. I mean, she was moving toward a conclusion, and this is interesting, he brought out those calendars as a form of proof of his innocence. Which, at the time, it just seemed like a ridiculous last ditch move. I wondered, did he buy them on eBay and then fill them out retrospectively. I kept thinking if we actually had a legitimate investigation of this. They should be doing forensics of when these entries were written in.

But she seemed to be leading up to a July 1982 day, as a probable date of the attempted rape, and then was taken off the stage so that rage-filled delusional men, like Lindsey Graham, could sidle up to Kavanaugh and kiss his ass instead. I mean, it was just a farce of a hearing, shame

on our country. I don't know, I mean there are so many things going on in this situation, that I'm not quite sure where to proceed.

Andrea Chalupa: There was a letter that Rachel Mitchell wrote, where she was basically telling the GOP that Dr. Ford has a very weak case. And so, it just shows that, again, the prosecutor was brought in to politicize the whole thing. Which, basically, really what it amounts to, a strategy memo for how the GOP can work towards further trying to discredit Dr. Ford. Meanwhile, you have a lot of people across the media, men and women, sharing their own survivor stories, and you have experts weighing in, and just full-on supporting Dr. Ford's traumatic testimony, really validating her. Again, she checks all the boxes of somebody that survived a trauma.

And just for people who just want the basic facts of ... Maybe you have no problem with this, maybe you think, "Oh, boys will be boys." That's fine. Okay, that's your position. Well, think about this, Brett Kavanaugh lied about making disparaging references to teenage girls in his high school yearbook. And he lied about this when he was before Congress. He lied when he tried to minimize his history of heavy drinking. He certainly lied when he denied having access to files that are obviously stolen from the Democratic Senators, when he worked in the Bush in White House.

So, it's the lying. It's the lying when he's going before Congress. If you're somebody that is attempting to be on the highest court in the land, the higher power that all cases eventually go up to when ... the big heavy cases that really shape our country for generations to come, you absolutely cannot lie to Congress. That alone disqualifies you. To all the misogynists out there, and for everybody that has to go home at Thanksgiving, to a table full of misogynists, just simply get your armor on and just point it out that he lied several times to Congress -- and that alone is disqualifying.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah. And it's important to note here, when you talk about rape, the common perception, or misperception, for decades, is that rape is an act of sex. Rape is an act of power. And lying, in this case, is an act of power. And lying in an autocracy is traditionally a way to flaunt power, it's to make people, the general population feel powerless. I think, in this case, you have a man, an accused attempted rapist lying blatantly and making women feel powerless. I think it's that combined effect that may be hitting people so hard.

But there are so many things wrong with Kavanaugh, even before we *heard* about the Ford case, in that attempted rape. We were dealing with somebody who had a record of debt, of gambling, of drunkenness, of probable perjury. Somebody who had been basically operating as a GOP operative in a robe for his entire career. Somebody incapable of being objective. We had this preemptive PR blitz, where they brought out the team of 15 year old girls, just like Ford, who he coached to sit behind him in the hearing. We had the 65 women overnight, who could vouch for his character. We had this kind of constant drumbeat of wholesomeness, because they *knew*.

They knew what a degraded, horrible, vicious person lay underneath that façade. And they were trying so hard to set the stage so that it would seem unbelievable, that if any of the people who he's behaved in such an atrocious way around came forward, they would not be seen as credible. I think it's safe to say that facade is now completely gone away through him. Through his own testimony, where he was belligerent, and hostile, and crazed, and just absolutely out of control.

And that, again, is the flaunting of power. He was saying to the Senate, both the GOP and Democrat alike, that he is above them. That he doesn't need to follow the law, that he doesn't need to follow protocol, that he doesn't need to follow or have basic human decency. I think this is most apparent when he's talking to [Senator] Amy Klobuchar, about whether she also was blackout drunk, and she, of course, her father, I think, was an alcoholic. So, it was meant as a *hurtful* petty slight. But, yeah, there are so many things that need to be investigated about him.

