

Rise of the Far-right Groups in Trump's America

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Abstract

In the wake of Donald Trump's ascent to presidency, a congenial environment emerged for the rise of far-right groups in the United States of America. These far-right groups - dormant earlier - are not only resurfaced but they seem to be occupying central position in the political milieu of the United States of America. Elements of Islamophobia, xenophobia and nativism seem prevalent in Trump's presidency. Such an environment is sharpening the cracks in the land of immigrants. Hence, this research intends to find the causes of the rise of far-right hate groups in America; what are the implications of this rise for American society; to avert further segregation and division of American society, how multiculturalism can be used as a tool to reconcile with the force of far-right hate groups; and to find out the institutional response to the hate crimes committed by affiliates of different hate groups. The research also intends to comprehend how to deal with these hate groups. Hence, in order to study the phenomenon, Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been employed to semi-structured interviews of a purposive convenient sample suggesting some policy guidelines and solution to the problem.

Keywords: Donald Trump's presidency, far-right, hate groups, Islamophobia, xenophobia, nativism, immigrants, multiculturalism, Ku Klux Klan, supremacists, Alt-right, Spoil system

Introduction

Being known as the land of immigrants, the United States of America is a second name of multiculturalism and diversity. But still there are forces existing in America to threaten this multiculturalism and diversity. The far-right groups always existed in America whose roots were laid in the form of Ku Klux Klan at the end of Civil War. Xenophobia and nativism were the main driving forces behind these hate groups. Hence, it seems that in the United States of America there has always been a conflict existing between these two opposing forces, but ultimately, it has been multiculturalism that has prevailed. Now, in the Trump's age, on one hand, far-right groups are on the rise and on the other hand, globalization is affecting the standard of living of an ordinary person belonging to white working class. Therefore, these people find their inclination more towards the far-right groups with the ascent of Trump to power, as his presidency espouses empowerment of white people.

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Election campaign slogan of Donald Trump -- America First -- has attracted many white supremacists. Moreover, Trump himself seems to be a supporter of white nationalism which can be deciphered from the facts that most of the advisors appointed by Trump are closely associated with far-right groups and have anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments. Stephen. K. Bannon, Michael. T. Flynn and Stephen Miller are a few to be named. It is worth mentioning that the father of Donald Trump, Fred Trump, was himself a Klan supporter and he was arrested in New York City in 1965 during a 'Klan Rally'. Heidi Beirich who is Deputy Director of Southern Poverty Law Centre Intelligence Project says that since 2014 the number of hate groups is increased by 17 percent while that with anti-Muslim sentiments are tripled since last year. Similarly, it is pertinent to mention that these hate groups have young people at their leadership position and unlike the past they have contacts in the White House (Grossman, 2017). Hence, it is alarming that these far-right groups have been backed up by support in the form of Donald Trump which never existed before.

It is a conundrum to resolve that in the history of the United State of America white supremacists belonging to various far-right and hate groups have killed more native Americans than immigrants. And it is a dilemma that President Trump is largely silent on the issue of domestic terrorism carried by the white supremacists in America and is quite vocal to blame Muslims for any terrorist attack occurring anywhere in the world. It is also important to mention that people having their origin in countries on which Trump has imposed travel ban are less likely involved in terrorism or have killed any American. Similarly, it can be said that threat from the Muslim and immigrants in United States of America is far less than threat from the far-right groups in America. For example, a young boy – Dylan Storm Roof – motivated by the ideology and values of far-right groups in 2015 in the Church of South Carolina committed a deadly act of terror killing nine people. The boy instead of being charged with terrorism was convicted for other hate crimes – though the case was by all means a terrorist one.

This paper intends to find out the causes behind the rise of far-right groups in America in its domestic and global context. It also intends to answer that what measures should be taken to avert further division of the American society. It will also look into the matter whether the measures taken by the government to tackle the issue of hate crimes are effective or not? Similarly, the opinion of people who are part of the phenomenon will be taken into account to suggest various policy recommendations. Therefore, qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis had been used in the research study.

