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Analysis

10 WAYS TO BE PREPARED AND GROUNDED NOW THAT TRUMP HAS WON

The key to taking effective action in a Trump world is to avoid perpetuating the autocrat's goals of fear, isolation, exhaustion and disorientation.

Daniel Hunter November 4, 2024



Getty Images News | Dean Mouhtaropoulos

This story was published prior to the election and updated on Nov. 6 to reflect the results.

It's important we squarely face Trump's victory and what there is to do about it.

Trump has already signaled the kind of president he will be: revengeful, uncontrolled and unburdened by past norms and current laws. I won't go through the litany of awful things he's pledged to do, since that's been well-established with his words, Project 2025 plans and excellent analyses from authoritarian experts.

Looking into an even more destabilized future is not easy. If you're like me, you're already tired. The prospect of more drama is daunting. But authoritarianism isn't going away no matter the election results. So here's some thinking about ways to orient so we can ground ourselves better for these times ahead.

I am blessed to have spent time writing scenarios about what might happen, developing trainings for a Trump win and working alongside colleagues living under autocratic regimes. One of the things they keep reminding

me is that good psychology is good social change. Authoritarian power is derived from fear of repression, isolation from each other and exhaustion at the utter chaos. We're already feeling it.

Thus, for us to be of any use in a Trump world, we have to pay grave attention to our inner states, so we don't perpetuate the autocrat's goals of fear, isolation, exhaustion or constant disorientation.

1. TRUST YOURSELF

I started writing this list with strategic principles (e.g. analyze your opponents weakness and learn to handle political violence), but actually the place to start is with your own self.

Trump is arriving at a time of great social distrust. Across the board, society has reduced trust in traditional institutions. Yes, there's more distrust of the media, medical professionals, experts and politicians. But it extends beyond that. There's reduced trust in most community institutions and membership groups. Whether from COVID or political polarization, a lot of us have experienced reduced trust in friends and family. Even our trust in predictable weather is diminished.

Previous Coverage



A new wave

of movements against Trumpism is coming

Distrust fuels the flame of autocracy because it makes it much easier to divide. We can see that in the casual nature of Trump's rhetoric — telling people to distrust immigrants, Democrats, socialists, people from Chicago, women marchers, Mexicans, the press and so on.

This is a social disease: You know who to trust by who they tell you to distrust.

Trust-building starts with your own self. It includes trusting your own eyes and gut, as well as building protection from the ways the crazy-making can become internalized.

This also means being trustworthy — not just with information, but with emotions. That way you can acknowledge what you know and admit the parts that are uncertain fears nagging at you.

Then take steps to follow through on what you need. If you're tired, take some rest. If you're scared, make some peace with your fears. I can point you to resources that support that — like FindingSteadyGround.com — but the value here is to start with trusting your own inner voice. If you need to stop checking your phone compulsively, *do it*. If you don't want to read this article now and instead take a good walk, *do it*.

Trust all these things inside of you because *trust* in self is part of the foundation of a healthy movement life.

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2. FIND OTHERS WHO YOU TRUST

I promise I'll head towards practical resistance strategies. But the emotional landscape matters a great deal. Hannah Arendt's "The Origins of Totalitarianism" explored how destructive ideologies like fascism and autocracy grow. She used the word verlassenheit — often translated as loneliness — as a central ingredient. As she meant it, loneliness isn't a feeling but a kind of social isolation of the mind. Your thinking becomes closed off to the world and a sense of being abandoned to each other.

She's identifying a societal breakdown that we're all experiencing. Under a Trump presidency, this trend will continue to accelerate. The constant attacks on social systems — teachers, health care and infrastructure — make us turn away from leaning on each other and towards ideologically simple answers that increase isolation (e.g. "distrust government," "MAGA is nuts," "anyone who votes that way doesn't care about you").

In extreme cases, like Chile in the 1970s and '80s, the dictatorship aimed to keep people in such tiny nodes of trust that everyone was an island unto themselves. At social gatherings and parties, people would commonly not introduce each other by name out of fear of being too involved. Fear breeds distance.

We have to consciously break that distance. In Chile they organized under the guise of affinity groups. This was, as its name suggests, people who shared some connections and trust. Finding just a few people who you trust to regularly act with and touch base with is central.



Find people you trust to meet with regularly. (What If Trump Wins/Elizabeth Beier)

Following Trump's win: Get some people to regularly touch base with. Use that trust to explore your own thinking and support each other to stay sharp and grounded.

