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## How will the battle over dreamers end? Here are four scenarios.

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A deadline to protect hundreds of thousands of young undocumented immigrants is less than two weeks away, and it's looking less and less likely that Washington will act in time to protect them.

So, where does that leave the estimated 700,000 "dreamers" who could face deportation as soon as March 5?

There are a few possibilities, and not all of them are good for dreamers. Here are the likeliest scenarios, in order of least likely to most:

### 4. Congress strikes a deal in time to protect dreamers from deportation

Any momentum Congress had hit a wall last week after four separate immigration proposals tied to protecting dreamers failed to advance in the Senate.

Even though protecting dreamers is something a majority of Washington wants, it's really hard to find consensus in the details. Take the bills the Senate debated last week and these thorny questions each tried to answer:

How many dreamers should be legalized?

Democrats have largely acquiesced to funding some of Trump's border wall in exchange for protecting dreamers. But how much? And will the funding be for over the next decade, or immediately? Can that money be used to actually build a wall, or could it be a fence and other construction projects?

Democrats and some mainstream Republicans also don't like the idea of curbing legal immigration, like the diversity visa lottery program and ending most family-sponsored visas.

On any one of those questions, Congress can't find an answer that will win a majority in the more moderate Senate, let alone among the more conservative House Republicans. And even if Congress could come up with a deal, there's no guarantee President Trump will sign it.

That could explain why, after last week's votes, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., reportedly thinks the Senate should move on from immigration.

In short, a legislative fix looks like it will not happen anytime soon.

### 3. Congress doesn't strike a deal in time, and Trump extends the deadline

Trump is the one who set the March 5 deadline in September after he announced that he was ending the Obama-era program protecting dreamers from deportation. Technically, he could just reset it.

Except the deadline is really more of a political one than a legal one. A federal California judge ordered the Trump administration to keep renewing dreamer protections past the March 5 deadline, and the Trump administration obliged. A federal New York judge also temporarily blocked the administration's moves to end dreamer protections.

But even if the March 5 deadline were hard-and-fast, the White House has said they aren't going to extend it. White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly told reporters that he doesn't think the president will push out the deadline for a few reasons:

He's not sure the president can, legally

Congress works best under a deadline, real or not. "What makes them act is pressure," Kelly said.

## 2. Congress doesn't strike a deal in time, and dreamers get deported en masse

After a deadline passes, the ball is in the White House's court. Trump can decide to deport these dreamers or extend the deadline.

So far, it doesn't look like he's considering extending the deadline. Which leaves ... well, Trump has hinted that dreamers shouldn't expect any more protections after Congress failed to find a deal.

"This will be our last chance," Trump tweeted last week as the Senate was voting.

Still, deporting dreamers en masse would be practically unreasonable and politically risky. Brought to the country as children, fluent in English and arguably as American as someone with citizenship, dreamers are a group that it is easy to have sympathy for. A January Quinnipiac University poll found that even 49 percent of Republicans support legalizing dreamers.

And a February Quinnipiac poll found that a majority of Americans would blame Republicans if dreamers got deported.

That could help explain what Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute, is seeing: Cities and counties aren't cooperating with federal agents to round up undocumented immigrants nearly as much as they were during the Obama administration. Legally, Trump can't crack down on sanctuary cities with the wave of his pen (and a bill to help him do that failed in the Senate, though the House did pass one.)

## 1. Congress doesn't get a deal, and dreamers just kinda fade into the shadows

This is the likeliest option because it's the one that's already happening. Nowrasteh said some 100 dreamers a day are losing their status, and some are getting deported when federal officials do raids, like the handful they've done in California and at 7/11 stores nationwide.

Absent a deal to protect them, and absent a deadline, this slow-and-steady fade of dreamers back into the shadows, or back to a home they never knew, will probably keep happening. And since it's not as dramatic as dreamers all losing their protections at once, there may not be as much public pressure for Congress to act to protect them.

"It will continue to be the slow burn that it already is, where dreamers who come into contact with law enforcement will be deported," he said. "They just fade back into the shadows."