

Trump: The Anti-immigrant, “Mexicanophobic” President

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Since the presidential campaign, the immigration debate has been very racially and ethnically offensive in general, but it has also been particularly anti-Mexican. Donald J. Trump stood out as the most “Mexicanophobic” of the Republican candidates, with our country becoming one of his favorite targets. In addition to repudiating NAFTA, he characterized Mexican immigrants as criminals, drug smugglers, rapists, and generally “bad hombres.” This atmosphere turned into fertile ground for the racists to come out of their closets, hurling their insulting attitudes and discourses against migrants, who have been irreversibly damaged by the now-president’s hate-speech.

A few days after his inauguration, Trump took three executive actions that have directly affected these Mexicans:

1. *Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements*

This January 25 decree orders the construction of a wall along the southern U.S. border, as well as the detention and deportation of unauthorized foreigners, speeding up the paperwork for undocumented immigrants waiting to hear about their eligibility to remain in the United States, and the hiring of more Border Patrol personnel.

Trump has threatened Mexico with making it pay for the building of the wall, which the Mexican government has repeatedly refused to accept. Trump has proposed different mechanisms to this end: imposing a 20-percent tax on exports from Mexico, another on remittances,¹ and through undocumented workers’ social security payments. Any of these alternatives would have very negative consequences for our country, particularly any interference with remittances.

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Fortunately, a growing number of members of Congress, including some Republicans, have come out against the wall, arguing that it is very expensive, is not a solution for national security issues, and that it would severely affect the environment and have a negative impact on bi-national relations and property rights. Estimates put the total cost of the wall at US\$22 billion, taking 3.5 years to build.

It is unnecessary to continue building the wall. Trump seems not to realize that the trends in undocumented Mexican migrant flows have changed, dropping substantially since the 2008 economic crisis. According to PEW Hispanic Center data, the total number of undocumented migrants has stabilized at 11.3 million from 2008 to 2014, after reaching an all-time high of 12.2 million in 2007. In 2014, there were 5.8 million undocumented Mexican migrants, half of the total, but at least 1.1 million fewer than in 2007, when there were 6.9 million.²

Mexican migrant flow has become “zero net” migration, something Trump seems to be unaware of. He also is unaware that 4.5 million (42 percent) of the undocumented migrants who were in the United States in 2014 were “over-stayers” and not entrants without inspection (EWIs), as he supposes. I believe that those who will get rich from building the wall, in addition to construction companies, will be migrant smugglers, who will up their rates even more than they already have.³ Even before putting up the first foot of wall, it has already seriously affected relations between border states and the two countries.

Trump proposes speeding up arrests of people suspected of breaking federal or state laws and finishing up the “catch and release” process. This is not a new policy: Barack Obama deported 2.7 million undocumented migrants and G. W. Bush, 2 million, both using the Secure Communities policy, in effect between 2008 and 2014 and replaced in 2015 by the Priority Enforcement Program.

Trump’s deportation program includes the need for hiring 5 000 new Border Patrol agents to add to the 19 828 already in place. He has already ordered the immediate hiring of 1 700 border officials, prosecutors, and judges at a cost of US\$1.2 billion.⁴ The program also proposes improving or, if necessary, building more detention centers for undocumented immigrants close to the border and assigning more immigration judges to those facilities.

Deportation hearings are enormously backlogged: by February 2017, approximately half a million cases were backed up in 58 immigration courts. With 352 judges, those immi-

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grants wait an average of 677 days for a hearing;⁵ this is why Attorney General Jeff Sessions has announced that 50 more judges will be hired this year and 75 next year.⁶

The executive branch wants to strengthen the E-Verify program, which checks the immigration status of job applicants. Employers registered in the program increased from 24 000 in 2009 to 500 000 in 2016. Actually, in the last decade and a half the number of deportations has risen substantially, but seldom have those who hire undocumented workers been penalized. While more than 2.7 million undocumented migrants were deported between 2009 and 2016, only 1 337 employers were arrested in the same period for “illegal” hirings, tax evasion, and/or money laundering.⁷

It is true that the number of Central Americans detained in recent years has increased, and very often people who say they are Mexican but are not are deported to Mexico. In the February 22 memorandum, the White House stated that undocumented migrants will be returned to their place of entry, regardless of their home country, even when they are awaiting legal proceedings in the United States. If a non-Mexican migrant has made an asylum request, he or she must wait in Mexico until his/her U.S. hearing date. Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly is also considering an initiative that would separate children from their parents if the latter enter the U.S. “illegally.”⁸ This is a clear violation of their human rights that the Mexican government must clarify and negotiate bilaterally.

2. Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States

In another decree also issued January 25 to complement the previous one, Trump ordered the reinstatement of the Secure Communities program and the hiring of 10 000 immigration officials to deport undocumented migrants. The decree also states that the 287g program must be revitalized, allowing state and local police officers and officials to cooperate with federal immigration officials. It proposes that the jurisdic-

tions that do not comply with federal law —what have been called “sanctuary cities”— will be punished and no longer receive more federal funds than those stipulated by law. In fact, in the budget he sent to Congress, Trump proposed a cut-back on reimbursements to uncooperative states, which would have very negative consequences.

3. *Protecting the Nation from*

Foreign Terrorist Entry into the U.S.

In the first version he issued, the January 27 decree, Trump argued that new measures had to be established for issuing visas to ensure that applicants are not associated with terrorism and do not have violent or hostile attitudes toward the country. This travel ban decreed the temporary (90-day) suspension of the entry of persons from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. It also suspended the Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days and the entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely. James Robart, the federal judge in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington state in Seattle, blocked this action, arguing its unconstitutionality because it discriminated against Muslims for reasons of their religion.

In the second version of the decree, issued March 6, 2017, Trump proposed blocking the entry of visitors from six of the seven countries mentioned, leaving out Iraq. Like the previous version, the newer decree reduced the admission of refugees from 110 000 to 50 000 a year. This time, two federal judges from Hawaii and Maryland temporarily blocked the decree, both finding reasons to consider it unconstitutional because it discriminated against Muslims. In the face of this second set-back, Trump said the Justice Department would fight in the courts to defend the decree.

The three decrees require that the relevant bodies present regular reports on the social and economic costs incurred because of immigrants, without comparing those numbers with the benefits they contribute to the economy and society. The undeclared intention is to constantly bombard the pub-

lic with rumors about supposed crimes committed by migrants, with the cruel, xenophobic aim of nurturing a negative perception of them.

REFLECTIONS GIVEN AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

In this conflict-ridden atmosphere, the prospects for comprehensive immigration reform are poor. However, in his first speech to Congress on February 28, Trump surprisingly said that he would be willing to analyze a policy for the entry of skilled workers and the undocumented least likely to require federal assistance or to compete with native-born U.S. citizens for low-paying jobs.

He called on Democrats to work with Republicans to reform the immigration system, making it merit-based, instead of having family reunification as the priority, the reason 63 percent of the one million immigrants admitted legally every year are granted entry.

Until now, Trump has not eliminated the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), as he had promised to during his campaign. He has only asked that those with criminal charges filed against them be removed. However, the “Daca-mented” are terrified that immigration authorities will eventually use their registered information to deport them.

The construction of the wall has become an iconic issue that is tremendously offensive to Mexico, which has repeatedly rejected it. I think Trump’s construction plans will meet with serious obstacles, and he will only continue them to please the voters who supported it to retain their support in the time running up to his reelection bid in 2020. Many members of Congress question its usefulness and are not willing to cut other budget items that they consider fundamental in order to fund it.

Despite the fact that detentions increased before the 2016 presidential elections, in 2017, they have decreased significantly due to potential migrants not wanting to take the risk or spend more to cross the border. This decrease can mean that “the real wall” may be internal, with a mounting hunt for undocumented migrants whether they are criminals or not. In fact, the executive actions mentioned above broaden the universe of the “deportables,” allowing us to expect an increase in round-ups on the streets and entries into people’s homes, their workplaces, schools, churches, etc., creating an atmosphere of harassment and fear such as migrants have not experienced in a long time.

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The U.S. President has not eliminated DACA as he had promised to during his campaign. He has only asked that those with criminal charges filed against them be removed.

Today, our undocumented compatriots are trapped by their fear of being found, detained, and deported, whether they have committed a crime or not. They feel much more unprotected and vulnerable due to the constant fear of being separated from their families. All this has caused serious damage to the migrant community and the violation of their human rights.