For the last several months I've been hosting a regular group at my house to "explore what is up with these times." Our crew thinks differently but invests in trust. We emote, cry, sing, laugh, sit in stillness and think together.

I've written an agenda for such gatherings right after a Trump win that you can use.

All of us will benefit from actively organized nodes to help stabilize us. In a destabilized society, you need people who help ground you.

3. GRIEVE

No matter what we try to do, there's going to be a lot of loss. The human thing to do is grieve. (Well, apparently humans are also very good at compartmentalizing, rationalizing, intellectualizing and ignoring — but the damage it does to our body and psyche is pretty well documented.)

If you aren't a feelings person, let me say it this way: The inability to grieve is a strategic error. After Donald Trump won in 2016, we all saw colleagues who never grieved. They didn't look into their feelings and the future — and as a result they remained in shock. For years they kept saying, "I can't believe he's doing that..."

An alternative: Start by naming and allowing feelings that come to arise. The night that Donald Trump won in 2016, I stayed up until 4 a.m. with a colleague. It was a tear-filled night of naming things that we had just lost. The list ranged from the political to the deeply personal:

"Trump will leave the Paris Climate Agreement and that means much of the world will soft pedal its climate plans."

"Ugh, I'm gonna have this man in my dreams. We're all going to sleep less and wake up to bat-shit crazy headlines each morning."

"Trump's gonna constantly attack immigrants — the wall may or may not happen, but he's gonna raise the threshold for racism. I don't think I can take it."

"Friends I know who signed up for DACA are never going to trust government again."

And on and on. It wasn't only a list, but it was finding the impact inside of us of sadness, anger, numbness, shock, confusion and fear. We alternated between rageful spouts and tears. We grieved. We cried. We held each other. We breathed. We dove back into naming all the bad things we *knew* we'd lost and things we *thought* we'd be likely to lose.

It wasn't anywhere near strategizing or list-making or planning. It was part of our acceptance that losing a presidency to an awful man means you and your people lose a lot. Ultimately, this helped us believe it — so we didn't spend years in a daze: "I can't believe this is happening in this country."

Believe it. Believe it now. Grief is a pathway to that acceptance.

4. RELEASE THAT WHICH YOU CANNOT CHANGE

Growing up my mom had a copy of the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." Notably, that prayer comes from theologian Reinhold Niebuhr as he was watching the rise of Nazis in Germany.

Trump's first day likely includes pardoning Jan. 6 insurrectionists, reallocating money to build the wall, pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement, and firing 50,000-plus government workers to begin replacing them with loyalists. There's little reason to believe that day two will get much quieter.

Under a Trump presidency, there are going to be so many issues that it will be hard to accept that we cannot do it all. I'm reminded of a colleague in Turkey who told me, "There's always something bad happening every day. If we had to react to every bad thing, we'd never have time to eat."

An elder once saw me trying to do everything and pulled me aside. "That's not a healthy lifelong strategy," she said. She'd been raised in Germany by the generation of Holocaust survivors who told her, "Never again." She took it personally, as if she had to stop every wrong. It wracked her and contributed to several serious ongoing medical conditions. We can accept our humanity or suffer that lack of acceptance.

Chaos is a friend of the autocrat. One way we can unwittingly assist is by joining in the story that we have to do it all.

Over the last few months I've been testing out a terribly challenging tool. It's a journaling exercise that invites you to reflect on which issues you'll spend energy on. It asks: what are issues you'll throw down on, do a lot for, a little for, or — despite caring about it — do nothing at all for? That last question can feel like a kind of torture for many activists, even while we're intellectually aware that we cannot stop it all.

Unaddressed, this desire to act on everything leads to bad strategy. Nine months ago when we gathered activists to scenario plan together, we took note of two knee-jerk tendencies from the left that ended up largely being dead-ends in the face of Trump:

- Public angsting posting outrage on social media, talking with friends, sharing awful news
- Symbolic actions organizing marches and public statements

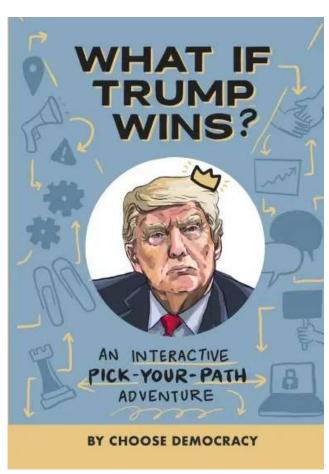
The first is where we look around at bad things happening and make sure other people know about them, too. We satisfy the social pressure of our friends who want us to show outrage — but the driving moves are only reactive. The end result wasn't the intended action or an informed population. It's demoralizing us. It's hurting our capacity for action. Public angsting as a strategy is akin to pleading with the hole in the boat to stop us from sinking.

