

What's at stake in the next four years

Avoid the media distractions. Focus on collective responses to Trump.

From the Editors in the [December 21, 2016](#) issue



Getty Images News via Thinkstock.

President-elect Donald Trump has shown himself highly skilled at using social media to keep the nation talking about himself, with little regard for how many people he offends, norms he violates, or untruths he disseminates. He has used his Twitter account to lash out at the cast of *Hamilton* for daring to advise him, and he has declared (with no basis in fact) that millions of Clinton votes were counted fraudulently.

The danger for critics who respond to Trump tweet by tweet is that they become so consumed with taking offense that they lose focus on more substantive issues and lose the energy to engage in more helpful forms of response over the long haul. In her 1967 essay "Truth and Politics," Hannah Arendt asked, "Is not impotent truth just as despicable as power that gives no heed to truth?" The question of the

moment is how to make truth potent.

Potent responses to the issues of governance likely to be raised in the months ahead include:

- Protecting constitutional rights and being alert to occasions when freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion are in jeopardy.
- Defending stewardship of the environment. Almost all scientists agree that abandoning limits on greenhouse gas emissions and watering down environmental regulations will imperil the planet and its most vulnerable citizens.
- Encouraging policies that narrow income inequalities and provide genuine economic opportunity to all workers—and that don't pit one segment against another.
- Keeping an eye on where the money goes. As a businessman with financial dealings around the globe, Trump needs to distance himself firmly from his own business operations so as to avoid directly enriching himself in office and adjusting policies to serve his interests.
- Speaking up alongside immigrants and their families, those who are targets of hate crimes, and all those whose voices are rarely heard by decision makers.
- Building up diverse coalitions that work to meet the needs of people at the local level, thereby strengthening the basis for more truthful political discourse.

Arendt observed that image-producing politicians try to create an alternative reality with which to deceive or manipulate the public. This fictive alternative reality has to be countered, she said, by people “who have managed to escape its spell and insist on talking about facts or events that do not fit the image.” A potent response comes, in other words, from those who know the lived realities of their neighbors and communities.

A version of this article appears in the December 21 print edition under the title “Resisting the spell.”