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Conservatives should reject Trump's sanctuary city policy

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Sanctuary cities are back in the news, thanks to Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids. The raids come only weeks after President Trump signed an executive order requiring that federal funds be withheld from sanctuary cities.

This order is a betrayal of the federalism that conservatives claim to support.

Even if the sanctuary provisions of the order did not raise serious constitutional concerns, they would be unwise policy. According to the Center for Immigration Studies, which supports limiting immigration, there are about 300 jurisdictions that deserve the sanctuary label, which describes areas where local officials have decided not to assist the federal government in enforcing immigration law.

Sanctuary policies and practices include barring police from asking crime victims or witnesses about immigration status, as well as forbidding officers from stopping someone solely to determine their status.

Although some might like to portray sanctuary cities as lawless holdouts run by politicians who consider political correctness their North Star, the fact is sanctuary policies can help improve police-community relationships.

Shortly after the November presidential election, Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck said the LAPD would continue its policy of not stopping people to confirm immigration status. San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera, who is leading that city's lawsuit against Trump's executive order, wrote, "Using city and county resources for federal immigration enforcement breeds distrust of local government and officials."

Such sentiments are not unique to the West Coast. University of San Francisco law Professor Bill Hing identified sanctuary policies across the country. According to Hing, sanctuary policies "are adopted as measures of good policing." Police departments have found that sanctuary policies can improve trust in police.

Such trust is crucial to policing. A 2013 PolicyLink survey found that 44 percent of Latinos were less likely to contact police if they'd been the victim of a crime because they fear police inquiring after their immigration status or the status of people they know. This attitude also affects Latino Americans, with 28 percent of U.S.-born Latinos expressing the same sentiment.

It's not hard to see why officers in some communities prefer sanctuary policies to being perceived as deputized federal agents.

The mayor of Austin, Texas, which is about 35 percent Latino or Hispanic, criticized the recent raids, saying, "(We) have a community that is, quite frankly, scared. There's a lot of uncertainty here. It's, unfortunately, undermining a lot of the trust relationship that had been built up with our public safety officials."

In some communities officials have determined that sanctuary policies are better for their community than using local police to enforce federal immigration laws. If enough constituents in these jurisdictions oppose sanctuary policies, then they can make these opinions known at elections. It's notable that in some cities, sanctuary policies have been in place for decades. San Francisco became a sanctuary city in 1989.

Opposing Trump's sanctuary policies should be easy for Republicans. The 2016 Republican Party platform praises federalism and bemoans the Obama administration's encroachments on state sovereignty in a range of areas, including immigration.

Many conservatives claim to revere federalism on many issues, including education, transportation and health care. They correctly argue that decisions about these areas are best made locally, not in Washington, D.C. Those supporting Trump's executive order ought to consider that local officials know more than White House staffers about what policing strategies are best for their constituents.

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