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## **Fear And Politics Is Trump's Formula, It Won't Stop Now**

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*"America is a proud nation of immigrants,"* Donald Trump declared in defense of his controversial executive order banning travel from seven countries, *"and we will continue to show compassion to those fleeing oppression, but we will do so while protecting our own citizens and border."* Terrorism and immigration were two core issues in Trump's successful presidential campaign, as he seamlessly melded the the politics of terrorism, of immigration and of border security. Whether or not it is upheld by the courts, his executive order last week banning immigration from seven countries honored a central commitment to his base, many of whom believe that banning Muslims is essential to national security and to their security. They believe that, at least in part, because he told them so.

In the 2016 election, according to Pew Research, terrorism was the second most important issue influencing people's votes — the first being the economy — as 70 percent of those polled said that it was a very important factor affecting their vote. But perspectives on the issue break down, as in all things these days, along highly partisan lines, with 58 percent of Republicans suggesting that the nation is more vulnerable to a major attack than on 9/11, as compared to 31 percent of Democrats and 34 percent of independents.

While the politics of terrorism are now tightly linked to the politics of immigration, as Trump's words suggest, the actual links between terrorism and immigration are far more tenuous. This week, Kellyanne Conway tripped herself up in an interview on MSNBC as she sought to justify the newly instituted travel ban by citing a "Bowling Green massacre," ostensibly committed by two Iraqi immigrants that, as it turned out, never took place.

If Conway resorted to alternative facts to justify the immigration ban, it may be because the real facts surrounding high profile terrorist attacks on U.S. soil since 9/11 do not fit the Trump campaign narrative. Most notably, Syrian refugees — the nationals specifically excluded from

entry to the United States in the executive order — have committed no recorded terrorist attacks in the United States. It is an inconvenient fact that none of the terrorist attacks in recent years have been committed by either refugees or immigrants from the targeted countries. Each of the high profile attacks since 9/11 — Boston, Orlando, San Bernardino, Charleston, Fort Hood, Chattanooga, Fort Lauderdale — were committed by perpetrators that were either native born or came to the United States as children.

As the Pew data above suggests, terrorism — or more accurately, fear of terrorism — is an intensely political issue. Fear of terrorism, a study by the CATO Institute suggested, has led to a disproportionate public response with respect to immigration, particularly relative to the history and real risks of terrorist attacks. According to the CATO Institute report, of the 154 foreign born terrorists who killed 3,014 people during the period 1975 through 2015 — of whom all but 37 of whom were killed on 9/11 — ten were immigrants who entered the country illegally, 54 were legal, permanent residents, 19 were students, 20 were refugees, 34 entered on tourist visas, and three were from Visa Waiver Program countries.

Over the past 40 years, the study concluded, the odds of an American being murdered by a foreign-born terrorist was 1 in 3.6 million a year, while the odds of an American being murdered in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee was a thousand time less, or 1 in 3.6 billion a year. In comparison, the odds of being murdered by anybody other than a foreign-born terrorist was more than 250 times greater than the chance of dying in a terrorist attack committed by a foreign-born terrorist. As many similar studies have observed, car accidents, accidental gunshot wounds, slipping or drowning in a bathtub, and being struck by lightning are far more likely causes of death than terrorist attacks.

Fear of terrorism is, of course, the prime objective of terrorism. It is, in part, why data such as that provided by the CATO Institute is almost never a material consideration in any public discussion. Fear of terrorist attacks among many Americans is palpable. This past summer, at the Republican National Convention, I asked Dianna, a delegate from Massachusetts, what drew her to Trump. “It was the Muslims.” She replied. She was not talking about some Muslims, she was talking about all Muslims. She wanted them all out of the country. She was deeply affected by the Boston marathon bombing — which left five dead and 280 injured — and when Donald Trump called for a ban on Muslims entering the country in December 2015, she was sold. She loves Trump because he said what she felt. There was none of the political correctness stuff, just what she believed to be the truth.

Trump’s language in his December 2015 manifesto was incendiary. He justified his call for a ban by suggesting, first, that more than half of American Muslims would like to be governed under Shariah law, and then, in the next sentence, arguing that Shariah law “authorizes” murdering non-believers who refuse to convert, beheadings, *“and more unthinkable acts that pose great harm to Americans, especially women.”* Trump then concludes that *“it is obvious to anybody the hatred is beyond comprehension... our country cannot be the victims of horrendous attacks by people that believe only in Jihad, and have no sense of reason or respect for human life.”*

In the months that followed, Trump succumbed to political correctness and softened his call for a ban, but his followers like Dianna knew where he stood and loved him for it. In crafting last

week's executive order banning Muslims from seven targeted countries from the United States, Trump was keeping faith with his supporters. For Dianna, as for millions of his most dedicated followers, Trump's commitment to pursue a ban on Muslim entering the country was unchanged. It was what they wanted and it was what he directed Rudy Giuliani to accomplish, as far as legally possible.

Rudy Giuliani has insisted that what makes the Muslim ban not a Muslim ban is that it rests on a "factual" basis focused on "sources of danger," not on religion. His words, *'this is about factual sources of danger, not about religion'*, is a legal formulation that may or may not survive court challenges, but it is also an old fashioned "dog whistle." It lets Trump and his supporters discuss the executive order using relatively politically acceptable language — and deny any intention to target Muslims — knowing that his supporters will hear and understand that it is intended to do exactly that.

It's just that Donald Trump has never been one to use a whistle, subtlety is not his style. He prefers a bull horn: Mexicans are rapists. Muslims want to cut your head off. That kind of thing. The problem with trying to claim that the ban is not about Islam is that for Dianna and a large part of Trump's base — to say nothing of his chief political strategist and alter ego Steve Bannon — it is avowedly about Islam. Fear is good politics. It is the formula that got him to the White House; there is no reason to expect him to stop now.