

In answer to a Newsweek article that said Trump was slipping in the polls:

This is grim. I hope it isn't true. But if it is, the last paragraph gives us our marching orders.

We've been reading stories like this for over a decade. Each one meant to signify an inflection point, a turning of the tide. Yet the tide never turns.

As of today, Donald Trump's supposedly "tanking" approval rating stands at 47%. Which is pretty much where it's been for the past eleven years. Yes, its seen upticks and downturns over that time, occasionally even dipping into the thirties. Yes, a majority of Americans disapprove of the tariffs. Yes, a majority think the economy is heading in the wrong direction. And yes, a majority disapprove of the job Trump is doing.

That's not new. Trump's popularity has almost never been above 50%, except for very brief periods of time. He's never needed it to be. His power derives not from the size but the durability of his popular support, and there's rarely been an approval rating as stubbornly durable as his.

Especially given the hundreds — thousands — of incidents over the past decade that would have sunk the careers of, say, Kamala Harris, Joe Biden, Barack Obama, or Hillary Clinton.

Think of it. All the corruption, the scandal, the pain and death and misery. All the insults to human decency and injuries to democratic ideals.

And his numbers are still pretty much where they were when it all started.

I am uninterested in whatever minor fluctuation will follow yesterday's vile display in the Oval Office, or tomorrow's outrage, or next week's. They will mean nothing.

What Trump supporters (as a whole, as a voting bloc, PLEASE don't tell me about your MAGA cousin who's having second thoughts) are thinking means nothing. The only thing that matters is what Trump's opponents are thinking. What we're thinking.

I remember making posts like this during Trump's first term, and wondering exactly what I'm wondering right now.

Which is very much not, "What will it take for his supporters to turn away from him," but rather, "What will it take for his opponents to realize his supporters won't turn away from him?"

Because the answer to that question is crucial. It will shape everything that happens over the next few weeks and months.

If, as I suspect, a sizable number of us are sitting at home today thinking that Trump's open defiance of a Supreme Court ruling, refusal to return an innocent, legal resident of the US from a gulag in El Salvador, and declaration that he wants to send American citizens to the same prison without due process, will somehow harm his approval rating, that does not bode well for our side.

Nothing will harm his approval rating.

Sure it might — might — go down a few points in the next few days. It won't mean a thing. Give it a few weeks.

To believe otherwise is to not understand the story of the Trump era. The story of the Trump era isn't "A bad man came along and duped a bunch of well-meaning, gullible people." Donald Trump didn't conjure his supporters from the ether with his magic MAGA wand. His supporters conjured him.

They wanted him. Badly. They'd been looking, searching, begging, screaming for someone like him, pushing every Republican candidate further and further to the right with every election cycle, demanding loudly that they "take a tougher" line on this, and "not give an inch" on that, that they "tell it like it is," and "say what everyone is thinking," for years. For decades.

They weren't duped.

They are never going to see the light. (Of course a few will, here and there. But not in meaningful numbers.) There will be no scales falling from eyes, no epiphanies, no death bed conversions. Not among the bedrock base, which has not budged an inch in ten years.

They waved signs that said, MASS DEPORTATIONS NOW at their third Trump convention.

They weren't duped.

The only duping that's gone on is the self-duping many of us have been guilty of for many years. It's a very human, very understandable, thing to do. To think better of your fellow human beings than perhaps they do themselves. To believe that, with enough patience, empathy, education and reason they are bound to see the error of their ways.

That belief is a dangerous one in this moment. It manifests in political choices that are bound to not only fail, but help the bad guys continue doing bad things.

It doesn't matter if a few thousand Trump supporters see the error of their ways. It doesn't matter if this or that Republican politician is momentarily seized by courage or conscience and speaks up about his or her disappointment in the president. The overwhelming majority of Trump supporters will remain Trump supporters NO MATTER WHAT.

Did you ever think you'd see Republican voters support a candidate who was openly subservient to Russia? Did you ever think you'd see them support a flagrant, serial adulterer and drug user? A denigrator of the military? A draft dodger? A New Yorker?

In 2014 Republicans raged at President Obama for supposedly not working hard enough to stop the Ebola epidemic. Six years later they followed Trump's lead and physically threatened people working to stop an epidemic.

Nothing will shake them.

Well, almost nothing.

There is one thing, one thing Donald Trump could do to lose significant support. And no, it is not making his supporters "feel the pain." It is not making them poor. These are people who are openly welcoming an imminent recession.

No, the one and only thing Donald Trump could do to tank his approval rating would be to stand in front of a camera and say, "Black and Latino people are as fully human as any white man or woman. They are possessed of the same inalienable rights, and deserving of the full enjoyment of those rights and the opportunities they promise, opportunities they have for too long been denied."

Now THAT would be a deal breaker.

Because that's the deal. They give him everything, he gives them fewer Black actors on their TV's, fewer Black managers at their offices, fewer Latino pilots on their planes, fewer Spanish names on the backs of their team's uniforms.

He breaks THAT deal, and all bets are off.

So we need to get it straight. We cannot see this struggle as a debate, as a project of persuasion. If some MAGA supporters are persuaded along the way, great! I say welcome them with open arms. And never, ever stop fighting hard to make their lives better. All of their lives.

But progress is going to come when we, not they, see the light. Before the left can meaningfully slow the MAGA rampage it needs to come to terms with the fact that the enemy isn't merely Trump, but the people who put him in the White House.

That is a very hard thing for a lot of us on the left to accept about our countrymen. But this struggle is more analogous to a civil war than it is to a heightened disagreement between political parties. We won't win it by persuading the enemy, but by overwhelming him.

Our energies should be channeled towards each other. Galvanizing, motivating, and enabling each other. Creating and sustaining solidarity. We can get a hundred first-time protestors out in the streets, or first-time voters to the polls, for the same investment it takes to turn one MAGA supporter toward the light.

Our hope doesn't lie in Trump's poll numbers going down. It lies in our commitment to keeping students from being disappeared and government workers from being fired and cancer research labs from being defunded and democracy from being destroyed.

Our hope doesn't lie with them, it lies with us.