Symbolic actions may fare little better under a Trump presidency. In whatever version of democracy we had, the logic of rallies and statements of outrage was to build a unified front that showed the opposition many voices were opposed to them. But under an unleashed fascist — if it's all you do — it's like begging the suicidal captain to plug the hole.

Let me be clear. These strategies *will* be part of the mix. We'll need public angsting and symbolic actions. But if you see an organization or group who *only* relies on these tactics, look elsewhere. There are other, more effective ways to engage.

5. FIND YOUR PATH

I've been writing scenarios of how a Trump presidency might play out. (You can read the scenarios written as a choose-your-own-adventure-style book at WhatIfTrumpWins.org or order the book.) The initial weeks look chaotic no matter what. But over time some differentiated resistance pathways begin to emerge.



One pathway is called "Protecting People." These are folks surviving and protecting our own — especially those of us directly targeted, such as trans people, folks choosing abortions and immigrants. This might mean organizing outside current systems for health care and mutual aid, or moving resources to communities that are

getting targeted. Further examples include starting immigrant welcoming committees, abortion-support funds or training volunteers on safety skills to respond to white nationalist violence.

Another pathway is "Defending Civic Institutions." This group may or may not be conscious that current institutions don't serve us all, but they are united in understanding that Trump wants them to crumble so he can exert greater control over our lives. Each bureaucracy will put up its own fight to defend itself.

Insider groups will play a central battle against Trump fascism. You may recall government scientists dumping copious climate data onto external servers, bracing for Trump's orders. This time, many more insiders understand it's code red. Hopefully, many will bravely refuse to quit — and instead choose to stay inside as long as possible.

Institutional pillars understand a Trump presidency is a dire threat. The military, for one, is well aware that Trump's potential orders to use them to crack down on civilian protesters would politicize them permanently.

These insiders will need external support. Sometimes it's just folks showing compassion that some of our best allies will be inside, silently resisting. A culture of celebrating people getting fired for the right reasons would help (then offering them practical help with life's next steps). Other moments will need open support and public activation.

Then there's a critical third pathway: "Disrupt and Disobey." This goes beyond protesting for better policies and into the territory of people intervening to stop bad policies or showing resistance.

Initially a lot of that prefigurative work may be purely symbolic. In Norway, to create a culture of resistance during World War II people wore innocuous paperclips as a sign they wouldn't obey. The symbolism is to build preparation for mass strikes and open resistance. In Serbia, protests against their dictator started with student strikes before escalating to strikes by pensioners (which were both largely symbolic) before finally escalating to the game-changing strike of coal miners.

In effective "Disrupt and Disobey" type actions the ultimate goal is paving a path for mass noncooperation: tax resistance, national strikes, work shut-downs and other nonviolent mass disobedience tactics — the most effective strategies to displace authoritarians. (Training on how to do that in a new Trump era can be found here.)

Lastly, there's a key fourth role: "Building Alternatives." We can't just be stuck reacting and stopping the bad. We have to have a vision. This is the slow growth work of building alternative ways that are more democratic. It includes grounding and healing work, rich cultural work, alternative ways of growing food and caring for kids, participatory budgeting or seeding constitutional conventions to build a majoritarian alternative to the Electoral College mess we're in.

Each of us may be attracted to some pathways more than others.



Myself, I'm attracted to "Disrupt and Disobey" — though I know when certain moments hit I'll be pulled into some immediate "Protecting People." I'm perhaps too impatient for most "Building Alternatives" and too unhappy with the status quo to do "Defend Civic Institutions." However, I'm delighted others will do that work!

I'm reminded of another way of finding your role that comes from my friend Ingrid's grandfather, who lived in Norway under the Nazi regime. He learned that the resistance was hiding people in the basement of a church near a cemetery. As a florist he already traveled to and from the cemetery — so he found a role smuggling messages in funeral wreaths, delivering them all over the city.

He didn't go out designing his perfect role. In fact, I'm not sure he would have looked at the list of possible "roles" and found his political path. Instead, he found his space by circumstance.