I think while people are focused on the sexual assault issue, they should still continue to [follow the money trail](#), because I found that alarming. You know, the [\\$200,000 in baseball tickets](#), the Country Club fee of, I think it was \$92,000. The mega-mansion, all on a judge's salary, I think of about \$200,000 a year. There are a lot of questions to be asked about, who is funding him? Who is grooming him? And, I guess, why? Although, I think, the why, at this point, is to show their power, to inflict maximum trauma.

They could easily trade this guy out. It's not hard to find a right-wing extremist who wants to be on the Supreme Court. They could get another candidate. And at this point, they should, but they don't want to. I think it's because having that blatant liar, the judge who's above the law is an assault on democracy itself. And it's showing that the GOP is openly moving to becoming a one party state, and now, isn't even keeping up the pretense of being anything other than that. The monster's out. The monster of Kavanaugh is out, the monster of the GOP is out, and they don't mind if we see it, because they're so confident that they will win.

Andrea Chalupa: And Trump's Republican Party is turning the Supreme Court into a kleptocracy court. That's so obvious with this big mysterious debt that was paid off -of Kavanaugh's - and where that money came from. It's really, follow the kleptocracy, that needs to be a central story. That's where the FBI investigation should really go as well. It's chilling. It's a chilling reminder of the sharp far right turn America has taken. That the White House can, yes, order an FBI investigation, for show, but then limit the FBI investigation. And what is the FBI supposed to do when that agency is holding on for dear life, trying to avoid an acceleration of Trump's purge when they're investigating the President and his family? It's just such a Catch-22.

It's like, obviously, they need to do a good job, and really get to the bottom of who Brett Kavanaugh is, but they are handcuffed. They're limited by the President himself, and if they push those boundaries, if they do say, "Look, we want to uphold the rule of law here. And really, this is a lifetime appointment to the highest court in the land, so we're going to really get to the bottom of this," if they do that, imagine how he's going to react. I mean, that whole stunt where he claimed that he fired Rosenstein, or Rosenstein resigned, I mean, yes, that was some bizarre 'reality show of terror' stunt that the White House did, to try to distract from Kavanaugh.

And everybody fell for it, and all it really ultimately did was reveal which reporters, like [Jonathan Swan](#) of Axios, who's really an easy mark for this administration, where they know they could place fake stories with him. [Laughs] And that was convenient for us, to see who's doing the White House's bidding inadvertently. Ultimately, it's like, the FBI, if they were to do the right thing here and say ... they risk their own jobs, and the security of their own Russia investigation. It's a really bizarre time, it just feels like the barbed wire is closing in on the rule of law right now.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, I mean, what you're seeing are people at all sorts of levels acting as if they are in great fear. You see this, I think, within the FBI, within these firings that have taken place in the aftermath. Where we've had this long slow motion purge, where Trump is, in a very overt way, trying to rid the FBI, and intelligence agencies, in general, of people who would have insight into his Russian mafia ties, and into his financial criminal background. But they're not fighting back. They're not really standing up and saying, like, "Who the hell are you to boss us around?" And, "This is not your role."

No one is even trying to say that they are a potential check on power. I mean, the Democrats are, to some extent, but they're unable to actually assert themselves, just because they don't have the majority. But it is amazing, I mean, and all this talk about masculinity, and toughness, and what it means to be a man. You're seeing just an utter fearfulness, and I'm not trying to equate that with femininity, or something. It's just an interesting thing, because you are seeing this alpha male domination scheme, where Trump just bosses everybody around. Trump who was so blatantly unqualified for the position that he's in, and they cower to him.

I want to get back to the Rosenstein media fake-out in a little bit. But one person who, I think, we really see this with, is Lindsey Graham. And so, I think that we should talk about what the hell happened to Lindsey Graham, back in-

Andrea Chalupa: Hashtag #FreeLindseyGraham.

