

Why many Americans view illegal immigrants as ‘invaders’

Liberals are partially responsible for the anti-immigrant rhetoric

Washington Times, By Ioannis Gatsiounis, Sept. 3, 2019

A liberal’s view of the immigration crisis:

Rhetoric alone is not enough to inspire someone to gun down a bunch of people. It must be persuasive. And so, we should be asking: What is it about “Hispanic invasion” that was so convincing to El Paso mass shooting suspect Patrick Crusius?

That’s where we on the left are partly to blame.

As it is, we show little political will to stop the surge of migrants at our southern border — 144,000 in May alone, a 13-year high — or the rise in migrants misusing U.S. asylum laws to seek economic opportunity.

We ignore realistic concerns about the skill and education levels of those we’re letting in, and we demonize anyone worried about how these convulsions will impact national identity and assimilation as a xenophobe. We’re now against a wall we didn’t oppose during the Barack Obama era, when there were fewer illegal crossings.

And through it all, we may still elect a presidential candidate who favors decriminalizing illegal border crossings and extending health care to undocumented migrants, even as most Americans oppose such moves.

All this has earned us a reputation for favoring “open borders,” and breathed life into Donald Trump’s nativist rhetoric. Suddenly, the notion of an invasion doesn’t feel like a stretch to many Americans.

It should but it doesn’t. That’s not how the world works.

Time and again, governments that fail to keep immigration flows at a level that doesn’t seem to threaten national identity, tolerance wanes, panic sets in, as the collective mind shifts toward preservation. People stop seeing the myriad benefits of immigrants and more as a



drain on resources and a threat to jobs and national security. (Immigrants in fact commit crimes at lower rates than native-born Americans do.) To many, invasion is what it feels like. Promising a corrective, rightist parties rise, as has been the case across much of Europe amid massive influxes of immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Bastions of liberalism like the Netherlands and Denmark turn a dark corner. And to be sure, the fear of being overrun by foreigners is not exclusive to white conservatives, as anyone in a swiftly gentrifying neighborhood can attest. That is, there's something deep within us as humans that responds viscerally when we feel overwhelmed by the other. Governments then must manage immigration in a way that does not unleash those fears. At the national level that includes tightening border security and not ignoring growing public concerns about what constitutes too much immigration.

But to a good many Americans it appears that we liberals aren't committed to managing immigration flows.

Rather, we look intent to "brown" the country with people who will align with us against our political enemies (all while some of us attempt to rewrite history to be hostile to our Founding Fathers and our most patriotic symbols).

Crucially in times like these, we need a leader who reassures the public that we are not being flooded by a brown wave. President Trump is not such a leader.

But as the alleged shooter said in his manifesto, his racial resentment predated the president's rhetoric, and that is certainly true of many Americans. It is also true their views will outlive Mr. Trump's presidency and likely be adopted by more Americans — increasing the chances of yet another domestic terror attack — unless Democrats and Republicans both do more to tamp down fear and fix immigration.

In laying the blame squarely on Donald Trump, we on the left aren't going far enough to understand what people, more deeply, are responding to, and until we do, until show we are serious about confronting our immigration crisis, we will be forced to look back on another case of our well-meaning intentions going way different than planned.

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