



With no 'softening' on immigration, can Trump broaden support?

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So much for Donald Trump's pivot on immigration.

Though Trump himself has suggested he was "softening" in recent days, the Republican presidential nominee used a high-profile speech Wednesday to re-affirm a hard-line immigration policy that includes cutting off federal funds for "sanctuary cities," building a "great wall along the southern border," exhibiting "zero tolerance for criminal aliens," and promoting policies that could well lead to removal of millions of undocumented immigrants.

Speaking to a boisterous crowd in Phoenix, Trump drew huge cheers when he declared "there will be no amnesty."

Critics and supporters of the Trump said the speech went against the real estate mogul's suggestions in recent says that he might pull back from some immigration proposals, especially the idea of mass deportations of an estimated 11 million people who are already in the U.S. illegally. Trump's aggressive speech came just a few hours after he made conciliatory remarks during a surprise visit to Mexico City to meet with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

"It's clear he didn't soften his immigration position one iota," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute and a critic of Trump.

Praise from the base, but is that enough?

Maintaining a hard line on immigration could be costly on Election Day, Nowrasteh said, citing polls that Americans oppose the idea of wholesale deportations that could break up families and take workers out of the U.S. economy. "Americans do not want to kick out 11 to 12 million people," he said.

To be sure, Trump did not mention his past support of an overall "deportation force" and did not discuss the idea of mass deportations — but he did pledge to triple the number of federal "deportation officers." as well as "a new special deportation task force focused on identifying and quickly removing the most dangerous criminal illegal immigrants in America."

In his remarks, Trump said, "You cannot obtain legal status or become a citizen of the United States by illegally entering our country. ... Those days are over."

Many analysts thought Trump might trim his proposals in a bid to appeal to Hispanics and suburban white voters who have been put off by his hard-line rhetoric.

The candidate himself has said "there could certainly be a softening because we're not looking to hurt people," drawing criticism from supporters who feared he might betray base backers who see 'open borders' as a major threat to American identity.

Noting that the immigration issue fueled Trump's rise to the Republican nomination, some of those same supporters effusively praised Trump's Phoenix speech.

"NO PIVOT," conservative author Ann Coulter tweeted. "I hear (Winston) Churchill had a nice turn of phrase, but Trump's immigration speech is the most magnificent speech ever given."

Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said Trump gave voters "a coherent and workable strategy" for addressing the problems of illegal immigration.

"Trump redefined the parameters of the immigration debate," Stein said.

The speech drew criticism from some of Trump's Hispanic supporters, including those who attended an Aug. 20 meeting in which Trump said he wanted a "humane" approach to dealing with undocumented Americans.

Alfonso Aguilar, president of the Latino Partnership for Conservative Principles, tweeted after the speech that he feels "disappointed and misled" and suggested he may pull his support of the GOP nominee. On CNN Thursday, he announced he had decided to stop backing Trump's candidacy.

Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton's campaign looked to capitalize. It announced it would put up television ads in Arizona, seeking to appeal to the growing Hispanic population in a state that hasn't supported a Democratic presidential candidate since Bill Clinton in 1996.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, a Clinton supporter, called Trump's immigration speech "mean-spirited."

"While he talked like John Wayne last night, he acted like Winnie the Pooh when he was in Mexico," Trumka said Thursday during a breakfast sponsored by *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Frank Sharry, executive director of the immigrant advocacy group America's Voice and a critic of Trump, said he expected the GOP candidate to make at least rhetorical changes on immigration. Instead, Trump amplified "a hard-line nativist position" that may not play well with suburban Republicans.

"There was nothing in that speech for them," Sharry said.

The deportation question

The main shift in Trump's policy came when discussing which undocumented immigrants to deport.

Trump has repeatedly said that all of the nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants must be deported. But on Wednesday night, he said his administration would focus on undocumented immigrants with criminal records, which he estimated to be about 2 million people. He would establish a "deportation task force" within Immigration and Customs Enforcement to find them and remove them from the country.

"Zero tolerance for criminal aliens," he said. "Day one, my first hour in office, those people are gone."

But Trump was vague on how he would handle the rest of the undocumented population.

In previous weeks, he worried many conservatives by raising the possibility of allowing some — those who had lived in the country for decades and led mostly law-abiding lives — to stay in the country under some form of legal status. On Wednesday, he seemed to close that door by saying all undocumented immigrants must return to their home countries.

"For those here illegally today who are seeking legal status, they will have one route and one route only — to return home and apply for reentry like everybody else," he said.

But shortly after, Trump seemed to reopen the door. He said that after a long series of enforcement mechanisms are put in place and new waves of illegal immigration are stopped, he would be willing to have a "discussion" about what to do with undocumented immigrants still in the country.

"Then and only then will we be in a position to consider the appropriate disposition of those individuals who remain," he said.

The rest of his hour-long speech, however, was spent outlining the policy proposals he announced last year.

Trump has blown hot and cold on other issues as well, including his call to suspend Muslim entry into the United States until the terrorism issue is resolved.

Trump began Wednesday's speech by talking about Americans who have been killed by people in the country illegally, and ended it by introducing parents of victims.

Urging backers in the key state of Arizona to get out and vote, Trump told supporters: "We're going to take our country back, folks ... This is a movement. We're going to take our country back."