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Research Methodology

In order to understand the phenomenon in depth, the research is intended to focus on the 'lived experiences' of the people; therefore, qualitative Interpretative Phenomenology (IPA) has been used in this study. IPA is an understanding of the phenomenon by an individual in a given environment. It consists of double hermeneutics. In other words, it consists of two tier interpretation of the data (i.e., the participant makes a sense of his own social world while the researcher tries to make sense of the understanding of the participant's social world). For this research, two far-right hate groups hate groups which are active, prominent, and greater in number have been taken through purposive sampling method. Both of these groups have links in the White House and share a common view towards the immigrants (i.e., hostility).

For interviews, purposive and convenience sampling method has been adopted due to time and travel constraints. As the purpose of the study is to look for the meanings the far-right phenomenon has got for the participants, therefore, the sample size is small consisting of seven participants. However, some considerations were taken in account while choosing the participants: the participant must be living in the United States of America, he/she should have witnessed hate activities, and have an understating of the phenomenon of far-right groups in the USA.

The sample comprises of:

- Two students of University of Massachusetts, Amherst studying Political Science,
- One student of Boston University studying Political Science
- One American Professor teaching Political Science at University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- Two teachers of Amherst Regional High School, Massachusetts
- A Muslim teacher teaching Public Policy Cleveland State University, Ohio.

As the study intends to find novel areas with respect to the rise of far-right phenomenon in the USA, therefore, semi-structured interviews are used as a tool of data collection. Semi-structured interview are in-depth interviews having guided not directed questions. Interview guide was developed form the gaps found in the literature review. While conducting interviews, on most of the occasions, a diversion from the pre-determined questions was observed which helped more in understating and finding out the novel areas of the study. On the basis of feasibility and convenience, four of the interviews were conducted through video call; two were

conducted through phone-call, and one through email correspondence. With prior consent of the participants, all the interviews were reordered except for the two where notes were taken.

The Far-right Groups in America

As far as the definition of far-right groups is concerned, so there is no consensus among the social scientists. However, it is common understanding among most of them to define it far-right as ideology inclined towards nativism, fascism, racism, xenophobia, and reactionary principles (Taylor, 2007)

Historically, the term finds its roots in the late eighteenth century during the French Revolution referring to those who used to sit on the right wing of the assembly. They were more inclined towards the unrestrained religious influence and aristocracy. Moreover, they were also in opposition to secularism and the principles of enlightenment (Far-right, 2018). Similar is the case in the United States of America; those who are more inclined towards the aforementioned views, can be found in the form of far-right hate groups. These groups are radical-right as they want to bring fundamental changes within the institutions and to avoid or remove those who threaten their economic interests and values (Lipset, 1955)

Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Alabama, is a non-profit activist group, tracking the civil rights and hate crimes, defines far-right group as “an organization with beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics” (Struyk, 2017). Struyk is of the view that the contemporary far-right groups find their roots back in 1990's when most of their member lost their blue-collar manufacturing jobs due to globalization (Struyk, 2017). But Ku Klux Klan--came into existence at the end of Civil War was the first instance of the far-right hate group in the United States of America David Neiwert who is author of *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* says that such hate groups live in a different American (i.e., Alt America or Alternative America) where suppositions and conspiracy theories are prioritized over facts (Neiwert, 2017).

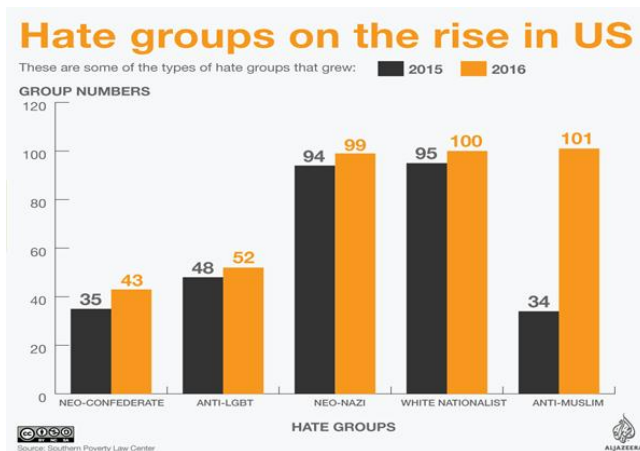
According to an SPLC report, since 2014, there has been a 14 percent rise in the number of far-right groups in America. Followed by Black Separatists and Ku Klux Klan, the anti-Muslim hate groups count for the third largest (Struyk, 2017). It is interesting to mention that according to the First Amendment of the US Constitution the "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the

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press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances” (Congress of the United States, n.d., para.6). Hence, it can be said that the founding fathers wanted to have a secular America where everyone to be treated equally irrespective of his /her race, colour and religion. Therefore, the very basis upon which the foundation of the majority of the far-right groups is built is in fact contrary to the law as their sentiments are anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant.

