

It's official: Trump will run a racist, xenophobic re-election campaign, based on lies

Andres Oppenheimer

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President Trump's speech in Orlando on Tuesday, the official start of his 2020 re-election bid, confirmed what many of us feared: He will run a racist and xenophobic re-election campaign, based on an alleged "immigration crisis" that he has largely fabricated.

Hours before his speech, Trump tweeted that he will order mass deportations of "millions of illegal aliens" starting next week. At his Orlando address, he lashed out against undocumented migrants, to the delight of the 20,000-strong crowd, and suggested he will crack down on them further in coming months.

Trump could have focused his re-election campaign on the strong U.S. economy and low unemployment figures, despite the fact that, to a large extent, he inherited both. But as I watched the crowd in Orlando, it was clear that Trump's followers got much more excited when he lambasted undocumented immigrants than when he brags about economic gains many may not yet see in their paychecks.

Populist demagogues all over the world need an enemy — real or imagined — to rally their supporters. Trump is no exception.

In Trump's case, he lied repeatedly during his Orlando address. He claimed that there is an invasion of undocumented migrants pouring into the country from Mexico, that they are bringing crime to the United States and that they are taking away jobs from Americans.

First, all serious studies based on U.S. Census figures show that overall illegal immigration today — especially from Mexico — is significantly down from what it was 10 years ago.

According to figures released June 17 by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center, there were 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants in 2017, down from 12.2 million in 2007. As a percentage of the population, the number of undocumented immigrants has dropped to 3.2 percent of the U.S. population in 2017, from 4 percent of the U.S. population.

Granted, there has been an upsurge of Central American migrants in recent months that has not yet affected the overall downward trend, but it's in part because many Hondurans, Guatemalans and Salvadorans are flocking to the United States as fast as they can for fears that Trump will close the border. In other words, Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric is driving many Central American would-be migrants to reason: "It's now, or never."

Second, Trump's claims that undocumented criminals are bringing crime to this country are ludicrous. There is no serious study showing that.

A recent Cato Institute report concluded that immigrants in general "have a lower criminal incarceration rate and there are lower crime rates in the neighborhoods where they live, according to the near-unanimous findings of the peer-reviewed evidence."

Third, there is little evidence to support Trump's claim that, "Illegal mass migration brings in millions of low-wage workers to compete for jobs, wages and opportunities against the most vulnerable Americans, cutting off their path to the American dream."

The fact is that Americans won't do most jobs that are performed by undocumented migrants. Expelling millions of unauthorized migrants would cause serious problems in many industries. Regularizing those who work hard and have no criminal records would be a much better solution.

Trump could start by legalizing the more than 700,000 DREAMers, the sons and daughters of undocumented migrants who were brought to this country as infants and who include Harvard graduates. But Trump has refused to give the DREAMers — or DACA-status recipients — a path to legal residency. He didn't even mention them in his Orlando speech.

Besides, how will Trump plan to carry out his threat of deporting "millions of illegal aliens"? Will Trump round up undocumented parents while their children are at school? What will he do with their children? Will he put their U.S.-born infants in detention camps or foster homes?

The bottom line is that Trump's anti-immigration offensive would be easier to explain if the United States were in an economic depression or if unemployment rates were at record highs.

But with a reasonably strong economy and record low unemployment rates, how can you explain Trump's anti-immigration obsession? There's only one explanation: It's racist political demagoguery.