

Blue Jean Nation 'Anatomy of an identity crisis'

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American values? Conservatives and Republicans seem more confident in their beliefs, and they define Democrats by default. Trump is promising both guns and butter. But, what are your core values?

ALTOONA, WI - If my travels over the last several years have taught me anything, it's that America — or at least our little corner of it here in Wisconsin — is in the midst of an identity crisis. I've been given the opportunity to meet with every imaginable kind of group — urban and rural, young and old, haves and have nots and used to haves, white and black and brown, left and right. One time we meet in a church or a school. Another time it's a bowling alley or tavern. Next time it's a VFW or American Legion hall. After that, a public library or bookstore.

Everywhere I go, I'm given a chance to share some thoughts. But I also get to ask questions and listen. I've asked the same questions at every stop: What are your core values? What do you stand for?

When I talk with conservative or Republican audiences, I'm struck by how quickly and confidently and uniformly they answer. Six themes surface time after time. Less government. Lower taxes. Free market economics. Individual liberty. Old-fashioned family values. Patriotism.

Sometimes the freedom they profess to love seems to clash with their definition of family values. Sometimes their love of country takes the form of military might or homeland security. Other times it comes out sounding like fear or even hatred of foreigners.

When I meet with Democrats or left-leaning groups and ask them my questions, what I typically hear is crickets. I get puzzled looks. Pregnant pauses. A few might bring up issues or causes they care about. I stop them. I ask again. What are your *values*? What principles form the basis of your positions on issues? Sometimes answers never come, only shrugs. When answers are offered, they generally are neither confident nor uniform.

In the vacuum that forms, Republicans define Democrats by default. Since Republicans say they are for less government and lower taxes, that puts Democrats on the side of more government and higher taxes. This current understanding will probably persist until either Democrats reach a consensus on what values guide them or a blossoming Republican identity crisis reaches full bloom.

Now that the GOP is Donald Trump's party, the commitment to limited government is fading. Trump is promising both guns and butter, with his demands for a [massive military buildup](#) and a [trillion-dollar domestic building program](#)

. Free trade is giving way to protectionism. Intrusive government authoritarianism is increasingly [trespassing on personal freedoms](#). Both in style and in substance, Trump is at odds with what Reagan-style conservatives consider traditional social values. Those on the right are having a harder and harder time recognizing their party and agreeing on what it should stand for.

So again I ask both Republicans and Democrats: What are your core values?

Here are mine:

1. **Freedom with responsibility.** Each individual has a right to be free. But with that right comes an obligation to make sure others are free as well.
2. **Democracy, both political and economic.** Both our political system and our economy should be of the people, by the people, and for the people.
3. **Equality.** We are all created equal, with inalienable rights. No one starts at third base.
4. **Caretaking.** This means looking out for one another, and having each other's back. It means taking care of the land and water and air.
5. **Service.** To community. To country. To each other.

— *Mike McCabe*

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