[Media Clip]

Lindsey Graham: Our Republican colleagues, if you vote no, you're legitimizing the most despicable thing I have seen in my time in politics. You want this seat, I hope you never get it. Lindsey Graham: I hope you're on the Supreme Court, that's exactly where you should be, and I hope that the American people will see through this charade. And I wish you well, and I intend to vote for you, and I hope everybody who's fair minded will.

[End Media Clip]

Sarah Kendzior: [Laughs] I don't even know, I think Lindsey Graham is in a prison of his own making. So, I mean, part of him is thinking he may just deserve to be in there, because we don't know. Everyone remembers, back in May, 2016, Lindsey Graham was a Trump *critic*. He was one of the biggest Trump critics in the Republican Party, he tweeted, "[If we nominate Trump, we](#)

[will get destroyed and we will deserve it.](#)" And I think the question of, who is we? Now, is interesting. The country, the GOP, are those two things synonymous anymore?

Then, of course, after that, after Trump won, it was Lindsey Graham and John McCain who initiated the investigation into Trump's ties with Russia. Lindsey Graham said, "The GOP was hacked, and I, personally, Lindsey Graham, [was hacked by Russia.](#)" Which leads to a lot of questions. And so, Graham functioned as, I mean, I guess, a prominent Trump critic, given the extremely low standard of criticism within the Republican Party. Meaning, he wasn't an ass kissing lackey, until late 2017, in which he made this abrupt transition into exactly that. There was a point where you could take old statements Lindsey Graham had made about Trump, and just literally flip them on their head, and it corresponded to how he felt then.

I've talked about this. I now have been talking about this for basically a year, on TV, in articles, and all this stuff. Because people always ask me, like, "What the fuck is with this guy?" I have a lot of potential reasons that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The most mild are careerism and opportunism, of course, you're going to see that from any politician. There is contamination, because of Trump's own criminality, and because the Republican Party, as a whole, is enmeshed in the Trump-Russia scandal, given the role of people like Michael Cohen, or Rick Gates, or others. In fundraising, we know that Graham himself [has received money from Russian oligarchs.](#)

Then, I think ... what I used to think, anyway, was the most likely possibility were blackmail, or threats. Those are two separate things, that possibly there was compromising information found in Graham's email, or just in his life, that can be used against him. I want to emphasize, it's not necessarily Russia that found this. This is the kind of thing Trump, and his little gang of goons do *all* the time. They've functioned for decades, back to the Roy Cohn era. Threatening people, getting into people's private life, recording them when they think no one sees it. This is just how they roll.

And so, the other thing is possibly a threat, either to him, as an individual, or to one of Graham's loved ones. Which is often a very effective way of keeping a potential dissident in line. I leaned toward that. Now, we're at this point where Graham, not only is no longer a critic in any capacity of Trump, but is just revealing himself to be an absolutely monstrous human being. And incoherent, and full of rage. The things that he was saying at the hearing blew my mind. I don't know whether that rage is coming from a place of fear, or whether this is just what was lurking inside his little Southern demeanor all along. I don't know, what do you think?

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, I mean, it's clear, this isn't ... In May, 2016, when Graham was so outspoken against Trump, that was before any of the hacked material against the Democrats were weaponized. That was before voters got [John Podesta's risotto recipe.](#) So, I don't think Lindsey Graham saw what was coming for him, having been hacked. Even the timeline on how late it took for the Democratic Party to find out how extensively *it* had been hacked. It's understandable that Lindsey Graham, in May, 2016, when he was a brave outspoken voice in the GOP, to trying to stop Trump, he probably had no idea, at that point, that he had been

hacked. Even if he did know, he probably didn't even understand what that meant fully, or what kind of details could come out, and how that could humiliate him.

If it's not something personal they're holding over him ... If you want clues, or some sort of idea of what it could possibly be, look at [how the Russian hacks hurt the Democrats](#), look at how destructive that was. So, it was time to go off WikiLeaks, to the first big drop, right before the Democratic convention in Philly, which really further drove apart Bernie's supporters and Hillary supporters. Because you saw the internal workings of Debbie Wasserman Schultz, and how decisions were being made, in terms of the primaries. The primary was already decided for Hillary, essentially. And that really drove those two camps apart, viciously.

