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Why Trump's Support Is Slipping

Donald Trump was elected president by successfully fuzzing the political tension between economic concerns and cultural factors. His core constituency is broadly conceived as disaffected white working-class men, 40-plus years old, with less than a college degree, self-identifying as evangelical Christians and Republican voters. He promised – and spent his first year in office — successfully convincing his base of support that he would “make America great again.” Recent polls make clear that some of these supports are losing faith in him.

Trump effectively collapsed the issues of economic class and social identity by exploiting a core component of a tried-and-true theme of Republican politics, a 21st century version of Pat Buchanan’s “Southern Strategy.” It’s a race-based politics that has defined the party since the days of Pres. Richard Nixon, effectively shifting the South from pro-segregationist white Democrats to staunch white Republicans. As the strategy moved north, reconfigured by Nixon as the “silent majority,” it promoted the identity of white-skin-privilege as an alternative to labor organizing as well as struggles over growing income inequality and social diversification.

However, recent Democratic electoral victories in governorship races in Virginia and New Jersey, the senate race in Alabama and state legislative elections in Wisconsin, Virginia, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Carolina, Montana and other states may prefigure the mid-term elections coming in November. Recent polls suggest that Trump support is slipping.

While a hard-core of Trump supporters will likely remain loyal to Republican candidates, others are likely to either stay home, vote for a Democrat or another candidate.

Who are Trump's supporters and where is the apparent slippage in his support coming from? In June 2017, the Democracy Fund VOTER Survey (Views of the Electorate Research Survey) published a revealing study by Emily Ekins of the CATO Institute, "[The Five Types of Trump Voters.](#)"

Ekins segments Trump's base of support into five segments:

- + Staunch Conservatives— represent nearly one-third (31%) of his base; they are loyal Republicans, fiscal conservatives, tend to be older, have higher socio-economic status, are politically informed, likely to be NRA members and adhere to traditional values

- + Free Marketeers – represent one-quarter(25%) of his base; they are loyal Republicans, fiscal conservatives and believe in free trader, favor smaller government, largely male, middle-aged, have more formal education, higher incomes, come from the Midwest and are more liberal on immigration.

- + American Preservationists— represent one-fifth (20%) of his base and the core group that propelled Trump to the nomination; they have lower levels of formal education and lower incomes, they favor higher taxes on the rich, back the social safety net, believe the economic and political systems are rigged, are skeptical of free trade and unregulated immigration.

- + Anti-Elites— represent less than a quarter (19%) of his base; they share a belief that the economic and political systems are rigged, hold relatively moderate positions on immigration, race and American identity, and are slightly younger than the other Trump groups.

- + The Disengaged — represent 5 percent of his base; they don't follow politics, skeptical about immigration, supported a temporary Muslim travel ban and tend to be younger and are more female than male.

Dissatisfaction with Trump appears to be occurring in all segments, but especially among the more moderate.

Arm-in-arm with Senate and House Republicans, Trump successful cultivated the social fiction that things are better than they are ... and will get better following his regressive economic and social programs. Trump's base has been reported to be supportive, if dubious, of two key components of his – and the Republican – program, the tax bill and efforts to restrict immigration of nonwhite people.

According to a [Gallup survey](#), more than half (56%) of all Americans disapproved of the tax bill and less than a third (29%) approved it, yet it received strong support from more than two-thirds (70%) of Republican voters; 16 percent of Republicans disapproved of the bill while nearly nine-out-of-ten (87%) of Democrats disapproved of it.

In similar terms, more than half (58%) of those surveyed in a September 2017 [Politico/Morning Consult poll](#) supported protecting “Dreamers” (i.e., undocumented immigrant young people). Support was reported as follows: among Democrats (84%), independents (74%) and Republicans (69%). A more recent [Gallup polls](#) found a deepening split not only among all Americans about Trump’s handling of immigration debate, but a steady decline of support among Republicans.

However, for all the hype regarding the passage of the Republican tax bill and a possible solution to the plight of the Dreamers, something deeper seems to be at play with regard to Trump’s base of support. It appears to be slipping. Two recent opinion polls question whether Americans, especially among Trump’s core constituency, will continue to back the great con being promoted by Trump and his Congressional allies.

On Friday, January 26th, the Rasmussen Reports “[Presidential Tracking Poll](#)” showed deepening erosion of Trump’s support among likely-voters. It found that while two-fifths (44%) of respondents approved of his job performance, those disapproving increased to over half (55%) of likely voters. Most revealing, the split is widening among those who “strongly” approve or disapprove of his job. Those strongly approving declined to 30 percent while those strongly disapproving rose to 42 percent. As Rasmussen put it, “This gives him [Trump] a Presidential Approval Index rating of -12.”

A recent [Pew Research poll](#) mirrors the Rasmussen findings. In a snapshot of opinions among those Pew calls “Republicans, Republican leaners,” it found Trump’s job approval from February to December 2017 fell to 32 percent from 39 percent. It observes, “Trump’s support [was] narrowing across a wide range of typically friendly demographics, from evangelicals to the elderly and whites without college degrees.”

Trump’s most notable loss of support came among white voters, declining to 41 percent from 49 percent; among white non-college adults, his approval rate dropped 10 points, to 46 from 56 percent. This pattern was reflected among evangelical Protestants where his approval rate dropped 17-point to 61 percent from 78 percent.

U.S. politics in the 20th century can be divided into two parts. The Great Depression scared the first era, which lasted from the 1929 stock-market crash to the post-WW-II

recovery in the mid-1950s. It was an era marked by the politics of class, particularly socio-economic concerns that took innumerable forms, whether social or personal. Class was at the heart of electoral campaigns of Roosevelt, Truman and Eisenhower; class issues mattered.

The second era began with Kennedy and, in the wake of the rise of the “American Dream,” class was normalized. The dominant ideology championed a version of middle-class prosperity that was ostensibly possible for all, debt could finance one’s dreams and unions were obsolete. Pres. Lyndon Johnson’s successful civil-rights legislations extended Nixon’s strategy in unanticipated ways, ways that challenged the prevailing, if narrow, notion of racism. Race was to be a secondary feature within a dynamic, prosperous country. Pres. Bill Clinton put the final nail in the coffin of class-consciousness, promoting finance capital, NAFTA and the wonders of America’s high-tech future, the gig-economy.

History has caught up with the America Dream and Trump is the result. Globalization, flat wages, deepening inequality and a corrupt political democracy define social life in the U.S. How many more Trump supporters will abandon him as the build-up for the mid-term elections plays out may be a key factor in the election’s outcome.