Donald Trump's accession to presidency is closely linked with the rise of far-right hate groups in the USA. It is a result of long developing global trends. Due to globalization, interconnectivity has increased which has resulted into massive flow of migrants into developed countries. According to the Census Bureau, the population of White Americans counted for 90 percent till 1960's, which was reduced to 62 percent in 2015, and if it is continued reducing with the same rate, White population will no longer be a majority by 2043. Similarly, as of globalization, big companies have shifted their manufacturing units form the developed countries to developing countries where labour is cheap, easily available and wages are low. This phenomenon has badly affected the working class of White Americans. Hence, the attraction of this White class towards Donald Trump was quite a natural outcome since he is against globalisation, multiculturalism and vows to work for the protection of the rights of the White class. Therefore, hate groups are on the rise in America as Donald Trump is a product of right-wing populism (Potok, 2017).

Figure 1



Source: Southern Poverty Law Center

White Nationalists

White Nationalists are looking for maintaining their national identity while at the same time ensuring survival of their race through political and economic dominance. Factors such as multiculturalism, the changing demographics of the USA, and the civil rights movements are taken as a threat to White's supremacy and identity. On the other hand, White class has the desire to establish a Whit-ethno state. In order to achieve this objective, two strategies -- mainstreaming and vanguardism -- are usually adopted. 'Mainstreaming' focuses on the infiltration and subversion of the exiting institutions, especially political, for promoting the cause of White Nationalism. Similarly, 'Vanguardism' seems to be more of a radical approach. As SPLC indicated, 'Alt-right' is the recent formulation of white nationalism. Public demonstrations, college speaking engagements and propaganda distribution are some of the tools used by it (White-nationalists, n.d.). A number of people having loose bonds of connection having far-right tendencies are included in it. Right Spencer, head of the National Policy Institute --a think tank advocating for the supremacy of White Americans -- was the first one to coin the word 'alt-right'. Introduction of the new term was aimed at gaining support of the people who are not in the favour of mainstream conservatism such as White supremacy and racism.

Figure 2. Tweet of Richard Spencer



Source: Tweeter

Anti-Muslims

Evoked by and after the 9/11 incident, the rise of Anti-Muslim Hate group in the United States is comparatively a new phenomenon. According to Southern Poverty

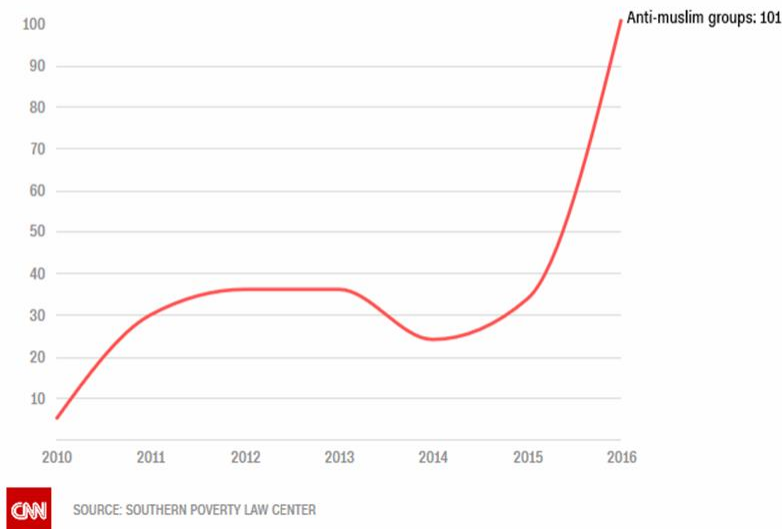
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Law Center, these groups think of Muslims as brutal and intolerant beings undermining the democratic values of the United States through a set of principles and theory called Jihad.