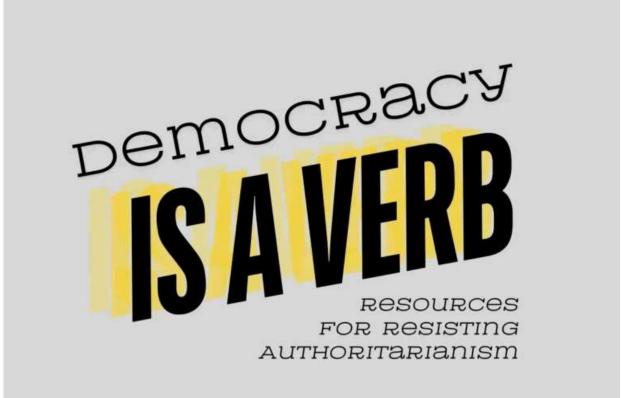
In other words: Your path may not be clear right now. That's okay. There will be plenty of opportunities to join the resistance.

6. DO NOT OBEY IN ADVANCE, DO NOT SELF-CENSOR

The *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*' cowardly refusal to endorse a political candidate is, it appears, a classic example of self-censorship. Trump did not have to make a direct threat to these media outlets. Their own leadership told them to "sit this one out."

Why? Because they wanted to stay safe.

Previous Coverage



• WNV's guide to protecting and expanding democracy

If autocrats teach us any valuable lesson it's this: Political space that you don't use, you lose.

This is a message to all levels of society: lawyers advising nonprofits, leaders worried about their funding base, folks worried about losing their jobs.

I'm not coaching to never self-protect. You can decide when to speak your mind. But it is a phenomenally slippery slope here we have to observe and combat.

Timothy Snyder has written a helpful book called "On Tyranny" — and turned it into a video series. He cites ceding power as the first problem to tackle, writing: "Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do."

Put simply: Use the political space and voice you have.

7. REORIENT YOUR POLITICAL MAP

A few months ago I sat in a room with retired generals, Republicans like Michael Steele, ex-governors and congress people. We were scenario-planning ways to prevent using the Insurrection Act to target civilian protesters, playing step-by-step who would give the orders to whom and how the worst could be avoided.

For a committed antiwar activist, the phrase "strange bedfellows" doesn't begin to describe the bizarre experience I felt.

I came out of it realizing that a Trump presidency reshapes alignments and possibilities. The bellicose, blasphemous language of Trump will meet the practical reality of governing. When you're out of power, it's easy to unify — but their coalition's cracks will quickly emerge. We have to stay sharp for opportunities to cleave off support.

How we position ourselves matters: Are we interested in engaging with people unhappy with the regime — whether because they love the current institutions or are unhappy with Trump's policies on them? Are we able to tell a story that explains how we got here — and do political education? Or are we only interested in maintaining ideological purity and preaching to our own choir?

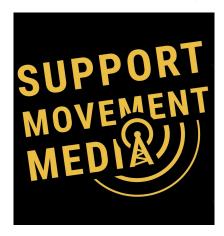
Even if you don't want to engage with them (which is fine), we'll all have to give space to those who do experiment with new language to appeal to others who don't share our worldview of a multiracial true democracy.

Empathy will be helpful here. I write all this with a particular moment in mind: At the end of the scenario day, we whipped around the room with conclusions. The generals said "The military cannot stop Trump from giving these orders." Politicians said "Congress cannot stop it."

I could see a lot of pain in high-ranking people of great power admitting a kind of defeat. I felt a level of compassion that surprised me.

Only the left activists said: We have an approach of mass noncooperation that can stop this. But we'd need your help.

I'm not sure that projected confidence was well-received. But if we're going to live into that (and I'm far from certain we can), we have to get real about power.



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8. GET REAL ABOUT POWER

In Trump's first term, the left's organizing had mixed results. With John McCain's assistance, we were able to block Trump's health proposal. Rallies proved less and less effective as time went on. The airport shutdowns showed that disruptive action can activate the public and helped pave the way for the court's dismissal over the Muslim ban. But Trump was still able to win huge tax cuts and appoint right-wing Supreme Court judges. The narrative lurched, and sizeble chunks of the population have now been captivated by the "Big Lie." It was elections that ultimately stopped Trump.

This time will be much harder.

The psychological exhaustion and despair is much higher. Deploying people into the streets for mass actions with no clear outcome will grow that frustration, leading to dropout and radicalized action divorced from strategy.

