



State of the race: 'Cancel culture' and polling don't mix

October 19, 2020

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Justin Kucera was a teacher and baseball coach at a Michigan high school who tweeted the fact that “@realDonaldTrump is our president.” District administrators offered him a choice: Leave on your terms, or ours.

Robyn Polak was a dental assistant and single mother in Wisconsin who posted her support for the president one day before he held a rally in Milwaukee. Soon after, she was fired.

Lizzy Matthews, a nurse who had worked for Denver Health Medical Center for 27 years, answered honestly when one of her patients asked what she thought about the candidates before the 2016 election. She lost her job.

There has been one message since 2016 directed at the president's supporters, and it's been very clear: speak at your own peril. Your opinions are wrong — harmful, even — and actions will be taken if you decide to express them.

It's no wonder some are beginning to question if these thought-restrictions are having any effects. If you believe the Cato Institute, more than 60 percent of Americans ensor themselves politically out of fear for how others will react. Free speech is dead — and, ironically, the liberal-minded killed it. Just ask the New York Post.

But what does this actually mean, that one of progressive icon FDR's “Four Freedoms” is gone as a liberal virtue? It depends on who you ask.

Ask Nate Silver, the man behind the popular political analytics website FiveThirtyEight, who can't seem to admit his 2016 forecasts were incorrect, and you'll probably hear that it means absolutely nothing. Opinion polling is the gold standard of political research. FiveThirtyEight even ranks the pollsters they follow for their accuracy to show how dedicated to data they are. Nothing could possibly be wrong — the statistical methodology is sound.

Ask Timur Kuran, economics and political science professor at Duke University, and he'd probably explain to you that you're likely to see an idea he formalized called “preference falsification” become more widespread. It's a simple concept really: stating one opinion publicly,

but actually believing something else. No one understands this phenomenon better than he does — he wrote an entire book on it.

The media has argued back and forth with each other over the question of whether so-called “silent Trump supporters” are out there. Since they decided that Maoist insurrections that “cancel” people for thought-crimes are not only okay, but are encouraged, the answer is undoubtedly “Yes.” It’s a matter of how many there are.

I’ll say this simply for the people who still have a hard time understanding 2016: Polling will not give you this answer. Ever.

I’ve spent the last four years doing my part to help President Trump have an astoundingly successful first term. If I ever got a call from a pollster (which I haven’t), I’d have no fear of answering honestly about which candidate earned my vote.

But not everyone is comfortable sharing what the left and their friends in the media and big institutions have deemed to be an invalid opinion. It can, and does, get you fired. Answering a pollster who called your phone, and knew your name, creates a record of your choice for president. There’s real risk in saying the name “Donald Trump” — someday, it could be used against you.

Don’t think we aren’t seeing this in action. The New York Times gleefully reported an 8-point lead for Joe Biden in Michigan in early October (that was still within the poll’s margin of error, but hear me out). Its same poll showed John James, an absolute rising star in the Republican Party, polling just one point behind the incumbent Democrat, Gary Peters, in the race for the U.S. Senate. Be honest with yourself — those aren’t crossover voters. “Preference falsification” could be very real.

No one will fire you for saying you support John James. Donald Trump, on the other hand...

It’s not that numbers don’t tell you anything — they do. For example, across the top six battleground states, conventional polling, with all its errors, says Trump is in a better position at this time against Joe Biden than he was at the same time four years ago against Hillary Clinton. Likewise, Republicans notably cut the Democrats’ voter registration advantage since 2016 in Pennsylvania, Arizona, North Carolina and Florida. And early returns from mail-in voting, a practice more popular among Democrats than Republicans, offer a picture of the relative state of the race come the time the majority of Trump voters show up on Election Day to cast their votes.

I’ve said this for years, and I’ll say it again: The only poll that matters is the one on Election Day. It’s the only poll where everyone who answers will answer what they truly feel.

Sometimes the “experts” can get it right — but when the “cancel culture” political left has scared at least half the country out of speaking honestly, maybe Professor Kuran’s “Private Truths, Public Lies” is worth a read.