

TRUMP II: THE NEXT FOUR YEARS

RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

**The Torrey Pines Democratic Club
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Introduction

- On November 6, 2024, Americans woke up to the news that Donald Trump had won the popular vote and would soon become the elected U.S. president for a second term.
- This after the fact that Trump had been: (i) twice impeached in his first term; (ii) later convicted of numerous felonies for fraud by a New York State jury of peers; (iii) found liable for defamation and sexual abuse in civil court; (iv) twice indicted by federal grand juries in Florida and New York, respectively, for (v) illegally possessing and hiding dozens of boxes of classified documents stolen at the end of his first term and secreted at his Mar-a-Lago residence, and (vi) for conspiracy to defraud the government and disenfranchise voters and to corruptly obstruct official proceedings.
- Among Democrats, the emotional reactions were intense and varied, ranging from disbelief, anger, profound sadness, depression, and withdrawal. Several prominent Democrats, and the media, focused on finding blame for the unexpected loss and raising questions of what went wrong.

Introduction (continued)

- But the plain and simple truth emerged that Republican voters turned out for the election and many Democratic voters did not. We also learned that some groups of voters who previously voted for Democratic candidates, switched to vote for Trump.
- Now, just days after observing the reality of the Trump's Inauguration, that reality is sinking deeply into our consciousness. Trump's Inaugural address, and actions taken during his first days in office, clearly demonstrate that Trump intends to carry out his threats for revenge and retribution against his political "enemies;" to remake the institutions of the federal government into a subservient force to carry out his will; and to implement the tenets of his "America First" agenda.

Introduction (continued)

- Like many of you, I also feel the deep emotions of disappointment, anger, and grief. As we continue through our own individual journeys toward accepting reality, we will come face-to-face with what we do next? For that, we need a *strategy* - a strategy is not based on emotions; it requires forming achievable goals and defining the steps needed to accomplish them.
- Each of us must decide whether we will simply give up and accept what comes, or resume efforts to achieve the foundational vision we, as Americans, have inherited and is set forth in the Preamble to our Constitution:
“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity”
- Setting my motions aside, in the following discussion I provide an outline of the risks and opportunities I see in front of us. I identify goals we can reasonably *achieve* over the next two years. This is the first step toward developing a strategy - defining our goals. The second step is more challenging, how do we get there? What steps must we take to achieve the goals?
- After this presentation, we'll open up the discussion. Our purpose is to gather our collective thoughts and to share ideas on how to achieve these goals.

Lessons from Trump I

Donald Trump's first term as president began on January 20, 2017. Surprised by their victory, Trump and his staff were ill-prepared to assume office. Trump's first term main goals were to:

- Build a wall along the U.S. - Mexican to stem the flow of asylum seekers and imposing travel bans
 - Enact a massive tax cut for wealthy Americans and cut the safety net for lower income Americans
 - End the Affordable Health Care Act ("Obama Care")
 - Impose massive tariffs on most if not all U.S. imports for revenue purposes
 - Reduce America's support for and participation in international treaties, including the NATO mutual defense pact.
 - Though not an expressed goal, with McConnell's help, Trump also managed to appoint three new justices to the Supreme Court.
- Trump failed to achieve most of these goals. He was thwarted in his efforts by administrative and legal checks and balances. His only enduring achievement is the 2017 Tax Reform Act.
 - Trump demonstrated his inability to understand complex issues; to maintain discipline; and to build effective strategies for achieving his goals.
 - At the end of his first term, Trump resorted to criminal acts of violence and corruption in a failed attempt to overturn his re-election loss.

Trump II - Trump Unchained!

- Following his 2020 reelection loss, Trump and his close followers moved to consolidate their control over the Republican Party organization and to build strong bases of support in many states. They succeeded in this effort.
- Facing numerous federal and state indictments and lawsuits, Trump's attorneys managed to delay his trials through appeals. Trump was aided in this by several rulings from the Supreme Court, including the infamous *U.S. v Trump* ruling in which the Court held that presidents enjoyed broad immunities from prosecutions for official and unofficial acts, putting presidents above the law.
- In many Republican-controlled states, the 2021 redistricting was accomplished through "political" gerrymandering and upheld by the Supreme Court. The gerrymandering of both states' legislative and congressional districts gave tremendous advantage to the Republicans in the 2022 and 2024 congressional and state elections.
- The Republican Party now controls 28 state legislatures; the Democrats control 15. Four states are divided or non-partisan. Twenty-seven of the 50 state governors are Republican.