Trump has been very clear about using his political power to its fullest — stretching and breaking the norms and laws that get in his way. The movement will constantly be asking itself: "Are you able to stop this new bad thing?"

We're not going to *convince* him not to do these things. No pressure on Republicans will result in more than the tiniest of crumbs (at least initially). We're not going to stop him from doing these things just by persuasive tactics or showing that there are a LOT of us who oppose them.



The upside down triangle. (What If Trump Wins/Elizabeth Beier)

It will be helpful to have a power analysis in our minds, specifically that's known as the upside-down triangle. This tool was built to explain how power moves even under dictatorships.

The central tenet is that like an upside-down triangle, power can be unstable. It naturally topples over without anything supporting it. To prevent that, power relies on pillars of support to keep it upright.

Casually, the left often focuses on pillars of support that include governments, media, corporations, shareholders and policy makers. Describing the pillars of support, Gene Sharp wrote:

By themselves, rulers cannot collect taxes, enforce repressive laws and regulations, keep trains running on time, prepare national budgets, direct traffic, manage ports, print money, repair roads, keep markets supplied with food, make steel, build rockets, train the police and army, issue postage stamps or even milk a cow. People provide these services to the ruler though a variety of organizations and institutions. If people would stop providing these skills, the ruler could not rule.

Removing one pillar of support can often gain major, life-saving concessions. In response to Trump's 2019 government shutdown, flight attendants prepared a national strike. Such a strike would ground planes across the country and a key transportation network. Within hours of announcing they were "mobilizing immediately" for a strike, Trump capitulated.

Another example comes from the recently deceased long-time activist Dick Taylor. In his book "Blockade," he writes about how he and a tiny group changed U.S. foreign policy by repeatedly blocking armaments sent to support Pakistani dictator Yahya Khan. The ragtag crew sent canoes to block mighty military shipments leaving from East Coast ports until eventually the International Longshoremen's Association was persuaded to refuse to load them. This broke the back of national policy.

For larger system change we have to look outside of recent U.S. organizing. A good place to start is with *Waging Nonviolence*'s recent interview series with folks sharing key lessons on fighting autocracies and aiming for system change.

In our country, pressuring elite power is reaching its end point. Power will need to emerge from folks no longer obeying the current unjust system. This tipping point of mass noncooperation will be messy. It means convincing a lot of people to take huge personal risks for a better option.

As a "Disrupt and Disobey" person, we have to move deliberately to gain the trust of others, like the "Protecting People" folks. Mass noncooperation does the opposite of their goal of protection — it *exposes* people to more risk, more repression. But with that comes the possibility that we could get the kind of liberatory government that we all truly deserve.

9. HANDLE FEAR, MAKE VIOLENCE REBOUND

Otpor in Serbia has provided an abundance of examples on how to face repression. They were young people who took a sarcastic response to regular police beatings. They would joke amongst each other, "It only hurts if you're scared."

Their attitude wasn't cavalier — it was tactical. They were not going to grow fear. So when hundreds were beaten on a single day, their response was: This repression will only stiffen the resistance.

This is attitude.

They were also practical. They would follow their arrested protesters to jail cells and insist on making sure they were being treated well. They would target police who beat them up — showing up outside their houses with pictures of the people they beat up. Their call was rooted in the future they wanted: "You'll have a chance to join us."

Handling fear isn't about suppressing it — but it is about constantly redirecting. One activist described to me two motions in the universe: shrinking or expansion. When Donald Trump directs the Justice Department to use sedition charges against protesters or arrest his political enemies like Jamie Raskin or Liz Cheney, what's our response?

Previous Coverage



Political

violence is surging, but there's a playbook to counter it

Activist/intellectual Hardy Merriman released a studied response about political violence that had some news that surprised me. The first was that physical political violence hasn't grown dramatically in this country — it still remains *relatively* rare. The *threats* of violence, however, trend upwards, such as this CNN report: "Politically motivated threats to public officials increased 178 percent during Trump's presidency," primarily from the right.

His conclusion wasn't that political violence isn't going to grow. Quite the opposite. But he noted that a key component to political violence is to intimidate and tell a story that they are the true victims. Making political violence rebound requires refusing to be intimidated and resisting those threats so they can backfire. (Training on this backfire technique is available from the HOPE-PV guide.)