Currently, anti-hate groups are 101 in number with ACT for America and Centre for Security Policy as the most prominent.. It is worthy to mention that Trump administration and ACT for America has close ties and Trump's anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim policies are in alignment with that of ACT for America. Similarly, Trump and Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State, are allies with founder of ACT for America (Gabriel. n.d.).

Figure 3.

Number of anti-Muslim hate groups in the United States tripled over the last year



Source: Southern Poverty Law Centre

A report by Federal Bureau of Investigation says that since the election of Trump as president, the number of hate crimes against Muslims has been increased by 67% (Kishi, 2016).

Similarly, the six countries which are travel banned by Trump rarely finds any terrorist who has committed a terror act against the Americans (Neiwert, 2017).

Emergent Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1- Causes of the rise of far-right groups	a) Ascendancy of Barack Obama as President
	b) Psychological Reasons
	c) Fear of being a minority by 2043
	d) Presence of immigrants
	e) Economic insecurity
	f) Race based society of America
	g) Technology and media
2- Institutional and legal response to tackle hate crimes	a) Judiciary is working good
	b) Trump is weakening the institutions
	c) More is needed to be done at federal as well as state level
	d) Educational institutions are not turning a blind eye to challenges posed by the far-right groups
3- Hate crime vs domestic terrorism	a) Hypocrisy exists
	b) Terrorism is operated for political objectives but hate groups do not.
	c) Acts of local militias do get declared as terrorism
	d) Terrorism is a slippery label and must be treated as other crimes
	e) Terrorism is executed systematically and have organizational support whereas hate crimes do not
4- Use or misuse of freedom of expression	a) Freedoms are an obstacle to tackle hate crimes
	b) Freedoms cannot be snatched from anyone
	c) Such freedoms can be used to tackle far-right groups as well
	d) Violations of freedoms are bad and must be taken care of
5- Implications for the American society	a) Government spending more on fulfilling the basic necessities of white working class
	b) Opioid crisis can be mitigated
	c) Counter-protests against far-right groups and Trump's policies
	d) More polarization of the American society
	e) Weakening of democratic norms
6- Suggestions	a) Embrace multiculturalism and diversity
	b) Address the concerns of far-right people
	c) Good education, job and health facilities
	d) Advocating tolerance
	e) Social activism and vigilance
	f) Economic security for all

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Discussion and Analysis

Causes of the Rise of Hate Groups

i) Psychological Reasons

It is well said that majority of the hate-mongers in the USA possess hate sentiments towards the people of other ethnicities particularly minorities. These hatred sentiments can be rooted into various psychological reasons. For example, it is a common perception among the White class in the USA that they are going to lose their identity and supremacy due to huge influx of migrants. As one of the respondents of the opinion that this is basically a psychological fear among the White class that with inflow of the refugees and migrants into the country, interests and opportunities of the white class are threatened and reduced respectively (J. Reidt, personal communication, April 29, 2018).

Similarly, another respondent is of the opinion that "Such people (white working class) are more prone towards finding stuff that can make immigrants responsible for their bad conditions. They don't consider other factors that have nothing to do with immigrants but are largely related to them. It is more due to their ignorance that they take fabricated stories as facts" (Sean, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

ii) Economic Insecurity

Economic insecurity resonated by the financial crisis of 2007-8 is a *raison d'être* for the White Class in the United States. It is this economic insecurity that compels White Americans to make immigrants responsible for their bad financial and living conditions. As a student of Political Science at University of Massachusetts, Amherst says:

It would be wrong to link [the] rise [of White far right groups] with Donald Trump. Yes, Trump has certainly put them into the political mainstream but to me, economic insecurity that was triggered in the wake of the Global Recession of 2007, is the biggest cause behind their rise. It was the only significant event that united and reinvigorated the scattered and dormant far-right groups. This Recession was the most detrimental to the working-class white who were already working on not so good conditions as a result of industries going out of the country and immigrants taking on the low-wage jobs (J. Huttenen, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

iii) Presence of Immigrants

Known for its values of diversity and multiculturalism, America is passing through a different period of time with respect to these values under Trump's presidency. For example, in the contemporary times, there is a perception that immigrants are responsible for all the ills of the society and that they should be send back to countries of their origin. As one of the respondents says that there is a great number of immigrants living a more comfortable life than an average America belonging to White class; therefore, it is hard for White American to digest this fact and consequently he/she puts all the burden of his /her low standard of living upon the immigrants. On the other, there are also viewpoints regarding contributions of immigrants to the economy, social and political development of America.

