

Authoritarianism Has Captivated the Right

David Harsanyi wrote an [interesting column](#) for *The Federalist* on Monday, entitled “*Authoritarianism Is Not Confined To One Political Party: The shared governing philosophy of contemporary liberalism and Trumpism*”.



As you can probably guess, the piece focuses on a topic I’ve written a lot about (and have taken a fair amount of heat for) over the past year and a half: the Right’s embrace of the same political sensibilities and style of governance that we excoriated under the Obama administration.

Harsanyi argues, “One of the few aspects of Obama’s legacy likely to survive the Trump years is his mainstreaming of the notion that the executive branch has an authority to do whatever it likes if the law-making branch ‘fails to act’ – a phrase Democrats used incessantly over the past six years.”

Sure enough, conservative opposition to executive overreach (in the name of “getting things done”) has largely fallen by the wayside under President Trump, perhaps most notably in the area of immigration policy.

The Right rightfully flipped out over (and questioned the legality of) Obama single-handedly changing the legal status of scores of people in this country, but when it came to restricting entry for thousands of potential refugees, oversight and the separation of powers weren’t all that concerning.

When Obama publicly scolded the Supreme Court over its

Citizens United ruling, conservatives (again rightfully) were up in arms. However, when Trump attacked a “so-called judge” (as he put it) for placing a temporary restraining order on his travel-ban executive order, righties portrayed the judge’s action not as a ‘check on power,’ but as obstructionism.

People can agree with a policy, and still recognize a double-standard when it comes to the use of executive power to put it into law, can’t they? Maybe not.

Like so many other components of Trump’s political agenda, the Republican base has traded in principles for actions (often as *payback* against the Left), even when those actions are in direct conflict with the positions the base has long believed in (small government, free trade, individual liberty, etc.)

I totally understand and respect the willingness to give our new president a chance to succeed; we should absolutely do that. But thus far, it appears as though the promises of Republicans to hold Trump accountable for his actions were probably just half-hearted suggestions.

To give credit where credit is true, Trump did throw the *old* base a bone with his [nomination of Neil Gorsuch](#) to the Supreme Court, a move which will undoubtedly earn him additional good will, even with his critics on the Right. As Rich Lowry of *National Review* [wrote](#), Gorsuch is the “anti-Trump” – a federalist who has called our government’s separation of powers “among the most important liberty-protecting devices of the constitutional design.”

So if you’re worried by Trump’s attempt at authoritative governance, like I am, Gorsuch should provide a bit of relief. What I’m extremely skeptical of, however, is the notion that principled conservatives will serve as a positive influence on the Trump presidency. If anything, Trump has been a negative influence on conservatives, and that includes high-profile opinion-makers.

Many (probably most) within the conservative media have pledged allegiance to Trumpism, and that's not a good thing if you legitimately believe in conservatism. Some hosts won't even allow Trump critics on their television shows anymore. This morning, radio-host Hugh Hewitt even [vowed to disallow](#) any Republican who votes against Trump's Labor Secretary nominee, Andy Puzder, from ever appearing on his show again.

Again, this isn't conservatism.

Whatever happened to the Right rejecting collectivism, scrutinizing the powerful, and promoting free thought? Is being a team player all that matters these days?

I guess we'll see in the coming months and years.

