Fact-Checking Donald Trump's Immigration Speech

John Kruzel

September 2, 2016

Donald Trump discussed immigration in a speech in Phoenix Wednesday. ABC News fact-checked several of his claims that touched on the federal government's immigration track record, as well as Trump's policy proposals and those of his Democratic challenger, **Hillary Clinton**.

Undocumented Immigrant Population

Claim: The federal government has no idea how many undocumented immigrants are in the United States.

Status: False. In 2012, the Department of **Homeland Security** estimated there were 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States, which has been largely corroborated by independent analysis.

Trump said: "Our government has no idea. It could be 3 million. It could be 30 million. They have no idea what the number is."

Background: The Department of Homeland Security's Office of Immigration Statistics **estimated** in January 2012 that 11.4 million unauthorized immigrants were living in the United States.

The department reached its figure by taking the U.S. Census Bureau's estimate of total foreign-born population living in the United States, minus those living here legally, either as lawful permanent residents, naturalized citizens, refugees and other similar categories. The remaining population was 11.4 million, with the margin of error for the foreign-born population at plus-or-minus roughly 125,000.

These figures were largely corroborated by a **Pew Research** Center **analysis** last year, which estimated 11.3 million unauthorized immigrants lived in the United States in 2014. The Pew study also found the population level had remained fairly stable for the preceding five years.

Clinton and Visa Overstays

Claim: Hillary Clinton supports visa overstays.

Status: Misleading. While Clinton's immigration plan does not address visa overstays, and she can be fairly criticized as having a mixed record on enforcement, claiming she supports U.S. visitors remaining beyond their visa expiration is an exaggeration.

Trump said: "President Obama and Hillary Clinton support sanctuary cities. They support catch and release on the border. They support visa overstays. They support the release of dangerous, dangerous, dangerous, criminals from detention. And, they support unconstitutional executive amnesty."

Background: The Department of Homeland **estimated** that out of 45 million visa-bearing travelers to enter the United States in fiscal 2015, about 416,500 overstayed their visas. Hillary Clinton's immigration plan does not address visa overstays. But, according to**FactCheck.org**, her record as secretary of state shows she favored a 2013 Senate bill that would have helped identify and remove those who overstay their visas.
More recently, however, Clinton vowed to weaken overstay penalties.

At an MSNBC-Telemundo **town hall** in February, Clinton vowed to repeal the provision in the 1996 **Illegal Immigration** Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act that imposes a punitive wait time for visa overstayers who later apply for legal status.
An audience member at the town hall told the story of her husband overstaying his U.S. visa, then being forced to remain in Mexico for 10 years before becoming eligible for legal status in the United States.

"I want to tell you," Clinton **said**. "I will end the three- and 10-year bar provision so that you do not have to face that ever again."
Her plan to end three- and 10-year bars also appears on her **website**.

Syrian Refugee Vetting
Claim: On **Syrian refugees** entering the United States, the federal government has "no idea who they are."
Status: Highly Misleading. While intelligence gaps exist, the United States employs a thorough, multi-stage vetting process before admitting Syrian refugees.

Trump said: "And we are going to stop the tens of thousands of people coming in from Syria. We have no idea who they are, where they come from. There's no documentation. There's no paperwork."

Background: Trump has repeatedly claimed there is no way to screen Syrian refugees. But as flagged in an earlier fact check, the typical vetting process for resettling refugees in the United States comprises a series of hurdles, the first of which is to meet the legal definition of a "refugee" (roughly 1 percent of applicants is deemed eligible), which can take up to 10 months.

The United States then vets refugees through multiple federal intelligence and security agencies, with roughly half being approved at this stage, according to the **State Department**. Then the names, biographical information and fingerprints of these refugees are processed through FBI, State Department, Homeland Security and Defense Department databases.
Finally, in the case of Syrian refugees, there's an added step of having their information cross-referenced with classified and unclassified information. Syrian refugees are also **reportedly** vetted through a secret **national security** screening program.

The vetting process typically takes from 18 to 24 months. To expedite the process for Syrian refugees, the Obama administration launched a surge operation with the hopes of reducing the time to three months in hopes of resettling some 10,000 refugees by fall 2016. But the "onerous and complex web of security checks and vetting procedures" has hampered the expedited process," according to **The New York Times.**

Still, U.S. officials have expressed concerns over intelligence gaps in Syria, and the accuracy of the failed state's criminal and terrorist databases. As FBI Director James Comey told a congressional panel in October 2015: "If someone has never made a ripple in the pond in Syria in a way that would get their identity or their interest reflected in our database, we can query our database until the cows come home, but there will be nothing show up because we have no record of them."

Immigrants' Taking U.S. Jobs

Claim: Lower-skilled immigrants with less education compete directly against U.S. workers.

Status: Questionable, because while some economists agree with Trump, others argue that immigrants take the jobs that native-born Americans are unwilling to perform.

Trump said: "While there are many illegal immigrants in our country who are good people, many, many, this doesn't change the fact that most illegal immigrants are lower skilled workers with less education, who compete directly against vulnerable American workers, and that these illegal workers draw much more out from the system than they can ever possibly pay back. And they're hurting a lot of our people that cannot get jobs under any circumstances."

Background: The notion that immigrants are taking away jobs from native-born Americans is largely a myth, according to an analysis by **CNN Money**.

The analysis cites Daniel Griswold, director of the libertarian Cato Institute's Center for Trade Policy Studies, who sought to demystify the issue before a House panel on immigration in 2011.

"According to Griswold, immigrants, regardless of status, fill the growing gap between expanding low-skilled jobs and the shrinking pool of native-born Americans who are willing to take such jobs," the CNN Money report states.

Analysis by a researcher at the left-leaning Urban Institute reached similar findings. While immigrants saw larger employment gains than U.S. workers after the recession, immigrants have been replacing, not displacing, native-born Americans, according to **Maria E. Enchautegui,** a senior research associate at the Urban Institute.

Enchautegui argues that the sharp drop in the number of U.S.-born workers with no college education means fewer native-born workers are competing for the kind of jobs that immigrants with less education generally fill.

A **report** by MarketWatch notes that some of the fastest job growth since the mid-2009 economic recovery began have been in service-related firms such as retailers, restaurants and hotels, entailing "work that native-born Americans are less eager to perform."