iv) Ascendancy of Barack Obama as President

In the early 2000's, the far-right hate groups in the United States of America were not active with mere exception of anti-Muslim hate groups. With the assent of Obama as president of the United States, these far-right hate groups became more active. These groups perceived Obama against the interest of the Whites as they thought of him as a black minority having Muslim descendents. As a respondent is of the opinion that electing Obama as a president of the United States was not acceptable for some of the White class as they wanted to preserve their political and economic dominance in the White House. (B. Lochiatto, personal communication, April 29, 2018). Hence, the far-right groups at the time of Obama seem as reactionary groups having psychological depression which became further active with advent of Trump on the political arena.

v) Fear of Being a Minority by 2043

Among the White class in the United States, there is a fear of changing demographics which would ultimately convert them a minority by 2043 (Census Bureau, USA). And being minority will ultimately threaten their interest in the White House. As one of the respondents is of the opinion that there is a fear of losing dominance in political and economic spheres among most of the white people who are becoming part of the far right group. Hence, this fear leads them to establish a white ethno-state (Sean, personal communication, May 30, 2018).

vi) Race Based Society of America

There is common perception among the Whites that constitute a superior race and identity, and that this race and identity should not be mixed up with other ethnicities. A faculty member of Cleveland State University says that race has played an

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important role in issues related to crime, low wages and drugs etc. In case of any mishap, it is becoming a norm to blame Black and Mexican race (O. Pasha, personal communication, May 31, 2018). Hence, race and identity are one of the reasons they support Trump's initiative of travel ban and strict laws and regulations for immigrants.

vii) Technology and Media

Technology and media play an important role in the rise of far-right hate groups in the USA. These mediums especially social media provides a passage for propagating message and recruitment of new members for these hate groups. Similarly, main media outlets such as Fox News are also playing an important role in this regard. As one of the respondents opines that the phenomenon of 'Fake News' is gaining momentum in the United States of America. The news channels such as Fox News are having their policies in alignment of Trump and hate groups. (O. Pasha, personal communication, May 31, 2018).

Role of Institutions and Hate Policies

In the United States of America, there is a system of checks and balances. No single institution or organ of the government can impose its unconstitutional or unpopular decisions upon the nation. As one of the respondents says, "One good thing about our America is that we have a fully operational system of checks and balances. No organ of government can dominate the other organ. And this is what happened when Trump tried to impose its executive order banning the Muslims from seven countries. It was revoked by the Supreme Court" (J. Huttenen, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

But at the same time, spoil system is also in practice when it comes to the contemporary practices and policies of Trump under the popular support of far-right hate groups. As a respondent says:

The problem occurs when the President uses the system of spoils to recruit those people in the executive departments who are in line with the policies of the incumbent president. I would use travel ban example again. After trump successfully inducted a new conservative judge in the Supreme Court, the number of conservative judges reached five out of nine and hence the ruling on travel ban came in his favour later on. So yes there is some sort of struggle going on among the institutions which is not good for US as a whole (J. Huttenen, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

In short, in order to handle hate crimes more efficiently and effectively, some new and bold measures should be taken at all levels of government.

Hate Crime vs. Domestic Terrorism

There is a debate whether hate crime should be counted as terrorism at domestic level or both to be dealt separately. In this regard, a respondent says:

These two are comparatively different and are treated differently here under separate laws for each. Hate crime cannot be labelled as domestic terrorism since they are operated for reasons other than that of terrorism. For instance, if a person goes out and protests against Muslims, the police can't do anything as long as that person is not hurting anybody. It's his fundamental right. But when a person goes out and carries out a shooting spree – the ones we have had in America, and then it comes under hate crime. Since, the shooter could easily get a gun – thanks to 2nd Amendment, and carried out the spree on his own without any support from far-right groups, it is hate crime not terrorism as the latter is planned covertly with organizational support having political objectives (Huttenen, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

Similarly, the respondent analyzes the very reasons for which the two are different things. He goes on saying:

In fact, we hardly find any link of white supremacist with terrorist organizations. Not even a single far-right group has ever endorsed such activities of white supremacists. What I feel is that such radical white supremacists are triggered to do such activities due to joblessness and anger which might be attributed to the rise of immigrants and economic insecurity in America. Also, I feel there is no need to compare these terms as both are dealt with iron hands and have strict laws. Nothing would render if hate crime is equated with domestic terrorism (J. Huttenen, personal communication, August 18, 2018).

