



CITING VIOLENCE TRENDS, TRUMP TO CAMPAIGN AS ‘LAW AND ORDER CANDIDATE’

Dustin Siggins

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Accepting the Republican Party’s nomination in July, New York City businessman Donald Trump declared himself a standard-bearer for voters who believe there is increasing unrest and violence in the country.

“Americans watching this address tonight have seen the recent images of violence in our streets and the chaos in our communities,” Trump said during his high-profile nomination acceptance speech at the Republican Party’s national convention in Cleveland, Ohio. “Many have witnessed this violence personally. Some have even been its victims. I have a message for all of you: The crime and violence that today afflicts our nation will soon come to an end. Beginning on January 20, 2017, safety will be restored.

“In this race for the White House, I am the law-and-order candidate,” Trump said. “Our convention occurs at a moment of crisis for our nation. The attacks on our police and the terrorism in our cities threaten our very way of life.”

Short-Term, Long-Term

John Malcolm, director of The Heritage Foundation’s Edwin Meese III Center for Legal and Judicial Studies, says the short-term and long-term trends in violence statistics tell a different story about safety.

“The violent crime rate has increased dramatically in the past couple of years, which is very alarming, but it is still much lower than it was in the past,” Malcolm said. “It is important to keep in mind that twice as many people were killed in the top 50 cities in 1991 as in 2015.”

Malcolm says there is currently no definitive answer explaining these short-term spikes in violent crime.

“There are various theories to explain what is going on with the spikes in violent crime,” Malcolm said. “Some argue it is due to the so-called ‘Ferguson effect.’ Others argue it is due to the early release of prisoners in many areas. Others argue it is due to the current drug epidemic and competition by drug dealers, gang members, and cartel operatives for turf. It is entirely possible that more than one factor is involved.”

Bad News on the Brain

Marian Tupy, a senior policy analyst at the Cato Institute’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity and editor of HumanProgress.org, says people are predisposed to believe things are spinning out of control.

“We are, by nature, pessimistic,” Tupy said. “We process new information through the amygdala, which is always on the look-out for bad stuff to warn our brains. But, also there is the instantaneous and immediate nature of modern information flow. We learn about and internalize bad things as they happen, even if they are far away. In the past, we would not know about them.”

Calls for Policies Based on Reality

Tupy says it’s “unfortunate” people trust feelings rather than the facts.

“People always have believed things that were not true,” Tupy said. “It is certainly unfortunate, because it may make us implement policies based on faulty perceptions of reality. Almost everything is improving: Cancer is down; AIDS is down; longevity is up on average; incomes are up. It is almost impossible to come up with one stat showing life getting worse.”