



Braced for battle on rights

Members of minority religions await Trump administration plans

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Since Election Day, spikes in support for groups that defend religious and other minorities speak to a fear that Donald Trump as president will trample on their rights and empower those who want to.

What the Trump administration will mean for Muslims, Jews, Hindus and other minority faiths depends on what policies he pursues, what federal judges and officials charged to uphold the Constitution will allow and the tone he sets on religious tolerance and pluralism.

Trump has so far picked:

Retired Lt. Gen. Michael T. Flynn, who has described Islam as "a cancer," as his national security adviser.

Stephen Bannon, who ran the Trump campaign criticized for playing to voters' Islamophobia and trafficking in anti-Semitic imagery, as his senior adviser.

Kansas Secretary of State Kris Korbach, who backs resurrecting a registry of immigrants from nations where terrorist groups flourish, as a transition team adviser.

On "60 Minutes," Trump called minorities' fear of his presidency is "totally unfounded" and he said the media exaggerated reports of his supporters committing hate crimes — although when pressed, he uttered an emphatic "stop it" to those who harass minorities.

"At this point we are going to take him at his word," said the ACLU's Daniel Mach on the likelihood that Trump would make good on his call for a ban on Muslims entering the country, increased surveillance of mosques and the "extreme vetting" of Muslim immigrants and visitors to the U.S.

Faiza Patel, co-director of the Brennan Center's Liberty and National Security Program at NYU Law School, said the FBI could be directed to increase surveillance and investigations of Muslims and mosques.

At a time when Muslims face high levels of hate crimes, "There's a real risk of a message coming from the highest levels of government that equates terrorism with Islam," Patel said.

Jewish groups and politicians have charged that Trump campaign ads and social media stoke anti-Semitic flames, employing symbols and age-old language used by conspiracy theorists to spread anti-Jewish hatred.

Jewish-Americans chose Hillary Clinton over Trump by a nearly 3-1 ratio, with some Jews taking solace in Trump's fond references to Jewish people, his daughter who converted to Judaism and his praise for Israel.

More Jewish Americans seemed to side with Jane Eisner, editor of the Forward, who wrote that "the anti-Semitic sentiments of the far right are closer to the center of political power than they have been in recent memory."

At the conservative Cato Institute, Jim Harper, who studies counterterrorism, worries a Trump administration poses a threat to minority religious rights, but he also points to countervailing forces that may mean the worst of those threats will not be realized.

"The agencies that would implement these policies are not fans of Trump," he said. "They regard him as outside the mainstream. And someone who might obey a Republican or Democrat in the traditional vein may decline to implement truly ugly policies — or do such a bad job you can't tell the difference."