I remember being at the convention, and it was, a lot of Bernie supporters treated it as a place to protest, and demanding reform of how the DNC did things. It was very tense. It was extremely tense, especially on that very first day. And that was done intentionally to inflict as much damage as possible, for Trump's opposition. Then you had a lot of the vetting that was being done, of the Democrats' donors, from passport information to Social Security numbers, all of that, and phone numbers. Well, that information, that very sensitive information of their donors was leaked online.

So, if you examine that, you can get a sense of what Lindsey Graham may be protecting, in terms of what hacked material they have. Yes, it could be something as common as you pointed out, this is a very common tactic. It could be something that could personally embarrass him, or somebody that he cares about, or somebody that he loves. Or it could be a combination, including information he doesn't want to get out there, for really top Republican financiers, that could really humiliate, infuriate them. It's clear that Lindsey Graham, through his bizarre behavior is ... increasingly bizarre behavior, he's acting like somebody who's being held hostage.

I think everybody needs to ... Really, if you have access to him in the halls of Congress, you really have to push this to him. You really have to put this front and center relentlessly, because this man has undergone a personality transformation since Trump has increased his hold of power over the US government. It has really shown that he's willing to purge, show his vindictive streak, and Lindsey Graham has very much fallen in line. And all reporters, all reporters have access to him covering Congress, ask him, just relentlessly ask him, really start digging in. Because, the sooner we free him, the better our country will be.

Sarah Kendzior: [Laughs] Yeah. I was going to say, if he's a hostage, he's acting like one with Stockholm Syndrome. He's acting like somebody who realizes the game has been won, and that it's better to join than to be excluded, or defeated, which is a frightening prospect. And yes, the media should be asking Graham, they should be asking a lot of people things that they're not doing. Because they're too busy engaging in pointless or dishonest propaganda initiatives, put out by the White House. And that's something I want to talk about, because you're bringing up what happened with the hacks in 2016, and the terrible effect they had on the Democratic Party.

It was not just the hacks, and it was not just the information, it was the weaponization of that. And that weaponization was not just performed by the Trump camp, it was the media itself. It was so-called liberal mainstream outlets that participated in framing this information in a way to cause the most chaos they could within the Democratic Party, and to benefit Trump. They are such dupes in this way. I think, for any kind of politician that's been hacked, I think it's the weaponization of that information, much more than what the contents are, that would frighten people. Because there is the sense of a massive collective echo chamber, especially the way media moves now, where it's gutted, it's algorithmic. It's people-piggy backing off each other.

Sarah Kendzior: Of course, the best example of this, recently, is the Rod Rosenstein debacle. In which, in the midst of the Kavanaugh conversation, we began hearing these [reports from Axios](#), from the New York Times, and then just broadly across the media spectrum, that he had either resigned or been fired. And so, we had, basically, I don't know, what was it? Like [two hours of total utter hell](#). We were really like, "Well, that's it. They've got the card, the Mueller investigation is effectively over, at least there's a serious obstacle now placed in its path." And it was all total bullshit. It was just-

Andrea Chalupa: Oh, they're going to want decisions in the Mueller investigation to go up to the Supreme Court, just to give it that carnival ride of legitimacy.

Sarah Kendzior: Oh, yeah.

Andrea Chalupa: Just give it a sheen of legitimacy by Brett Kavanaugh, at the Supreme Court-

Sarah Kendzior: Well yeah, and that's why-

Andrea Chalupa: ... making the final decision and-

Sarah Kendzior: ... they want him.

Andrea Chalupa: ... protecting the Trumps.