We can shrink into a cacophony of "that's not fair," which fuels the fear of repression. Or we take a page from the great strategist Bayard Rustin.

Black civil rights leaders were targeted by the government of Montgomery, Alabama during the bus boycott in the 1950s. Leaders like the newly appointed Martin Luther King Jr. went into hiding after police threats of arrest based on antiquated anti-boycott laws. Movement organizer Rustin organized them to go down to the station and demand to be arrested since they were leaders — making a positive spectacle of the repression. Some leaders not on police lists publicly demanded they, too, get arrested. Folks charged were met with cheers from crowds, holding their arrest papers high in the air. Fear was turned into valor.

10. ENVISION A POSITIVE FUTURE



Spend some time envisioning how we might advance our cause. (What If Trump Wins/Elizabeth Beier)

I don't feel certain, and I'm not predicting we win. But we've all now imagined storylines about how bad it might get. We would do ourselves a service to spend an equal measure of time envisioning how we might advance our cause in these conditions. As writer Walidah Imarisha says, "The goal of visionary fiction is to change the world."

In my mind, we'll have to eventually get Trump out of office. There are two paths available.

The first: Vote him out. Given the bias of the electoral college, this requires successfully defending nearly all local, state and national takeovers of elections such that they remain relatively fair and free.

Winning via the path of electoral majority has a wide swath of experience and support from mainstream progressive organizations and Democratic institutions. It's going to be a major thrust.

In my scenario writing I've explored what that strategy could look like, including preparing electoral workers to stand against last minute attempts by Trump to change election rules and even stymie the election with dubious emergency orders. They don't obey — and go ahead with elections anyway.

The second strategy is if he illegally refuses to leave or allow fair elections: Kick him out. That means we are able to develop a national nonviolent resistance campaign capable of forcing him out of office.

I've written several versions of this: One where large-scale strikes disable portions of the U.S. economy. If you recall from COVID, our systems are extremely vulnerable. Businesses running "just in time" inventory means small hiccups in the system can cause cascading effects.

Sustained strikes would face deep resistance, but they could swing communities currently on the fence, like the business community, which already is concerned about Trump's temperamental nature. Trump's own policies might make these conditions much easier. If he really does mass deportations, the economic injury might be fatal.

In another scenario I explore another strategy of taking advantage of a Trump overreach. Autocrats overplay their hands. And in this imagined scenario, Trump overreaches when he attempts to force autoworkers to stop building electric vehicles. UAW workers refuse and keep the factories running. Eventually he's unable to stop them — but in the process he's publicly humiliated.

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A very public loss like this can cause what Timur Kuran calls an "unanticipated revolution." He noted many incidents where political leaders seem to have full support, then suddenly it evaporates. He gives as an example the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79. "None of the major intelligence organizations — not even the CIA or the KGB — expected Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's regime to collapse. Right up to the revolution, they expected him to weather the gathering storm."

Kuran's analysis reminds us to look at Trump's political weakness. Political hacks like Lindsay Graham appear to be sycophants — but if given the chance to turn their knife in his back, they might. This means exposed political weaknesses could quickly turn the many inside Trump's campaign against him.

That feels far away from now. But all these remain possibilities. Practicing this future thinking and seeing into these directions gives me some hope and some strategic sensibilities.

On the days when I can't sense any of these political possibilities (more than not), I zoom out further to the lifespans of trees and rocks, heading into spiritual reminders that nothing lasts forever.

All of the future is uncertain. But using these things, we're more likely to have a more hopeful future and experience during these turbulent times.

CORRECTIONS 11/6/24: Hardy Merriman's name was incorrectly spelled. And the quote from Otpor was mistated as "It doesn't hurt if you're afraid."

DANIEL HUNTER

Daniel Hunter coaches and trains movements across the globe. As founder of Choose Democracy he's helped stop Trump's coup attempts. He has trained extensively with ethnic minorities in Burma, pastors in Sierra Leone, and independence activists in northeast India. He has written multiple books, including "What Will You Do If Trump Wins," "Climate Resistance Handbook" and "Building a Movement to End the New Jim Crow."

DIEZ MANERAS DE PREPARARNOS Y CENTRARNOS AHORA QUE TRUMP GANÓ

WHY CLIMATE ACTIVISTS NEED TO CELEBRATE — EVEN IF WE'RE NOT FEELING LIKE IT

UKRAINE'S SECRET WEAPON MAY PROVE TO BE CIVILIAN RESISTANCE