



INDEPENDENT

My conservative case against Trump's border wall makes sense — even if you don't like that I'm a liberal.

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The immense political divide in the US gnaws at me. Call me naïve, but I believe that at our core, most of us want the same or similar things. We simply disagree on how to best achieve them. If only we could find common ground, I tell myself, we could actually come up with solutions that satisfy both sides of the aisle.

So when a Facebook friend challenged “liberals” like me to make a case “not based on emotion” on why we oppose Trump’s border wall, I decided to use conservative sources to back up my arguments.

Most illegal immigrants are people who overstay their legal visas, I argued - and most illegal drugs are smuggled in through legal points of entry, hidden in secret containers or trucks. Walls are also impractical, expensive, and have a barely discernible impact on illegal immigration according to the Congressional Research Center. Most border patrol agents would rather have more manpower and better technology and are concerned about walls causing surveillance blind-spots. Walls also prevent seasonal workers who provide cheap labour from entering and exiting.

Surely, I figured, as I typed out these responses to my friend, we’d find common ground if I spoke “his language.”

I figured wrong.

My friend not only deleted my response, he deleted the whole thread. I didn’t want to lose the research, so I [reposted my findings on Medium](#). To my astonishment, the piece took off and currently has 1.8 million views (if only my books sold as much!)

However, despite the conservative sourcing, a great many wall supporters went on the attack after reading my article. Variations of, “Your facts are wrong, your logic is stupid, and you’re an idiot” followed me round social media. Again and again, angry commenters decried “my” facts. But here’s the thing: they weren’t “mine.” If facts could be owned (which, of course, they cannot), I wanted to say, they’d be yours.

Conservative sources showed that walls over vast distances are ineffective—they don’t work unless they’re militarised to an extreme extent. People tunnel under, drive over, or cut through. Or they enter where walls cannot be built because of natural barriers. Plus, considering the majority of illegal immigrants are “over-stayers”, the wall is meaningless if you really want to drive down immigration.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) itself says the majority of illegal drugs come into the country through existing ports of entry. Wouldn't it make more sense to pour money into enhancing security where most of the drug supply is actually coming in?

Then there is the issue of "eminent domain"—private citizens own much of the land slated for the wall. Do conservatives seriously support the government snatching private property from citizens? The payouts, entanglements, and legal costs involved are likely to be immense.

It wasn't me but the right-wing libertarian think-tank the Cato Institute that concluded, "President Trump's wall would be a mammoth expenditure that would have little impact on illegal immigration...[and] will harm the lives of thousands of border residents...while wasting billions of tax dollars."

It was the business-oriented *Harvard Business Review* that pointed out, "It's not realistic to erect a physical barrier...without weakening your own economy and putting in jeopardy 1.1 million American jobs." And it was MIT engineers who calculated that a border wall would actually cost \$31.2bn. We might as well take the \$5bn currently requested and toss it to the desert winds for all the difference it will make.

Interestingly, some of my liberal friends wanted to know why I didn't include a discussion on human suffering (people dying in the desert, and so on) or the immense environmental harm a wall would inflict. "Because I was trying to speak their language," I explained. "To focus on what *they* cared about."

I'd hoped this approach would inspire folks to take a step back and look at what experts from both sides say would work on our immigration challenges—policy changes and investments in technology and manpower.

Did seeing research from their side of the aisle inspire those on the fence (excuse the pun) to at least reconsider their position on the wall? Who can say? However, I still think using conservative research to reach conservatives—and vice versa—is a valid way to begin a dialogue. It's really a matter of respect—it's an acknowledgment that you are willing to see things from their point of view and find common ground.

Could this approach make a difference when arguing about such hot-button issues as abortion or global warming? I don't know, but perhaps attempting to might short-circuit the automatic emotional response that paints issues in black or white and keeps us stuck in cycles of outrage.

For that reason alone, it's worth trying.