Sarah Kendzior: Because they know how he'll rule, in advance. They know that he doesn't think a president can be indicted, and, of course, he's not going to think his little lord and master Donald Trump can be indicted. But, yeah, in every kind of autocracy, they go through these rituals, these facades of a democratic process. Whether it's a dictator being elected with 95% of the vote, because the people love him so. Or some ruling that disregards all actual criminal information about somebody who has committed a crime in plain sight, and exonerates them, while labeling the opposition as criminals. We're already seeing things like this, and I think if the Mueller probe does reach the Supreme Court with Kavanaugh up on it, we'll see more of that.

Sarah Kendzior: But I'm really interested in how this Rosenstein story, how this narrative is being built. Because we basically have had about a month of propaganda initiatives from the White House being inserted into these outlets, in particular, the New York Times, which has offered itself up as a mechanism of legitimation for an ostensible coup. There were basically

three big moves. There was the [anonymous op-ed on the “deep state”](#) which we discussed in the last episode. Which basically served to validate all of Trump's paranoia, served as a prelude for a purge. I think we can be fairly confident that the target of the purge was Rosenstein.

Sarah Kendzior: Then we had [an article, about a week ago, saying that Rosenstein had wanted to invoke the 25th Amendment](#), then get rid of Trump. The week that Trump fired Comey, honestly, I think that's a totally reasonable thing to say, [laughs] that was also the week that Trump [invited Russian officials into the Oval Office](#), so they could laugh about firing Comey. And there was a wealth of information about Trump being a sociopath, and otherwise mentally unfit for the office.

But, nonetheless, that's just my opinion, it is not - by Rod Rosenstein's own words - his opinion, he denies ever saying this. There's a little bit of talk about maybe he said it in a joking way, but, regardless of that, the New York Times presented it as a completely straightforward statement. The kind of statement guaranteed to inflame Trump, to make him very angry, to make Trump's fans angry, and to give a pretense to fire him. And so, that was the second thing.

Then you get this flurry of articles saying that he's resigning, or that he's getting fired, all of which are meant to make the public question Rosenstein's sincerity, his dedication, his own fitness for the office that he inhabits. I'm sorry, this is so convoluted and repetitive. All media outlets make mistakes, all journalists make mistakes, that's just part of life. And if you explain your actions and apologize, and issue corrections, then that's excusable. That's not what's happening here, this is a pattern of disinformation.

In previous shows, we've discussed the relationship that Trump has with the Times, which has done probably more for him than any outlet, except Fox News, to buffer him, to cover for him instead of covering him. And it's depressing to see this, I don't know what's coming next, but I don't like that the groundwork is being laid in this fashion.

Andrea Chalupa: No, no. Yeah, to your earlier point, the weaponization of the hacked emails, and the media was all over that. All over that. They had no problem covering as breaking news, the little gossipy bits and those emails that WikiLeaks released, after being handed all that, after they were stolen by the Russians. And yet, they're not ... they're hardly scratching the surface on answering who paid Brett Kavanaugh's gambling debt. How did he suddenly get like ... was it a quarter of a million dollars? And so, that, they spend more time, honestly, on John Podesta's risotto recipe than they've done on, who is bankrolling [Kavanaugh]? What dark money is bankrolling a possibly gambling-addicted future justice on the Supreme Court?

I know it's not as sexy and fun as gossip in emails that people never thought would ever be released, and it is not that voyeuristic, but my God, this is a very important question that's central to all of this. This really defines a man's character, and who he's beholden to, and who he'll be paying back once he's on the Supreme Court. And it's not sexy, but it's key to all of this, and the future of our country. So, that's really where I hope the cat laser pointer of excitement lands on that in a big way, and that the media finally digs into it and doesn't relent.

Sarah Kendzior: Right. It's also frustrating, because those debts that he incurred are *traceable*. If he bought \$200,000 worth of baseball tickets, you can find the friends that he says paid him back, or the people who went with him to games. These are all concrete material things. These are things that happened recently. This is all an area, we've known about this for months, that you would think reporters would go. I just, I wonder, sometimes, about this political culture, or about this D.C., New York sense of entitlement among the wealthy elites.

