

Historian Suggests Trump Would Suspend the Constitution

During election season, hyperbole becomes the norm. It doesn't seem that unusual to see presidential hopefuls accused of [fearmongering](#) and [demagoguery](#).

Princeton historian Sean Wilentz recently dialed up the rhetoric even more. In a video that appeared on Big Think earlier this month, Wilentz implied that Donald Trump just might decide to suspend the Constitution if he is elected president in November.

"If [Trump] becomes president will he be able to do everything he says he's going to do?" asks Wilentz. "No. We do still have a Constitution."

Wilentz then casually fantasizes that Trump could decide to suspend the Constitution in an act of Caesarism.

"Then we have a crisis like we've never faced as a country before except possibly in the case of session in 1861," says Wilentz, the George Henry Davis 1886 Professor of American History at the Ivy League university. "That was a constitutional crisis that ended up with 750,000 military dead. I don't want to go through that again."

"It would be a crisis presidency, yeah," Wilentz adds.

I recall reading Wilentz as a grad student. His work [*Chants Democratic*](#) is a classic in labor history, a rather good read.

I don't doubt that Wilentz has legitimate and perhaps even valid concerns about a Trump presidency. Conservative writers have shared similar concerns, particularly over Trump's [apparent willingness](#) to "open up the libel laws," which could have a chilling effect on free speech.

All of that said, Wilentz's comments seem a bit extreme. The historian is critical of politicians who "appeal to people's fears," but implying that a politician might suspend the Constitution seems itself a form of fear-mongering.