

## Public was primed for Trump

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Are chickens finally coming home to roost for conservative ideologues willing to ignore the covert racial dog-whistling promoted by the candidates they supported for public office?

Over many generations, politically active conservatives have assumed ordinary voters shared the basic conservative premise that governmental efforts to promote the common good and address social injustice are a threat to the magic of the marketplace or likely to have perverse or futile results.

Now they find conservative goals dependent upon an energetic GOP voter base mobilized by Trumpian bigotry towards immigrants, Muslims and Hispanics, even as average GOP voter sentiment remains profoundly unmoved and even antagonistic towards long-desired conservative policies such as the gigantic GOP tax cut “stimulus” favoring wealthy “job creators” and free trade across international borders.

Despite the horror that many prominent conservative columnists (e.g., Jennifer Rubin, Max Boot, George Will, David Brooks) and politicians (all the Bushes and a sizable list of former and current Republican governors) feel about Trumpian bigotry and the administration’s departures from traditional conservatism, political science research over many decades has thoroughly demolished the notion that ordinary voters are motivated by any consistent ideology. It matters not whether they temporarily respond to ill-defined brands like “conservative” or “liberal.”

The most highly regarded academic research into the 2016 presidential election found that Trump appealed to those who favored anti-trade policies, large entitlement programs (Social Security and Medicare) and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Such attitudes were, in the language of the authors, “hiding in plain sight,” ready to be “activated” by any politician ready to exploit them.

Wild applause in Trump’s West Virginia rallies for a president whose conduct and bellicose rhetoric threatens the very notion of the rule of law and norms essential to a constitutional republic, once thought essential to traditional conservatism, suggests a profound loss of common sense. Indeed, the president’s decision in a Charleston rally last year to highlight crimes committed by alleged foreigners suggests a revival of the worst anti-immigrant and racist traditions in our history, whether embedded in the 19th century Know Nothing movement or the Jim Crow era which theoretically ended in the 1960s.

Immigrants were attacked as if they are a howling mob of wildlings bent on rape, murder and destruction of our way of life — in a state that has one of the smallest immigrant populations in the nation. The fact that official statistics confirm that violent crimes are much more likely to be committed by fellow citizens is never acknowledged by Trumpian acolytes. (For those who prefer facts, consult the libertarian Cato Institute online or the American Immigration Council,

which suggest immigrants are far more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators.) The Dear Leader's only concern is to create in the public imagination an "alien" that only he can defend us against. We are headed into full-scale, dimwitted fascism.

However, it is important not to give exclusive attention to the lead demagogue. The assault on our republic can occur because the president can rely upon an insurgent radicalized base built up or condoned over many years by professed "conservatives." The mob-like orientation Trump depends upon grew out of a long tradition scapegoating racial, ethnic or religious minorities as threats to the "American" way of life.

Consider the evidence. Even before Trump was nominated, 73 percent of declared members of his party wanted to ban Muslims from entering the United States, while most thrilled to the dog whistle which suggested that President Obama was not really an American, but a foreigner born in Kenya. Ninety percent wanted to immediately deport 12 million undocumented immigrants, thrilling to the bellicose rhetoric that proclaimed them largely "rapists" or drug dealers, rather than workers employed by American citizens to harvest agricultural goods, work in low paying factories and provide a variety of services that most Americans would not provide themselves because of the low pay or status involved.

After his election, the Dear Leader could proceed with silence from his own party as his administration separated children from immigrants seeking asylum, putting them in cages even as their parents were denied a hearing and deported. The longstanding evaporation of Fourth Amendment protections along international borders could extend inland as ICE enforcers boarded buses and raided restaurants across the United States, including West Virginia. Already, steps are taken to examine the credentials of legal immigrants to see if that status can be revoked. Non-citizens willing to fight in the armed forces are now denied citizenship for their service, violating a very old and proud American precedent. Many citizens near the Mexican border have their passports questioned because they are Hispanic. The logical next step, favored by some right-wing fanatics, would be to deny birthright citizenship itself, reversing a key constitutional consequence of the Civil War.

We can expect the assault on the republic to accelerate as Trump appoints conservative Federalist Society nominees to all parts of the federal bench, undermining the judicial neutrality upon which our country depends. We can assume other traditionally conservative goals, such as deregulation of standards for air and water quality as well as slashed government agencies established during the Progressive era and the New Deal to continue, fully enabled by the Trumpian appeal to bigotry. In such manner, conservative ideologues will achieve what they want, having sold their souls to the devil.