But it can be observed that for achieving their political objectives both groups are different in their means and strategies (i.e., terrorist make a use of violence while hate groups use other legal means). Hence, there is need for more vigorous and rigorous policies to deal with hate crimes.

Use or Misuse of Freedom of Expression

Freedom of speech is guaranteed in the US Constitution. It is the right of every individual to use this right. However, it is seen that in Trump's presidency it is used as more of a tool of hatred. As a student from the University of Massachusetts is of the opinion that on campuses there are people who use the freedom of speech as a tool of

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in order to promote their hatred agenda. However, the campus cannot do anything about such people as it is already guaranteed in the constitution (B. Lochiatto, personal communication, April 29, 2018).

Similarly, some people are also of the view that if freedom of speech is used as a tool of hatred propaganda by the far-right hate groups, on the same measures, it is used by civil rights activists and organization to spread their message and organize resources.

Implications for the American Society

On one hand if the rise of far-right hate groups have negative implications for the America; on the hand it has some positive impacts as well. One of the respondent stated that the rise of far-right hate groups has pushed forward the debate and discussion of hate and intolerance into the public sphere. Ultimately, this discussion will end in some positive legislation (T. Fricke, personal communication, June 07, 2018) Similarly, the rise of far-right hate groups have also given a voice to the poor and underprivileged white class (O. Pasha, personal communication, May 31, 2018). Hence, the rise of far-right groups has positive as well as negative implication for American society. But it seems that negative implications surpass the positive ones.

Suggestions

Known for its tolerance, diversity and multiculturalism, the United States of America is losing these established values especially in the Trump's presidency. The problem of radical rise of the far-right hate groups is not only to be addressed by the national government but also state and local government and civil society organization. There is a dire need to keep the following points in view:

- Multiculturalism and diversity should be maintained and promoted.
- Concerns of the far-right group should be addressed properly.
- Quality education, adequate job and health facilities should be provided equally to all the ethnicities, races and religious minorities.
- Equal economic opportunities should be provided to all.
- Culture of tolerance should be promoted; other minorities should be embraced gracefully.

Conclusion

It is a fact that due to globalization a common American in the Rust Belt has suffered economically. Similarly, because of cheap labour and low cost prices, most of the manufacturing units have been shifted to other countries. The remaining menial jobs

are held mostly by immigrants at very low wages as compared to White Americans. Moreover, the economic crises of 2000's further worsened the situation followed by the ascendancy of Barack Obama as President of the United States. Thus, all these circumstances added to the rejuvenation of the dormant movements for the identity and interest of White race in the United States, and resulting in the rise of far-right groups spreading nativism, Islamphobia , and Xenophobia.

This rise of far-right groups in the United States is creating a sense of disunity in the society. And these groups are rising in numbers none ever existed before. And it is obvious that this alarming situation has not cautioned the USA but the world as well. Similarly, Trump has not only inculcated nationalism into politics but through his executive orders has raised the eyebrows around for acts going against American values. And that is why people are protesting against these far-right groups and Trump.

As substantiated by the statistics, the far-right groups seem to be more of a threat to the United States than the perceived threat by Muslims and immigrants. It would be detrimental if the policy makers do not deal it in accordance to American democratic norms and multicultural values. Similarly, there is a dire need for taking some constitutional and legal measures to deal with these far-right hatred groups on urgency basis.

Importantly, it is also a high time for the government to address the problems and grievance of the White Class. On one side, if the rise of far-right is alarming for the United States and the world, on the other hand, on the same lines, it is alarming for the government to come up with solutions for crises from within.

So, there is a dire need to distinguish between free speech and a hate speech. In the name of freedom of expression and speech, sentiments of people of other ethnicities, religions, and immigrants are threatened which in turn reciprocates the same sentiments among them. Legislations should be done in order to distinguish between the duos and pave way for a tolerant, diverse, multicultural, and multi-ethnic society. It will happen when same Americans play their effective and decisive role in the upcoming elections and register a clear message, and then the new government will do accordingly.

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