



Will Trump ‘tweak’ on deportation blow over quickly, as ally thinks?

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Should they stay or should they go?

Donald Trump promises to end his open debate with himself in a speech in Arizona on Wednesday to clarify whether he’d deport more than 11 million immigrants who are in the United States illegally or retreat on his proposal for a so-called deportation force.

He’s expected to moderate his approach while reaffirming his tough talk on building a wall to separate the U.S. and Mexico and swiftly deporting immigrants in the U.S. illegally who are in prison or commit crimes.

Rep. Tom Marino, R-Pa., a Trump supporter who spoke with him about immigration last week, calls the anticipated change in the presidential candidate’s tone on deportation a “tweak” – even as Trump critics have described it as waffling.

“Yes, I think he’s moving away from that – from the perspective – taking into consideration many factors involved: Is the person a criminal? Do they have family here? That may have influence,” Marino said Monday night. “That’s the approach he’s going to take, I get after a couple of conversations with him. What’s the fair, humane, human side of dealing with this for those that are not violent, for those that are not breaking the law, for those who aren’t causing havoc, short of amnesty?”

He has been inconsistent on deportation and the deportation force throughout the entire campaign. . . . He’s been talking about allowing some illegal immigrants to stay in the U.S. interspersed with calls to deport them all. I don’t expect any clarity. Alex Nowrasteh, immigration policy analyst, Cato Institute

But what Marino considers a tweak might be labeled a retreat in order to court general-election voters.

“He’s made this a cornerstone of his campaign – ‘Build a wall, deport them’ – and there’s no walking it back,” said GOP strategist David Johnson, a former Florida Republican Party executive director. “It’s difficult for me to see a path to moderate that without alienating the Republicans who got him this far.”

Johnson noted that Trump's supporters – of which he is not one – often say they like the candidate “because he says what he means. Now the question is going to be, ‘What did he mean?’ ”

A new Pew Research Center poll released this month highlights the potential danger for Trump. It found that half of his supporters say immigrants living in the U.S. illegally are more likely than American citizens are to commit crimes. That number shoots up to 59 percent among strong Trump supporters, according to the poll.

“It’s clear that Donald Trump supporters are of the opposite view of the general public and Hillary Clinton supporters, with negative views of unauthorized immigrants, support for building a wall and no legalization for those who are here illegally,” said Mark Hugo Lopez, Pew’s director of Hispanic research.

The poll found that 76 percent of Americans overall think that immigrants here illegally are as hardworking and honest as U.S. citizens, while 67 percent say they are no more likely than citizens to commit serious crimes.

Trump started his public debate last week when he said he was open to “softening” immigration laws.

He even polled a televised town hall studio audience, asking, “So you have somebody who’s been in the county for 20 years, has done a great job, and everything else. . . . Do we take him and the family and her and him or whatever and send him out?”

Trump’s tone drove conservatives such as Sarah Palin over the edge.

“If Mr. Trump were to go down a path of wishy-washy positions on things that the core foundation of his support has so appreciated, and that is respecting our Constitution and respecting law and order in America, then yeah, there would be massive disappointment,” Palin told The Wall Street Journal.

Still, Pennsylvania’s Marino thinks that whatever heat Trump receives after Wednesday’s speech will blow over.

“I think people like Palin and Ann Coulter, this will be a talking issue for them for a couple of weeks, then they’ll go to something else,” he said. “But I think mainstream America is more concerned about criminals and the wall going up. I think he will overall benefit from this, because people will say this is a logical method to handle these issues.”

Some conservatives appear to be willing to give Trump room. Talk radio host Rush Limbaugh told a caller Monday that there’s nothing in the immigration-position section of Trump’s website that mentions mass deportation, omitting that the candidate had embraced roundups in interviews and GOP debates.

In the end, Limbaugh told Monday’s caller that it didn’t matter because Trump supporters are “gonna stick with him no matter what. I never took him seriously on this.”

Neither did Roy Beck, the executive director of NumbersUSA, which pushes for less immigration. Beck likened Trump's self-debate on immigration to the work of a novice politician who doesn't do serious deliberation in private.

"He's like a stand-up comedian working out material on the road," Beck said.