



USA TODAY

Donald Trump is using crime victims to drive his immigration agenda. That's the kind of leader he is.

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July 5, 2018

President Donald Trump wants you to be afraid of people you shouldn't fear. He wants that fear to motivate you to support him and his policies. And he is willing to do anything — even exploit the families of crime victims — to do this.

How do we know this? Because he has done it.

Following the announcement that his administration would no longer be separating migrant families at the border Trump held a press conference and photo op with individuals whose family members had been killed by undocumented immigrants.

In doing this, he drew a direct connection between migrants at the border and criminals.

He said:

These are the American citizens permanently separated from their loved ones — the word 'permanently' being the word that you have to think about — 'permanently.' They're not separated for a day or two days. These are permanently separated, because they were killed by criminal illegal aliens. These are the families the media ignores.

First, these families are NOT ignored by the news media.

Second, any number of studies have shown that immigrants are much less likely to be convicted of crimes than native-born Americans.

That's not a political argument. It's a simple fact.

Facts should drive policy, not fear

The author of a study by the libertarian Cato Institute said: "As a percentage of their respective populations, there were 56 percent fewer criminal convictions of illegal immigrants than of native-born Americans in Texas in 2015. The criminal conviction rate for legal immigrants was about 85 percent below the native-born rate."

The author of a study published in the journal Criminology actually found that crime goes down in places with higher numbers of undocumented immigrants, saying, "Increases in the

undocumented immigrant population within states are associated with significant decreases in the prevalence of violence.”

The pain of those who have lost loved ones to crime — no matter the perpetrator — is real, and they can express their grief or anger or outrage in any way they choose.

But Trump is using this particular group of victims for political gain.

It should disgust you.

Imagine a president parading before the cameras the families of crime victims killed by African-Americans.

Would that be seen as racist?

Is it any less unfair than taking advantage of families impacted by undocumented immigrants?

Imagine a president trotting out before cameras the families of crime victims killed by white perpetrators? How would that go over?

Or perpetrators only from the South? Or only from New York City? Or only with Italian surnames? Or only Jewish ... wait ... that has been done before.

Trump uses hate for political gain

During Trump’s press conference with the families of victims killed by undocumented immigrants he said:

You don’t hear that. I always hear that, 'Oh, no, the population is safer than the people that live in the country.' You’ve heard that, fellas. Right? You’ve heard that. I hear it so much. And I say, 'Is that possible?' The answer is it’s not true. You hear it’s like they’re better people than what we have — than our citizens. It’s not true.

Actually, the part about being safer IS true.

And the claim about being “better” was never made. By anyone. That’s just Trump trying to stir resentment and hate, suggesting you can’t trust immigrants no matter what facts are presented.

Just has he’s done with Muslims. And to a degree with the media. Howling about “fake news.” Calling journalists the “enemy of the people.” All of it for political gain.

The strategy is simple. Ignore the facts. Play to fears and existing prejudices. And if the people you are trying to convince don’t yet have fully developed prejudices, teach them.

Trump has done so with undocumented immigrants. He has done so with Muslims. And I’d guess he’s not finished spreading the seeds of distrust and hate about other groups to audiences old and young.

That kind of political strategy has been utilized before.

In 1938 there was a children’s book published in Germany called “The Poisonous Mushroom.” There is a line in it that goes: “Just as it is often hard to tell a toadstool from an edible mushroom, so too it is often very hard to recognise the Jew as a swindler and criminal.”