

A year ago, as the Republican Party was preparing to head to its convention in Cleveland to officially nominate Donald Trump for president, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) issued an analysis of Trump's policy proposals.

That analysis, "Donald Trump: A One-Man Constitutional Crisis," concluded that his proposals to deport millions of undocumented immigrants, ban Muslims from entering the country, surveil American Muslims and their houses of worship, revise libel laws and bring back the Bush-era torture program would blatantly violate the Constitution.

It was a terrifying report. Still, many thought that this country "whose ideals have inspired people from all over the world to come here and become Americans, united not by ethnicity, language religion or culture, but by the ideas and ideals laid out in our Constitution" wouldn't elect a man whose proposals were seemingly so in conflict with it.

But we did.

And the election of a man who is openly hostile to minorities, immigrants and particularly to individuals of Latino descent has struck me, the son of Colombian immigrants, in a personal way.

I worry that my parents will be accosted at the grocery store for speaking Spanish. I worry that my two boys will be told by classmates to "go back where they came from" because their skin is brown.

As Trump's political rhetoric turns into policy, our fundamental American values are being put to their greatest test.

MORE ON TRUMP ON GRAY MATTERS: How Trump's threats have evolved

Thankfully, our system of checks and balances is serving to curtail many of the administration's efforts to run roughshod over our constitutional freedoms. Courts throughout the country have ruled against several of the Trump administration's most blatantly unconstitutional efforts "to defund cities that have chosen to limit participation in federal immigration enforcement and ban people from six predominantly Muslim countries from entering the country.

But the Trump administration is making headway with some its most problematic proposals. The president's stated goal of deporting millions of undocumented people has already resulted in widespread fear in immigrant communities. In his first week in office, President Trump issued an order giving agents the green light to prioritize the arrest of many immigrants who had been afforded some humanitarian discretion, including parents of U.S. citizen children who had been reporting annually to authorities.

But nowhere is this problematic headway more apparent than in Texas, where our legislature has passed Senate Bill 4. The law has been widely criticized by law enforcement and community leaders for harming public safety by removing discretion from local officials to determine how best to use limited police resources. It has effectively mandated that local agencies engage in immigration enforcement, and subjects law enforcement to heavy fines, criminal penalties and even removal from office.

These policies will have devastating consequences for our society "school attendance rates will decrease, families will be separated and an even greater number of individuals will fear reporting crimes or cooperating with federal or local officials out of concern that they or their family members might be targeted for deportation.

Immigration is one thing. But the Trump administration has also adopted retrograde policies on criminal justice. For example, before the election, there was bipartisan recognition that this country had a problem with incarceration; that 2.3 million people behind bars was too many; and the fact that a hugely disproportionate percentage of those people are black or brown was a serious problem. (The rate of imprisonment for black men is nearly six times that of white men.) It was generally accepted by both political parties that we needed to reduce the prison population by eliminating mandatory minimums and reducing sentences for drug offenses.

Instead of building on this consensus or paying heed to experts on criminal justice reform, the administration is reducing federal oversight over police departments accused of abuse. Whereas previous administrations "both Republican and Democrat" have responded to reports of systemic police abuse by investigating

and entering into consent decrees to assist police departments in developing 21st century best practices, the Trump administration is on the record opposing these decrees, leaving many communities without needed federal protections. In short, it has sent the message that the status quo is acceptable and that black and brown people are not entitled to the same protection.

GRAY MATTERS: Can we stop saying Trump's presidency is an 'existential crisis'?

And then there is the most fundamental right to our democracy – the right to vote. In May, Trump created a Presidential Commission on Election Integrity, with the mission of combating purported "voter fraud." Despite that numerous studies have shown that voter fraud is virtually nonexistent here, President Trump continues to insist that he lost the popular vote because 3 million to 5 million undocumented residents cast ballots.

Such propaganda about illegal voting has been used to justify unnecessary and discriminatory restrictions on voting. And since Trump appointed Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach as vice-chair of that commission, there should be little doubt of his motives: Last year, Kobach was rebuked by a federal court for disenfranchising thousands of motor-voter applicants whom he claimed might not be citizens, based on what the court found was "pure speculation."

This list is not exhaustive. We are seeing increased attacks at both the federal and state level on reproductive rights and the rights of the LGBTQ community and people with disabilities. My colleagues and I are doing everything we can to challenge these constitutional violations, but there is a limit to what lawyers and courts can do to protect our constitutional values.

On this Independence Day, I hope Texans, who welcomed my parents here with open arms, will speak up against policies that threaten our most fundamental values.

Andre Segura is the new legal director of the ACLU of Texas.

Bookmark Gray Matters. There should be little doubt of its motives.

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