

Why Trump Is Gaining Conservative Christian Supporters

A recent editorial in *The New York Times* confirms the results of my own online polling. President Trump appears to be gaining more conservative Christian voters than he is losing.

Writing for the *Times* on Oct. 5, Jeremy W. Peters compiles an impressive list of former Never Trumpers who are now firmly in his camp. And quite a few of those on his list would identify as conservative religious voters.

Some of them once labeled Trump a “racist” and a “fascist.” Others, like Glenn Beck, “once called Mr. Trump ‘an immoral man who is absent decency or dignity,’” but “now says that his defeat in 2020 would mark ‘the end of the country as we know it.’”

Peters also notes that “L. Brent Bozell III, who in his *National Review* essay wrote, ‘Trump might be the greatest charlatan of them all,’ now counts himself as a Trump convert.”

The results of my own unscientific, online polling have confirmed a similar trend. The vast majority of those who voted for Trump in 2016 plan to do so again, while a small majority of those who did not vote for him in 2016 plan to do so in 2020.

In my most recent Twitter poll, 64% of those responding voted for Trump in 2016 compared to 36% who did not. (For context, I believe that the large majority of my Twitter followers identify as conservative Christians.)

At the rate of 15 to 1, those who voted for Trump in 2016 said

they would do so in 2020.

Significantly, slightly over half of those who did not vote for Trump in 2016 said they would in 2020.

So, based on this small sampling, Trump is gaining more conservative Christians than he is losing.

Yet there's no denying that he continues to violate Christian ethics with his mean-spirited words and behavior. And I just don't mean his behavior towards his political enemies.

He has thrown Jeff Sessions under the bus. He has insulted Rex Tillerson. He recently blamed Rick Perry for the Ukraine phone call.

As for his attacks on his opponents, who can begin to list them all? And who in his right Christian mind would dream of defending them all?

Yet it appears that evangelical Christian support for the president is increasing rather than decreasing. How can this be?

There are people very close to me who voted for Trump with great reluctance in 2016 and who do not plan to vote for him in 2020. They feel his behavior has so degraded and divided the nation that, in the end, he has done more harm than good.

From what I can tell, though, this position represents the minority view among Trump voters. How, then, do we explain this?

Perhaps, when we voted for him, we said, "We hope he will keep his promises"—which he absolutely has, on many fronts—"and we hope he will change his behavior"—which he absolutely has not.

What, then, explains what appears to be our increasing support (meaning, in numbers) for the president?

Peters writes, "Few changes of heart have been as head-spinning as the social conservatives and evangelical Christians who now consider Mr. Trump a hero. Many of the conservative women who once saw him as a boor have come to believe that for too long they were focused on the wrong qualities in presidential candidates. They wanted someone pious when they should have been looking for someone who could throw punches."

Another op-ed writer for the Times, Frank Bruni, who is known for his extreme hostility to conservative Christianity, is less charitable. His Oct. 5 article bears this title and subtitle: "How to Sell Your Soul to Donald Trump. Mike Pompeo is just the latest lackey to teach a master class in moral surrender."

According to Bruni, "It's the story of Faust, who sold his soul for renown, then endured the ugliness of that deal. It's also the story of too many of Trump's Republican enablers to count."

Are these perspectives accurate?

There's certainly some truth to what these men are saying, since political allegiances, in and of themselves, often demand some level of compromise. There are no perfect candidates or perfect parties, and so voters weigh their priorities and cast their ballots accordingly. In the same way, the same George H. W. Bush who once accused fellow presidential candidate Ronald Reagan of advocating "voodoo economics" became his vice president.

But what both Peters and, even more so, Bruni, are missing is that the opposition to Trump has become so radicalized that his former detractors have become his supporters. In other words, the alternative to Trump has become so extreme and the attacks against him so over the top that it has become easier to rally around him.

The bias of the leftist media has become embarrassing. (I'm not claiming the rightist media is unbiased; I'm simply making a point here in the context of why Trump appears to be gaining support.)

The demonization of the Democratic party has become alarming.

The futility of the Mueller investigation for the last two years and the current impeachments efforts add to the feeling that Trump is being unfairly attacked. (Even as the president, he has the ability to portray himself as the victim and underdog.)

And all the while, Trump is appointing conservative justices to the courts, speaking out for religious liberty and leading a strong economy.

As for the implications of the attempts to impeach and remove Trump, Franklin Graham recently stated, "Our country could begin to unravel if an elected president is thrown out of office because of lies and the media."

Put another way, the anti-Trump hysteria, which the president seems to stoke with joy, has created an anti-left backlash. And, since the enemy of my enemy is my friend, Trump has become the friend of many of his former enemies. It's that simple. (This is not to defend every detail of Trump's Ukraine call. It is questionable whether he committed an impeachable offense.)

For me, as an evangelical leader, the path is clear: If it's Trump against a radical Democrat, the president gets my vote. But he doesn't get my soul.

To maintain our integrity, that's a distinction we must continue to make, loudly and clearly.

We will sell our souls to no one. The Lord alone owns us, and our allegiance belongs to Him. Fact.

As for our vote, it's a pragmatic choice made in the midst of a flawed world with flawed candidates and flawed parties.

For many of us, Trump, at present, is our best alternative to the agenda of the radical left. And that's why he has our vote.

Reading more into this is a mistake. Accusing all of us of moral compromise is an unfoundedly broad-brushed slur.

Some, indeed, have compromised. Some may have even "sold their souls."

But many others have not. Fact.