

Twitter Thread by Yascha Mounk



Yascha Mounk

@Yascha_Mounk



Twelve months ago, I believed that a Supreme Court dominated by conservatives like Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh would never license a full-out power grab by Donald Trump.

In my latest @slate column, I explain why I've changed my

When Donald Trump was elected, no serious political scientist predicted that the Republican Party would become a tool of his whim as quickly and thoroughly as it did.

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Optimists claimed that GOP leaders like Paul Ryan and Lindsey Graham, who shared few of his views, would rein him in.

Pessimists—like me!—claimed that Trump would slowly take over the Republican Party after a protracted civil war.

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We were all naïve. In reality, some conservatives, like Ryan, abandoned the field. Others, like Graham, reinvented themselves as Trumpist populists.

To be part of the conservative tribe today is to go wherever the resentment—and its leader—takes you.

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That makes it all the more scary that the Kavanaugh confirmation process has eliminated the last doubts about a central fact of American politics.

The Supreme Court is not a nonpartisan court of law. It is a realm to do partisan battle by other means.

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When John Roberts and, in his initial hearings, Kavanaugh pretended to be umpires who just call balls and strikes, their hypocrisy was the tribute vice pays to virtue.

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That hypocrisy had its real uses.

A partisan who needs plausible deniability can skew the playing field by allowing gerrymandering and voter purges, as Roberts et al. have done over the past year. But he cannot allow a naked power grab by a co-partisan president.

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In his second hearings, Kavanaugh ripped the mask of hypocrisy off, openly threatening to maul the libs.

This has consequences. It's no longer unimaginable that SCOTUS will allow attacks on the F.B.I. or tolerate the politically motivated prosecution of a Dem candidate.

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Will that actually happen?

The evidence from other countries suggests that this depends on Trump's popularity. As political scientists have long known, in most democracies, popular support for the government is a good predictor of court behavior.

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In a sense, this is good news: Trump remains unlikely to win over the many millions of Americans who intensely disapprove of him. Democrats are likely to win the House. They have a good chance of ousting Trump in 2020.

Doom is by no means foreordained.

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But it is also a reminder of just how high the stakes of electoral politics now are.

If "We, the People" fail to constrain the current president, we can no longer rely on the Republicans in Congress, or the Republicans on the Supreme Court, to do so on our behalf.

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Oh, and to the followers I gained after my threads on Sokal Squared: Welcome!

Hope you don't mind that I don't just dislike bullshit science--but also think that beating Trump and other authoritarian populists around the world is the most urgent task of our age.