Andrea Chalupa: The social climbing class.

Sarah Kendzior: Yes.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, and I think that a lot of people don't view the administration with the existential horror that we do. [Laughs] They see it as a professional opportunity, they see it as something that they're remote and removed from. Somebody wrote me recently about a New York Times journalist who proudly said he didn't vote in 2012, or 2016. And about that journalist's conversation with Bob Woodward, in which they mocked the idea of the Resistance. Then this person had thanked me for taking matters seriously. Because if you're not a wealthy white man from a certain type of family, this is absolutely not an abstract issue.

Your rights are at stake, your ability to survive is at stake. I would think if you have a conscience, if you have any compassion, even if you are of that privileged class, you would think people would at least feel bad about, oh, I don't know, *kids snatched from their parents and put into tent camps*. You would think that that would alarm you, and that you would want that to stop. And that you would want this country to not be that kind of country, and not to continue to go down this terrible road. But there are a lot of Brett Kavanaugh types among us. There's a kind of elite that seems to just flow by, gets more entrenched, more removed from ordinary people, from what most people consider regular life.

And I think that's just going to continue, that's why I worry about some of the traditional mechanisms against an autocracy. You know, mass strikes, or just mass refusal, they just, they don't care. They don't care about being caught, and they've built up such wealth in such insularity, that it's hard to penetrate it. And that doesn't mean that we stop, it means we step things up, and we fight harder. But, that insular privileged culture, we see remnants of it everywhere, and not just in these hearings.

We see it in the media too, which as I wrote about my book, has increasingly become a profession of elites, of unpaid internships, of expensive advanced degrees that weren't required a decade or two ago. And that's the intent, it's to keep out people who care, it's to keep out people who don't give a shit about social climbing and parties. I don't know all the crap they're doing, I don't know any of this, but it's obviously very important to them. [Laughs]

Andrea Chalupa: I know what they're doing, so, I've met some of these people in person. But, yeah, no, it's like you have a [UN report saying that America's poor is becoming more poor under](#)

Trump. The UN. The UN has had to take it upon itself to shine a very serious spotlight on America's massive crisis of income inequality. You have reports on academics that are facing poverty so they turn to sex work and sleeping in their cars. So, things are getting ... not only in the U.S., but around the world, it's the state of the world with income inequality, which is the devastation that is really raw.

Then you have this media elite, the social climbers that are cloistered. Another callous display of this is how so many, especially in cable news, were going on and on about praising Dr. Ford's credibility. She has this off the charts credibility. They're talking about her almost like a show pony, in terms of her credibility. What if she didn't? What if she didn't check all the boxes? I mean, there's so many reasons why victims don't come forward, and one of the reasons is, obviously, the deep shame of it is very heavy. But you never feel credible enough as a survivor of this. You never feel like you are politically correct enough, and I worry about that a lot.

I worry about that, especially when you have a worsening economy. And now under Trump, when you have this deeper decline into poverty, I worry about people that are being forced to turn to sex work. I think there's never been a more important issue, or urgent issue. One of the most important ones that we should really start talking about in the mainstream is legalizing sex work. Because that's how you're going to be protecting these men and women that are forced to turn to that. Many are. I don't think you need to be a saint, ever, to step forward and say, "Hey, this powerful man did this to me. I know I'm a hotel maid, or I know I'm a ..." Even a political operative for a Democratic campaign, so, therefore, I may have some political motive. Sure, go ahead and discuss that to death, but the point is, "He did this to me."

I think that whole credibility issue just smacked of elitism. Like here, Dr. Ford did all the right things, because she's a rich woman, a privileged woman that had the support network. As heroic as what she did, she was absolutely superhuman. And what she did is going to leave a lasting impact for good in our country, and that bravery is contagious. But there are so many women that don't have that support network, who are brutally abused, who don't feel like they're going to be believed if they go to the press, or that they could even trust the police. And so, that's another heartbreaking underlying thing in all this.

