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SURVIVING THE NEW TRUMP ERA

In the seven stages of grief, progressives are wallowing in the first three stages of shock, denial, and anger. But don't get stuck in the seventh stage of acceptance.



Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. presidential election was surprising in a number of ways. He won every swing state as well as the popular vote, which a Republican candidate hadn't done in two decades. He led his party to a congressional sweep, with the Republicans maintaining control of the House of Representatives and seizing a majority in the Senate. And he benefited from an unexpectedly large shift in votes among Latino and African-American men.

In 2016, when Hilary Clinton won the popular vote by a significant margin but lost the Electoral College, anti-Trump forces could plausibly argue that most of the country opposed the new president. This time around, a very slim plurality of voters had no problem putting back into the White House a convicted felon who supported efforts to overthrow the results of the 2020 election.

In 2016, Trump himself was surprised by his own victory, and his team was ill-prepared to take power. In 2024, the Trump team is ready to hit the ground running on day one. It has already made some of the most extreme choices in U.S. history for the top positions in U.S. government: serial rule-breaker Matt Gaetz for attorney general, conspiracy theorist Tulsi Gabbard for director of national intelligence, right-wing TV host Pete Hegseth to head up the Pentagon, and extremist Stephen Miller to oversee immigration.

This time around, the conservative establishment has a detailed game plan for the administration—Project 2025—that will guide Trump and his team. A new conservative thinktank in Washington, DC, the America First Policy Institute, will also be shaping the administration's agenda.

The Biden administration is scrambling to preserve some of the achievements that the Trump team plans to destroy, [particularly around clean energy](#). Federal employees are fearful that they will lose their jobs in Trump's promised attacks on the "deep state." Prominent anti-Trumpers are worried about the retribution that the former and



The next four years promise to be chaotic, vengeful, and dangerous. U.S. democracy is certainly in peril. The international rule of law will likely sustain numerous challenges, as it has already from Russia and Israel. And the planet itself, thanks to the climate denier returning to the White House, faces the prospect of a big step backward.

What can be done to prevent the new Trump administration from doing its worst?

At the global level, many countries will step into the vacuum created by U.S. withdrawal—from the Paris agreement, the effort to supply Ukraine, and various global human rights institutions. European powers will likely step up their assistance to Ukraine if the Trump administration ends all military support for the besieged country. Europe, too, will continue to take the lead in terms of a clean energy transition, but China, Brazil, and India are also producing [a growing amount of electricity](#) from renewable sources.

Europe, however, is divided, with a number of far-right leaders who are thrilled to have a U.S. leader like Trump pushing for change from the outside. And the authoritarian leaders of other countries—Russia, China, Turkey—will happily take the U.S. side in eroding human rights norms and institutions.

Inside the United States, the greatest resistance will come from the states. These states controlled by Democrats—California, Washington, Massachusetts—are already preparing to work together to block Trump from executing his extremist agenda. This resistance will likely take the form of filing suits that tangle up the new administration in court. During Trump's first term, states joining together to stymie Trump [succeeded in 94 cases](#). Unfortunately, thanks to all of Trump's judicial appointees in his first term, these legal challenges will face longer odds.

States also have considerable authority to set policy. For instance, in the wake of the Supreme Court's repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, a number of



in the case of Trump's determination to proceed with mass deportations, some Democratic governors have already said that they [will not allow](#) state police to assist federal authorities with the removals. Democrat-led states will do their best to create islands of sanctuary against the overreach of federal authorities.

NGOs and social movements will also mount resistance. A women's march in Washington, DC just after Trump's inauguration in 2017 demonstrated the depth and breadth of anger at the new president's attitudes and proposed policies toward women. A comparable march is [planned for January 2025](#).

In addition to using the courts to stop or delay Trump policies, the resistance is organizing to push the Democratic Party toward economic populism. Harris lost a lot of working-class voters. As Maurice Mitchell of the Working Families Party [puts it](#), "Donald Trump has no solutions to address the needs of working-class people in this country. And we know that when he tries to implement his agenda of more tax cuts for billionaires, gutting health care, deporting millions, and supporting war crimes with public dollars, people will rise up."

The goal of these progressives is to highlight the economic costs of Trump's early moves—mass deportations, tariffs, corporate tax cuts—to build momentum to win the 2016 midterm elections. Resistance will be much easier if the Democrats control at least one chamber of Congress.

A number of key movements exploded during Trump's first term: the Sunrise Movement around climate change began just a couple months after Trump's inauguration, #MeToo went viral in October 2017, #BlackLivesMatter went global after police killed George Floyd in May 2020. Inevitably, after the despondency of the election fades and the outrage at Trump's actual policies explodes, [new movements](#) will emerge to mobilize public anger.

The centrists in the Democratic Party failed in the last election because they refused to embrace the kind of economic populism that the



the economic left. Although these parts often overlap, the party failed to emphasize the latter in the last election, which could have appealed to so many voters who ended up pulling the lever for Trump because of the rising cost of food and rent.

In the seven stages of grief, progressives are wallowing right now in the first three stages of shock, denial, and anger. It would be a mistake to get stuck in the seventh and final stage of acceptance. When Trump's policies begin to bite, the anger will return and, with it, a new determined resistance.

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