

Donald Trump's Campaign against Muslims and the Rationale of Exclusion

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Donald Trump has had it in for the followers Allah and the Prophet from the start of his campaign. Much of this, however, is histrionics. Adopting a salesman's pitch, Trump changes the message depending on his audience. If one is to go back into the troves of interviews he has done, chiding remarks about fellow Republicans who took racial, historically questionable lines can be found.

Now, in the full flight of engineered bigotry, Trump has taken the anti-Islamic position and made it firm within his platform. The timing is apt. The war in Syria is only expanding, ostensibly against the forces of ISIS. A faceoff is unfolding. The attacks in Paris remain raw. He resorts to history, poorly, but his deficiency as a student of Clio's mysteries disappears when he puts on the demagogue's hat. Resonances change; the register is different.

Given that the register in many Western states is very much sceptical of Islam and its followers, his cue was as unsurprising as it was violent. On Monday, he called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States while we figure out what the hell is going on." "We," he pointedly remarked, "are out of control."

Trump had referenced his statement by referring to poll results farmed by an anti-Islamic group, suggesting that "great hatred" had been evidenced "towards Americans by large segments of the Muslim population."

Trump's proposal to bar foreign Muslims, one which shares its DNA with numerous proposals on the Right to restrict the entry of Muslims generally, has caused a storm. GOP leaders balked. Even that dark eminence, former Vice President Dick Cheney, took issue with the supposedly "un-American" nature of the idea. "Well, I just think this whole notion that somehow we need to say no more Muslims and just ban a whole religion goes against everything we stand for and believe in."

A stunned Kassem Allie, executive director of the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Michigan, claimed that he was "trampling on our constitution and packaging it as snake oil cure for our security concerns." [1]

Allie also detected a Nazi-Stalinist echo, a rather dramatic point given that the US has previously barred other groups from entering on bureaucratic security grounds. The refugee annals will show a rather poor record in the 1930s to Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, characterised by the ignominious turning back of the German Ocean liner, the *MS St. Louis*. A quarter of those on board would perish in the Holocaust.

Trump's sharp stance has various effects. For one thing, it provides cover for other

presidential candidates who are themselves problematic. The focus on Hillary Clinton, which should be razor sharp and sceptical, has not so much blurred as vanished – for the moment. The limelight has been well and truly cast on the property tycoon. What will he do next?

The remarks have not been falling on deaf electoral ears. Trump knows how to snap up coverage, something he needed to do after losing ground in a Monmouth University poll. (That poll had suggested Ted Cruz's shading him into second spot in the first party election contest on February 1 in Iowa.) He plays the press, claims Jeb Bush, "like a fiddle". Cast an outrageous remark out in the open, and the media will give it legs. "That's his strategy to dominate the news."

Accordingly, a new poll from NBC news and the *Wall Street Journal* has found that 42 percent of Republican voters support the suggestion. A smaller 36 percent oppose it. But ever polarising, Trump's anti-Muslim bar is opposed by 57 percent of respondents across party lines.[2]

There has also been some movement in the polls for Trump personally – and these have not been entirely negative. There is nothing ingenious to it – the technique is the classic anti-establishment message that is trundled into old populism. The result is a surge since Monday, one that has placed him ahead of a paltry lot of rivals.

While one should take Fox News, and its polls, with the slightest of pinches, the network's poll of 437 likely Republican primary voters, conducted over December 5 to 8, was music for The Donald. Steaming ahead of the historically challenged Ben Carson, languishing at 15 percent, Trump mustered 35 percent.[3]

Such results can have one of two effects. Other candidates can contrast their positions, drawing strength from distinction rather than similarity. But the law of polemical averages suggests that drawing similarity from distinction is the more regular pattern. Other GOP candidates have had to compete on similar terms, modifying more moderate stances, notably surrounding refugees and security. Trump might be deemed mad, obscene, absurd and somehow self-disqualifying for the White House, but he does possess a dangerous appeal to a slew of voters. The Democrats have expressed concern, but will hope that such appeal remains confined to a cancelling GOP core. As for Trump, he has made sounds to the effect that he is happy to run as an independent, if need be. Interesting times await.

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Notes

[1]

<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/08/donald-trump-muslim-ban-republican-party-chaos>

[2]

<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/10/donald-trump-strikes-chord-with-gop-voters-over-muslims-poll-finds>

[3]

<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2015-12-10/trump-polling-lead-surges-after-anti-muslim-comments>

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