In general, women and people of color shouldn't have to be perfect in order to be believed and taken seriously. I mean, the fight for equality, it's not to take away any rights and benefits of privileged white men, it's just the simple demand to be seen as human. Kids can be kids, unless those children are black. God forbid they get caught playing with a toy gun in a public park, like 12 year old Tamir Rice. And so, all of this is just, allow humans to be humans, regardless of how they identify with their gender, or the color of their skin. And people, like women and people of color should not have to feel like saints first, before they can step forward and call out some abuse.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, absolutely.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, I want to end the show on an extra angry note, [laughter] by saying, if you are as furious as we are, and you feel like all the gaslighting that the pundits were doing

throughout Trump's rise to power, and in his first year in office saying, "Oh, he'll pivot, the GOP will hold him in line," et cetera. If you are as furious as all of us, *Gaslit Nation* listeners out there, we encourage you to take your anger out in the polls, on November 6th, and a really great way to do that --

As we've been saying on this show, in previous episodes, this is an assault on the rule of law in America. The checks and balances that are supposed to protect our democracy are quickly being chipped away at. And so, the power is really down to us now. We're the last resort. We strongly encourage, if you're listening, to take this extremely seriously. This is, by far, the most important election, yet again, in our lifetimes. You have to go, please, we're begging you, go to a site like crushthemidterms.org.

In a matter of seconds, make your plan on how you can help Democrats take back the House, take back the Senate. It's very simple, easy to use, I'm obsessed with this site. It's helped me get out there into the field. Once you create your plan, in a matter of seconds, tweet it to us, [@GaslitNation](https://twitter.com/GaslitNation), and we'll retweet your plan, as long as you're not a Neo-Nazi, or a far-right stooge, we will be checking. In two weeks, on the next episode of ... Actually, we're going weekly now, for October, aren't we? We forgot to announce that.

Sarah Kendzior: Hopefully, yeah.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, we're going weekly.

Sarah Kendzior: We're trying to go weekly. If you really want us to go weekly, go donate to the [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com/GaslitNation)-

Andrea Chalupa: Yes, please. [Laughter]

Sarah Kendzior: ... then it'll be a lot easier for us to pay our production cost. But yeah, the plan is to try to go weekly, we will see how this goes.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, leading up to the midterms. So, on the next episode of *Gaslit Nation*, we will announce a winner. Tweet at us, [@GaslitNation](https://twitter.com/GaslitNation), on Twitter, send us your crushthemidterms.org plan, on how you plan to get back at the far-right on Election Day, November 6th. We will retweet all those plans, and on the next episode, we'll choose a winner. Just select, spin the wheel of chance.

We'll send that winner a free copy of Sarah's New York Times best-selling book, [The View From Flyover Country](https://www.randomhouse.com/book/1111111), signed by her, and you'll get that in the mail. And our gratitude for *all* people who participate, we need you. This is a very desperate time in our country, this is not a drill. It's really come to this, they're closing in. They're going to steal the Supreme Court now, and we all have to fight like our lives depend on it, because they do on November 6th.

[Media Clip]

Stephen Colbert: The Senate took a recess, then it was time to hear from Judge Kavanaugh. And he came out with a well-quaffed head of steam.

Brett Kavanaugh: This whole two-week effort has been a calculated and orchestrated political hit, fueled with apparent pent-up anger about President Trump, and the 2016 election, fear that has been unfairly stoked about my judicial record, revenge on behalf of the Clintons.

Stephen Colbert: In conclusion, I will be an unbiased and impartial judge. Just an umpire calling balls and strikes, secretly being thrown by George Soros and Hillary Clinton.

Sarah Kendzior: Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa.

Andrea Chalupa: And our editor is Cullen Daigle. Thank you, Cullen.

Sarah Kendzior: If you want to help us, leave a review on iTunes. Every review helps us build our audience.

Andrea Chalupa: And check out our [Patreon](#), if you like what we do. Thanks for listening.