

Viewpoint: Trump's inflammatory appeals triggered support for him in 2016. Here's why scientists think it won't happen again

In the 2016 election, undecided voters were influenced by the brain's fear-driven impulses—more simply, gut instinct—once they arrived inside the voting booth, even though they were unable to explain their decision to pre-election pollsters in a carefully reasoned manner.

In 2020, Trump continues to use the same strategy of appealing to the brain's threat-detection circuitry and emotion-based decision process to attract votes and vilify opponents.

“Biden wants to surrender our country to the violent left-wing mob.... If Biden wins, very simple, China wins. If Biden wins, the mob wins. If Biden wins, the rioters, anarchists, arsonists and flag-burners, they win,” [Trump declared](#) at his Wisconsin campaign rally on September 17, 2020, offering new alleged threats to our nation.

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But fear-driven appeals will likely persuade fewer voters this time, because we overcome fear in two ways: by reason and experience. Inhibitory neural pathways from the prefrontal cortex to the limbic system will enable reason to quash fear if the dangers are not grounded in fact. The type of street violence Trump rails against now was not the norm during the Obama and Biden years.

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Whether voters choose to vote for Trump on the basis of emotion or reason, they will be better able to articulate the reasons, or rationalizations, for their choice. This should give pollsters better data to make a more accurate prediction.

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