Opinion
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The U.S.-Mexico border wall is seen in Jacumba Hot Springs, California, June 3. (OSV News/Reuters/Go Nakamura)



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Former President Donald Trump says a lot of terrifying things.

At last week's press conference, Trump spoke about former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and what he could have done as president to her. "I could have done things to her that would've made your head spin."

In a speech in New Hampshire late last year, Trump spoke about confronting domestic political threats. "We will root out the communists, Marxists, fascists and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country," the former president said.

Trump reserves his scariest comments, however, for the topic of immigration, better to say, immigrants, because Trump's most vile remarks usually are directed not at policies but at persons. From his first campaign speech back in 2015, when he said many migrants are "rapists" and "criminals," to his April 2, 2024, campaign speech in Michigan where he called migrants "animals" and "not human," Trump has engaged repeatedly in the ugly demagogic ploy of dehumanizing one's opponents.

At the Republican National Convention last month, Trump promised to build the border wall, a promise he made in 2016 but was unable to fulfill during his four years in office.

Actually, it was hard to know what he said. "And we built — most of the wall is already built, and we built it through using the funds, because what's more, what's better than that?" reads the transcript. "We have to stop the invasion into our country that's killing hundreds of thousands of people a year. We're not going to let that happen."

Syntax is not Trump's specialty. But demonizing migrants is. He accused them of spreading "misery, crime, poverty, disease and destruction to communities all across our land."

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Earlier this year, Trump raised the prospect of deploying the military to round up undocumented migrants. "When we talk military, generally speaking, I talk National Guard," Trump told Time magazine. "I've used the National Guard in Minneapolis. And if I didn't use it, I don't think you'd have Minneapolis standing right now, because it was really bad. But I think in terms of the National Guard. But if I thought things were getting out of control, I would have no problem using the military, per se. We have to have safety in our country. We have to have law and order in our country."

Apparently, he is willing to set aside those laws that protect the rights of migrants and refugees.

The thing about Trump is that he makes these wild claims — remember when he said, in the same opening 2015 campaign speech, that he was going to make Mexico pay for the border wall? — and people do not know whether or not to take him seriously. Is it all just bluster?

In his acceptance speech at the RNC he also said: "I will end every single international crisis that the current administration has created, including the horrible war with Russia and Ukraine, which would have never happened if I was president." What does he do for an encore? The eschaton?

In The Washington Post, Mexican writer León Krauze (son of the great historian Enrique) recently outlined just what implementing Trump's immigration plans would entail and how horrific the results would be. He writes:

> If carried out, Trump's planned mass deportation would leave nearly 4½ million children in the United States partially or wholly orphaned. The impact of mass deportation on families would be profound. In Florida, nearly 2 million U.S. citizens or non-undocumented residents live in households with at least one undocumented person; in California, it's more than 4 million. The sudden disappearance of a parent or a main provider will be devastating: It is estimated that more than 900,000 households with at least one child who is a U.S. citizen will fall below the poverty line if the undocumented breadwinners in these families are deported.

The human toll he sketches is too dreadful to contemplate, which may be why some voters are reluctant to consider it a real possibility. It is just Trumpian, tough guy rhetoric.

Here at NCR, J. Kevin Appleby explained how Trump's proposals, if implemented, would destroy families and also harm Catholic parishes throughout the country.

"The Catholic Church — an immigrant church — would not be immune to the effects of this misguided proposal," he writes. "Local parishes, which happen to attract immigrant families on Sundays and Holy Days, would be monitored by immigration enforcement. Mass attendance would likely fall significantly in immigrant communities."



Ohio Sen. JD Vance speaks at the People's Convention on June 16 in Detroit. (Wikimedia Commons/Gage Skidmore)

People are right to be concerned about what Trump says, but what his running mate, Sen. JD Vance, said was scarier still. Speaking to ABC News' Jon Karl, Vance was

asked how one goes about effecting such a mass deportation.

"You start with what's achievable," Vance said. "I think that if you deport a lot of violent criminals and frankly if you make it harder to hire illegal labor, which undercuts the wages of American workers, I think you go a lot of the way to solving the illegal immigration problem."

He added, "I think it's interesting that people focus on, well, how do you deport 18 million people? Let's start with 1 million. That's where Kamala Harris has failed. And then we can go from there."

This is different from Trump spouting off-script visions of dystopian fantasy and gross exaggeration. Vance's language is calculated, thoughtful in a perverse kind of way, programmatic.

It is like the campaign's decision to print signs that read, "Mass Deportation," and distribute them to RNC conventioneers. That was a decision, requiring time, planning and money. It wasn't Trump at Mar-a-Lago running his mouth.

When Vance converted to Catholicism, he evidently missed the session on church teaching about human dignity, and the one about church history, and the one on biblical exegesis regarding welcoming the stranger. Still, perhaps it is not Vance's intellectual and religious affinities but his relative groundedness that is more worrisome. Trump rants, but Vance makes plans. The thought of this duo gaining power is terrifying.

This story appears in the **Election 2024** feature series. View the full series.