

Four steps to surviving the toxic 2024 election

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The 2024 campaign season has become a magician's hat of sorts, with new tricks, shocking moments — and near indescribable terrors — emerging on a near-hourly basis.

The consternation caused by political prosecutions, accusations of diminished mental capacity and persistent battles over policy is enough to induce anxiety in even the calmest among us.

The heaviness of the uncertainty cannot be overstated, and the intensity of our individual political opinions is almost unparalleled. Maybe the echo chambers have become stronger, our compassions have waned, the stakes are higher than ever — or it's an amalgam of all three.

Regardless, the result for most of us has been a slew of powder kegs waiting to implode friendships, relationships and even familial bonds. Americans are perhaps more on edge than they've been in decades, with commotion and insanity threatening any semblance of unity.

Sadly, respite is nowhere in sight, as we're still four months away from Election Day. In politics, that's an eternity. And if history is any barometer, anger and frustration are almost certain to ramp up in some quarters even after the election, regardless of who wins.

So, how do we survive this seemingly never-ending campaign — a political nightmare with the power to splinter our relationships? How do we thrive amid a presidential election cycle colored by profound dysfunction and pandemonium?

Believe it or not, the answers are simple. But navigating such choppy waters requires grit, determination and persistence. Let's explore four steps to making it through the 2024 election unscathed.

1. Know when to speak — and when to hold your tongue. Too many of us assume every thought and whim needs to be verbalized. But when our speech is unrestrained, calamity almost always follows. This is especially true in contentious election cycles.

Proverbs offers some of the most beneficial advice. “The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge,” Proverbs 15:2 (NIV) reads. “But the mouth of the fool gushes folly.” A few chapters later, Proverbs 18:21 gets even more candid, proclaiming: “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

For many of us, folly is our go-to and the forbidden fruit of selfish banter is our beloved delicacy. Yet being more intentional about what we say — and don’t say — is the most elevating life hack to protect ourselves and loved ones this election cycle.

2. We must stop seeing others as enemies. Don’t get me wrong: There are millions of people with deplorable and damaging ideas, perspectives and belief systems. But rather than spewing hatred, a different approach would serve us well.

Dehumanization based on politics has done nothing to enrich our society and has bred only rampant disdain. Furthermore, from a practical sense, the more successful approach involves targeting bad ideas with logic, dismantling them by positively engaging and asking thoughtful questions that help others see the error of their ways.

Lambasting people as “stupid” and treating them inhumanely won’t do much to move the needle, and it certainly won’t paint you in a favorable light. If you can’t bring yourself to respect others enough to engage calmly, perhaps you should choose eternal electoral silence.

3. Stop allowing emotions to drive your commentary and political posture. Facts matter, and logic is paramount. Too often we embrace poor policy ideas or excuse bad behavior from politicians we like while diminishing almost everything an opposing public official says or does.

Many times, this comes at the expense of truth, with people elevating emotion over reality. Not only is this a dishonest way to approach issues and elections, but it’s also a blatant decision to choose lies, deceit and ideological lethargy over goodness and righteousness.

If we're going to walk around claiming "facts don't care about your feelings," then we must ensure we're allowing discernible truths to dominate our perspectives and behaviors.

And don't be afraid of opposing views. It's not about ushering in some sort of unrealistic, utopian moment where people magically agree with one another. Rather, listening to others' perspectives without internally or externally imploding allows us to understand better where people stand so we can refine our own views.

Beyond that, it's tough to formulate counterarguments if there's no baseline for comprehending others' beliefs and values. This is one of the biggest reasons anti-conservative bias in media, Hollywood and education has so profoundly harmed progressives, sending many into a panic anytime they encounter an idea with which they disagree.

4. Make a concerted effort to be a better person this election cycle. As a Christian, I often find myself praying for God to help me be kinder, gentler and more in line with the Lord's will for my life. Regardless of where you stand theologically, the Bible points to something called the "fruit of the Spirit," and it refers to the standing we should have toward people.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) reads, with the Scripture also proclaiming, "Against such things there is no law."

It's hard to argue against the benefits of these sentiments in general, but in a flammable election year, these values are indispensable. Rather than basting in emotional rot, let's take steps toward embracing these fruits. After all, our national sanity depends on it