Twitter Thread by Seth Cotlar



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This reminds me of a 2010 poll of Tea Party supporters in which 84% said that "the views of the people involved in the Tea Party movement generally reflect the views of most Americans." Only 20% thought Obama shared the values of most Americans.

> This statistic that 90 percent of Republicans presume Trump will win may prove far more important than any of the sort https://t.co/LXTkTYzNsA covers. It scares me shitless. https://t.co/9z3NmfIbmX
>
> — Rick Perlstein (@rickperlstein) October 27, 2020

Full polling data here. I was asked to give a talk on campus about the Tea Party in 2010, and one of my main points was that it was a weakness of the movement that it had such a delusional perception of the American people. Oops. https://t.co/DQx43ckn7R

Anyway...the dynamic described here has been a long time coming. https://t.co/skjA9Zl1gz

> A GOP political culture that regards Americans who don't agree with them as existential enemies to the nation is the logical result of the GOP's longrunning culture war approach to politics. They've been telling conservatives they're "at war" w/ their fellow citizens for decades.
>
> — Seth Cotlar (@SethCotlar) October 27, 2020

That's the weird, seemingly illogical, thing about the right's culture war. They simultaneously think of themselves as speaking for the majority of Americans, AND they think that they are the saving remnant protecting a decadent society from ruin.

What squares this circle is the assumption that "the real American people" consist of straight white, rural or suburban people, & anyone not in that category doesn't really count as an American. That's how right wing culture warriors can both be the "majority," and a minority.

That explicitly exclusionary vision of "Americanism" (which is often articulated in more implicit ways like "our beautiful suburbs w/o low income housing") has very deep roots in our political culture. Trump's GOP hardly invented it.

But what's arguably new is the pride with which Trump's GOP has embraced the politics of hierarchy and exclusion. No more paeans to "compassionate conservatism," no matter how empty that rhetoric was. No more talk of "a nation of immigrants," no matter how weak that often was.

Thanks to this person in the replies who said it far more succinctly than I could have. https://t.co/ylrOwmEJyw

> It has been a hot war against pluralism in favor of a white fundamentalist Christian monoculture. And this election was their last stand
>
> — Joe Seither (@joeseither) October 28, 2020

Understanding contemporary conservatism as an attack on pluralism helps explain the ever more explicit Islamophobia of the American right, the transphobia, the hatred of higher education, the hatred of "Hollywood," the disdain for cities.

"Pluralism" is an essential value in any functioning, modern democracy. When one party ceases to even give lip service to pluralism, then it threatens to transform that democracy into something quite different.

This is why, IMHO, there is important work to be done in red & purple parts of the US to talk people off the cliff of GOP anti-pluralism. My sense (hope?) is that most (not all) of my fellow Americans are pluralists in practice, even if they may vote an anti-pluralist party.

Part of this hope derives from having grown up in a small town in PA that is now big time Trump country. Within their own communities/neighborhoods, there was often a good deal of toleration for difference. A kind of "live and let live" attitude.

But there was also a suspicion of "outsiders" borne of a lack of knowledge about the world outside that place. I'd guess that over 50% of my classmates had never left the state before they were 18. The "outside world" was an abstraction to them (and me).

Reagan's "welfare queen" rhetoric really resonated in the 80s (when I was in HS there). There was not a single African-American student in my HS, but boy did my classmates spend time talking about black people as if they knew something about them.

There is no better way to get a white, Trump voting former classmate of mine from Central Pa to recirculate a pro-Trump message on FB, than to have it come out of the mouth of a person of color. If they have a black co-worker, they will assuredly post pictures of them together.

So in their interpersonal lives, these people express a desire to be pluralists. I was the only Jewish kid in my HS, and while this sometimes produced some awkwardness, it mostly produced an "oh, that's kind of weird and exotic and I don't know what to do with it, but cool."

But that unfamiliarity and discomfort can also be turned to more angry, sinister purposes by savvy politicians and media outlets that see an advantage in it. Those former HS friends can now be found circulating Soros memes in abundance.

A kid I played Little League with is now a full blown Q adherent who posts videos fantasizing about the day when the "cosmopolitan elite, the cultural marxists" (like me) will be "eliminated from the earth." Needless to say, I don't believe he thought that way about me in 1981.

I also suspect that were I to encounter him IRL and ask him about it, he'd still stick to his guns about the Q stuff but he'd assure me that he knows I'm not one of the bad guys and that he means me no harm. Perhaps I'm naive, but I think he'd really mean it too.

What the GOP has done in the county where I grew up is that they've encouraged people to look upon their neighbors as enemies. To look at that barista with the nose ring not as a kid expressing themselves, but as an antifa terrorist who hates America. https://t.co/n8nz08cLOq

> Every now and then I check in to the official FB page of the GOP for the Central Pennsylvania county in which I grew up, and where my family had lived since the 1910s. https://t.co/8Ycd7wEL5p
>
> — Seth Cotlar (@SethCotlar) September 29, 2019

"Turning neighbors into enemies" is a hallmark of fascist political cultures. Turning benign differences into existential threats is the essence of anti-pluralistic politics. At that point, that is virtually the only message that the GOP is sending its voters.

How many times was this story repeated across the US. People vote for Trump. A person of color who they like is harmed by Trump's policies. People then say (in earnest, I believe) wait a minute, I didn't want *him* to be harmed. He's a good guy. https://t.co/1O89mGJBNs

Connecting the dots between federal policy and what happens in one's community is incredibly difficult, even for people with PHDs in Political Science or History. Most voters just don't see those connections, and the GOP has taken advantage of that knowledge gap.