



If You Don't Know What Donald Trump's Immigration Speech Will Say, You Haven't Been Listening

His much-ballyhooed recent 'softening' aside, Donald Trump has been giving the same immigration speech for months.

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The way Donald Trump talks about his immigration policy can sound perplexing, but it's actually quite simple.

Still, the public can be excused for being confused. As with all things Trump, he's been on all sides of the issue.

One day a "deportation force" is a serious policy idea, and the next day undocumented immigrants are "great people."

It's all over the map, and that's why there's so much pent-up suspense over the immigration speech he will deliver Wednesday. Trump's announcement late Tuesday night that he would travel to Mexico to meet with the Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto hours before that speech has just added to the intrigue.

But if you look past Trump's rhetoric, you can see a clearly articulated vision for immigration in the United States.

Rhetorically, politicians have been vacillating on the issue for years.

Hillary Clinton, for instance, has taken just about every tone imaginable on immigration over the course of her career. In this presidential cycle alone, she's hedged and hemmed on the question of whether children should be deported—the same Hillary Clinton who has made support for children's rights an integral part of her #brand.

And, of course, President Obama entered the White House gunning hard for immigrants' rights, only to deport substantially more people than President George W. Bush did. Really. So

fixating on politicians' rhetoric doesn't give you much good information on they would really *do*.

Confused? You're not alone.

The right's strongest supporters of stricter immigration enforcement generally concur that the Republican nominee mostly doesn't know what he's talking about with regard to the particulars of immigration policy.

"It's pretty detailed," said Mark Krikorian, one of Trump's most-cited immigration experts, on the candidate's immigration plan. "It's just that he's never read it."

Still, the candidate has been pretty clear about his basic hopes and dreams: He wants to build a wall, and he wants to deport more people, particularly criminals.

And talking points that the Republican National Committee distributed to surrogates on Tuesday morning shed additional light on how the party itself understands Trump's immigration stance.

"From the beginning of this campaign, Mr. Trump has said no amnesty and no citizenship, and he's never wavered from his core principles for ending illegal immigration," the email read.

Then it gave this description of "the plan that will go into effect" on President Trump's first day on the job:

- Enact a plan to secure the border.
- Enforce our current immigration laws, with ICE beginning to deport illegal immigrants with criminal records.
- End "sanctuary cities" by pressuring those cities through the power of the federal government.
- Implement a real E-Verify system that will stop employers from hiring illegal immigrants.
- Until these first steps are enacted, nothing else matters.

The hallmark of Trump's border security plan, of course, is the wall. Trump's own immigration plan concedes that Mexico may not immediately cough up the cash to pay for construction, so building won't start until Congress appropriates funds to pay for it.

The even more controversial component of Trump's immigration plan, though, is a so-called deportation force. The mogul first used that term in an interview with MSNBC on Nov. 11, 2015. But it was misleading from the get-go (because he doesn't know what he's talking about); Trump's plan doesn't call for making a new law enforcement agency; rather, it calls for tripling the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers responsible for finding and detaining undocumented immigrants.

In an interview with Trump campaign manager Kellyanne Conway on Aug. 29, Bloomberg's John Heilemann asked incredulously if Trump would actually create a force of armed agents

responsible for finding undocumented immigrants and getting them deported. But this armed force already exists. Trump would just make it bigger—if Congress appropriates the money for it, of course. That would make it feasible for the number of deportations to substantially increase.

But would Trump actually be able to round up, detain, and deport the 11 million or more undocumented immigrants currently living in the U.S.? It seems unlikely. Such a detention-and-relocation regime is unprecedented in human history, according to Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy expert at the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute.

“It’s rare that that many people move in such a short period of time without a mass killing,” he said. “Trump does not want a mass killing, so that’s one reason why I just don’t think even if he was elected he would deport 11 to 12 million people.”

Forcibly relocating that many people—unless the force moving them also wants them dead—is unheard of.

And besides the basic unthinkable-ness of it, finding and then detaining and then deporting 11 million people would be extremely expensive and time-consuming.

Let’s say Trump starts with the immigrants who would be easiest to apprehend: the 665,000 or so DREAMers who came to the U.S. as children and whom Obama has shielded from deportation with an executive action.

Trump long ago committed to reversing Obama’s move. Assuming he did so, some participants would probably still be able to get asylum and stay in the U.S. Finding an additional 10.5 million undocumented immigrants and deporting them would be a Herculean task. Finding 665,000 people whose names and addresses are already in a government database wouldn’t be extraordinarily hard. But finding millions more who have shown no interest in signing any federal registries?

Way more expensive—to say the least. And that’s not even touching on the massive backlog this would create for immigration courts. Technically, it could all happen. But it probably won’t.

Much more likely is getting congressional approval for a mandatory, nationwide E-Verify system that would make all employers confirm anyone they hire is a legal resident or citizen of the U.S. Republicans have shown some appetite for this—Orwellian overtones aside—so it wouldn’t be a heavy lift. And any electoral mood that puts Trump in the White House would likely also keep Republicans in control of both chambers of Congress, making it easier to mandate nationwide E-Verify use.

And that’s what Trump would do. In short, we’ve always had the basic contours of what a Trump immigration policy would—and could—look like. If you don’t like the idea of exponentially growing the immigration-industrial complex, or you feel queasy about the notion of only being able to get a job if your name is in a government database, or you think law-abiding undocumented immigrants who came here as kids should be allowed to stay—well, then maybe Trump isn’t for you. But you already knew that.

Meanwhile, longtime immigration wonks like Nowrasteh aren’t on pins and needles for Trump’s much-hyped speech.

“I think we know everything we’re going to know,” he said. “And I’m pretty sure within 48 hours of him giving the speech, he will contradict it.”