Trump II - Trump Unchained!

- As Trump begins his second term as president, his Republican Party controls narrow majorities in both the House and Senate.
- He enjoys the confidence and support of a majority of the Supreme Court justices, who have favored him with several important rulings greatly expanding the powers of the presidency.
- He has fended off all but one of the numerous criminal indictments brought against him, and has not been held to account for either his actions during the January 6th takeover of the U.S. Capitol, or for stealing and hiding confidential and secret U.S. documents.
- Trump's nominations for high-level cabinet, diplomatic, and administrative positions are based on the singular qualification of personal loyalty and obedience to him, not on experience, knowledge, or expertise in the areas of responsibility.
- Trump enjoys the benefit of the Project 2025 blueprint as a roadmap for consolidating his control over and dismantling of the federal bureaucracy.
- There are few guardrails left in place to constrain Trump's decisions and actions as president. The remaining exceptions are the individual states, through legal challenges; public opinion; and the Constitutional restrictions on term limits and periodic elections.
- As long as our Constitution remains viable and effective, our democracy survives.

Now, let's look at the three separated powers of the federal government ...

Trump's Executive Power

The Risks?

Without the usual safeguards on Executive power, the next four years under Trump's will be volatile and uncertain. As president, Trump expanded executive power enables him to:

- Raise tariffs that could harm U.S. trade interests abroad and likely trigger retaliation. Inflation will rise
- Order military forces to the U.S. border to prevent illegal entries, actively deny entry to asylum seekers, and undertake mass incarceration and deportations of non-citizens
- Subvert the independence of the Justice Department and the FBI, exacting his “revenge and retribution” on political “enemies”
- Seek foreign misadventures; perhaps to control or annex the PanamacCanal and Greenland, and pressure Canada and Mexico.
- Through performative and substantive “Executive Orders,” Trump can overturn or impose restrictions on individual rights; on existing laws; on Constitutional guarantees, such as “birthright citizenship” under the 14th Amendment; and dismantle civil service protections for federal workers.
- He can Issue pardons and commute sentences for whomever he pleases

Oour oppurtunities for Resistance

- Citizens, acting in a determined and coordinated manner, can raise popular opposition against the worst abuses of presidential power through public demonstrations and rallies aimed at gaining pubic support.
- Citizens may also challenge certain actions through the legal system or by petitioning Congress to take remedial actions, such as impeachment or remedial legislation.

The House of Representatives

The Risks?

- The “People’s House” is very narrowly divided, with 220 Republicans, 215 Democrats. Democrats gained 4 seats in the 2024 elections. Factions and faultlines are emerging in the Republican Caucus. On some issues, some Republicans may defect slowing the Republican agenda. Speaker Mike Johnson has only a narrow margin of support within the Republican Caucus. Any missteps on his part could result in his dismissal, as was done with Kevin McCarthy, leading to a Republican internal fight over his replacement
- The 2022-2024 House was the least productive in recent memory. The 2025-2-26 House is likely to suffer a similar experience. As a lame duck, Trump’s influence in the House may shrink as members no longer fear his wrath in their next election. Issues on which Republicans will struggle include selective tax cuts; “safety net” spending reductions; Social Security and Medicare reductions; restrictive immigration reforms; and a national abortion ban. Expect the House to experience a very volatile but relatively unproductive session.

Our opportunities for Resistance

- Support our local Democratic House members: Mike Levin, Scott Peters, and Sara Jacobs. Democrats have a chance to win back the House in the 2026 elections. They need just 3 seats. Further Republican gerrymandering may stand in the way.
- Prepare for our own 2026 Congressional district elections, and add support for key races in other districts.
- Communicate with neighbors and friends on the issues and key races in order to spread support.
- Stay informed, don’t “drop out.” Your voice and your vote matter!

The Senate

The Risks?

- Democrats lost four seats in the Senate, and the majority. Republicans hold 53 seats to 45 for the Democrats plus 2 Independents - King (I-ME) and Sanders (I-VT). Both King and Sanders caucus with Democrats. John Thune (R-SD) was elected Majority Leader, replacing McConnell who did not seek the office.
- Except for confirmations on administration and judicial nominations, and some budget matters, Democrats have the power to block most legislative matters by filibuster; this could prompt Republicans to change Senate rules. Democrats will have a strong bargaining chip. Democrats can prevent any legislation that violates core Democratic principles, and negotiate with Republicans for bi-partisan support on bills that serve the national interest.
- Most of Trump's nominations will be approved.
- Under Biden's Administration, both parties agreed on a bi-partisan Immigration Reform bill that Trump killed. Republicans will be less motivated to adopt any immigration reform, relying on executive power to accomplish their goals.

