

You might not like Republicans calling for a ban on refugees. But it's smart politics.

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Over the past 24 hours, almost half of the nation's governors — all but one Republican — have said they plan to refuse to allow Syrian immigrants into their states in the wake of the Paris attacks carried out by the Islamic State. (No matter that they can't really do that.) Ted Cruz, a leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, has announced plans to introduce legislation in the Senate that would bar all Syrian Muslim refugees from entering America.

That stance has been greeted with widespread ridicule and disgust by Democrats who insist that keeping people out of the U.S. is anathema to the founding principles of the country. "That's shameful," President Obama said in a speech addressing the Paris attacks on Monday. "That's not American. It's not who we are. We don't have religious tests to our compassion."

Think what you will, but one thing is clear: The political upside for Republican politicians pushing an immigration ban on Syrian Muslims as a broader response to the threat posed by the Islamic State sure looks like a political winner.

The Pew Research Center did an in-depth poll looking into Americans' view on Islamic extremism in the fall of 2014 — and its findings suggest that politicians like Cruz have virtually nothing to lose in this fight over how best to respond to ISIS's latest act of violence.

More than 7 in 10 Republican voters say they were "very concerned" about the rise of Islamic extremism in the United States. That's almost double the amount of Democrats who said the same (...).

That marked concern with the threat of Islamic extremism is accentuated by a deep lack of confidence among Republicans with the Obama administration's ability to handle what they perceive to be a growing threat. Nearly 6 in 10 Republicans believe that the government is not doing well at all in reducing the threat of terrorism (...). Republicans also were (and are) much more likely to say that the government's antiterrorism policies aren't doing enough to keep the country safe than they are to say that the policies are restricting civil liberties.

It's safe to say that in the intervening year — particularly in the wake of the Paris attacks that have been plastered all over every TV screen and newspaper homepage for the last 96 hours straight — Republican voters' views on national security broadly and ISIS in particular have not waned and are very likely to have grown more strident.

Given that, the positions of these Republican governors as well as Cruz and several other people running for president amounts to a political layup. Calling for a ban on Muslim refugees from Syria hits two sweet spots: 1) The concerns among the Republican electorate about the threat posed by Islamic extremists and 2) The unhappiness among GOPers for how Obama has handled terrorism broadly.

The message these Republicans are sending is simple: Obama has not acted. We will.

"A big part of the reason we are not effectively combating radical Islamic terrorism indeed as the president readily acknowledged he has no strategy to do so, is because he will not acknowledge the enemy we are fighting," Cruz told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt on Monday. "And so President Obama and Hillary Clinton's proposal to bring tens of thousands of Syrian Muslim refugees to America is nothing short of lunacy."

Like it or not, that is a message virtually certain to win Cruz voters — or at least nodding heads — within the Republican primary electorate he is trying to convince to be for him. Expect more rhetoric of the sort coming from Cruz and his brethren, not less, in the coming days.

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