It is true that in previous years, thousands of migrants had been deported without causing a big reaction in the United States or in Mexico. This may have been because they were justified by the idea that the economic crisis had made many of the jobs undocumented workers usually held disappear, and some people even returned voluntarily. The difference is that today, the deportations are being publicized more and they are perceived as a witch-hunt being carried out for ethnic and racial reasons.

Since the entry process is considered basic to security, immigration officials are authorized to review the content of telephones and computers, regardless of the interests of foreign citizens, who can be returned to their place of origin if they do not comply with authorities' demands, a situation that is both unprecedented and alarming. At the same time, tourists from some countries are forbidden to bring with them electronic equipment, except cellular phones, if they have flown on certain non-U.S. airlines.

Mexico is a country of emigrants, immigrants, and migrants in transit, and is facing great challenges due to the first two decrees mentioned above. Our government has made important efforts on our southern border apprehending Central Americans (392 000 in 2014) attempting to cross our country in search of the "American dream."⁹ This means it is doing an expensive, painful job to satisfy the needs of the U.S. government that is not necessarily acknowledged in the framework of bilateral cooperation.

At the same time, our northern border has become an increasingly conflicted, problematic area, given that many Central Americans, Mexicans, and people from other countries are there as deportees or waiting to enter the United States.

This is why the Mexican government must demand that when the Trump government deports undocumented migrants to Mexico, it must first verify whether they are Mexican or not and also stipulate the crime they committed, showing that they have received due process in a court before being deported.

Trump's "Mexicanphobia" has thrown Mexico-U.S. relations into crisis. The damage to Mexicans both here and there is clear. It is possible that in the face of this sentiment, anti-Americanism could resurface in Mexico, a nationalist reaction that has been latent at other times in our history and that could increase bilateral tensions. ■■■

NOTES

¹ Remittances sent to Mexico came to US\$26.97 billion in 2016, an all-time high. An estimated 1.4 million households in Mexico receive them. Juan José Li Ng, "En 2016 las remesas alcanzaron su máximo histórico," BBVA Research, February 1, 2017, <https://www.bbva.com/publicaciones/mexico-en-2016-las-remesas-alcanzan-su-maximo-historico-26-970-md/>.

² Ana Gonzalez-Barrera y Jens Manuel Krogstad, "What We Know about Illegal Immigration from Mexico," *Factank, News in Numbers*, Pew Research Center, March 2, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/02/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>.

³ In November 2016, smugglers were charging about US\$3 500 per crossing. Starting in January 2017, the price rose to up to US\$8 000. Aline Corpus, "Elevan polleros cuotas y abusos," *Reforma* (Mexico City), March 12, 2017, <http://www.reforma.com/aplicacioneslibre/articulo/default.aspx?id=1055304&v=3&md5=5e615698e22ce9111a58f7e7a891a2f7&ta=0dfdbac11765226904c16cb9ad1b2efe&pc=102>.

⁴ Bill Theobald, "Trump's Budget Directs \$2.6 Billion to Border Wall and That's Not All," *USA Today*, March 16, 2017, <http://www.king5.com/ext/news/nation-now/on-immigration-trumps-budget-calls-for-far-more-than-a-wall/281/nationnow/trjuNh7CjmwSqI6qMA8sG>.

⁵ Madison Park, "By the Numbers: Why Immigration Cases Take So Long," CNN, April 12, 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/04/12/politics/immigration-case-backlog-by-the-numbers/.

⁶ Morton Keller and Julian E. Zelizer, "How Much Space Does Trump Have for Bipartisanship?" *The Atlantic*, April 10, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/04/history-bipartisanship/522450/>.

⁷ Cindy Cárcamo, "Trump's Crackdown Focuses on People in the U.S. Illegally, But Not on the Businesses that Hire Them," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-immigration-employers-20170320-story.html>.

⁸ Mahita Gajanan, "Homeland Security Chief Says He's Considering Separating Immigrant Children from Parents," *Time*, March 6, 2017, <http://time.com/4692899/homeland-security-john-kelly-separate-children-parents-immigration/>.

⁹ Ernesto Rodríguez, "Migración centroamericana en tránsito irregular por México: nuevas cifras y tendencias," *Technical Report*, Research Gate, Canamid Policy Brief Series, PB14, CIESAS, December 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314279166_Migracion_centroamericana_en_transito_irregular_por_Mexico_Nuevas_cifras_y_tendencias.