Our opportunities for Resistance

- In the 2026 election, 33 Senate seats will be open. Of these, 20 seats are currently held by Republicans and 13 are held by Democratic. Unlike in 2024, the advantage will swing to the Democrats. If Trump's popularity falls, Democrats may be in position to win a majority of Senate seats.
- Support and communicate with our California Senators, Alex Padilla and Adam Schiff; be prepared to support Democratic candidates running in key Republican states and Democratic incumbents seeking reelection.

Trump's Future Prospects

- At age 78, Trump is the oldest U.S. president ever to assume office. He has now achieved his primary goal of winning re-election and avoiding further criminal convictions and prison sentencing. As president, his top ambition is, as always, making more money. He has little interest in governing.
- Trump is unlikely to spend much time and energy in actually governing. This may account for his surrogate nominations to cabinet-level and administrative positions, of people like himself - billionaires and media personalities - whom he can rely on to do the actual work. As in "The Apprentice," expect Trump to command - and leave the responsibility to others to accomplish.
- Trump won this election by a narrow margin. He received less than a majority of votes. According to the polling website, "538," two days after Inauguration, Trump's "favorable" approval rating (46.4%) was *below* his "unfavorable" rating (48.0%). It can only get worse from here.
- Trump has already shown signs of aging before the election. If he should falter, Vice President J D Vance is a much younger 40 years of age. But Vance lacks the experience in public or elective office, having spent just two years in the Senate. The likelihood of mistakes and errors occurring during this administration seems high (the General Pardon issued for J6 convicts?). Similar mistakes could open up new opportunities for the Democrats.

The Challenges For the Democrats

- The Democratic Party faces huge challenges in overcoming the 2024 defeats. On February 1st, the Democratic leadership will elect a new DNC Chair. This gives an opportunity to find a new path for Democrats to win back voters. A new strategy must be developed. We need a reexamination of our traditional values and principles and a new formulation of our goals and priorities.
- Democrats must re-frame who we are in the minds of voters. In the 2024 election, 245 million Americans were eligible to vote. Just over 150 million did vote. Ninety million eligible voters, or 40%, did not vote. There were more non-voters than voters who voted for either party.
- Democrats have an opportunity to tap into this large body of non-voters. We need to learn why they are not voting so the Democratic Party can respond accordingly. We need not, and should not, sacrifice our core principles. We should tailor our message and platform within the framework of our core principles.
- The next few months is critical for leadership to reexamine the Party's overall practices and campaign strategies.
- In Congress, Democratic members of the House and Senate need to stand firm in opposition to any efforts that violate our core principles while, at the same time, stand ready to cooperate on matters of vital national interest.

Our Individual Responsibilities . . .

As Barak Obama wisely told us: “You are the change you want.” Here’s what *we* must do:

- Stop wasting time and energy trying to place blame for the 2024 election - it’s over!
- We’ve had two months or more to grieve and to console ourselves for the disappointments and lost opportunities of the 2024 election - it’s time to look ahead to the 2026 midterms.
- This is OUR Party - we have a responsibility to help redefine who we are, who we represent, and how we reach voters. The Party needs the resources *you* can bring to the table.
- Support the DNC - we need to rebuild the party treasury and to recruit new active members, like us.
- Support your favorite elected representatives wherever they are - sign up for and read their weekly updates to stay informed on the issues.
- If you haven’t done so already, join and participate in the local Democratic Club of your choosing. We gain strength and ability through association with people who share our values and interests.
- Stay informed! Subscribe to the emerging new online journalists and writers - Heather Cox Richardson, Robert Hubbell, Joyce Vance, Jennifer Reuben, Robert Reich, Steve Schmidt, Jamelle Bouie, and others. This is where the *real* news is found - no bots, trolls, or foreign fake news! Subscribe to *independent* general news sources - *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Associated Press*.

JOIN THE DIALOGUE - HELP DEFINE OUR FUTURE

Here are a few suggestions to get us started:

- How should the DNC prepare to capture the attention of Non-voters and Democratic voters who turned off in the past election?
- What do you consider to be the most important values and principles of the Democratic Party?
- What do you think needs to change in the Democratic Party platform or Party structure?
- How can you help elect Democrats win elections to the House and Senate?
- How can you spread “the word” about the benefits of voting for Democrats?
- Any other thoughts or ideas you’d like to share?