

Trump Signs Order to Designate English as Official Language of the U.S.

The order did not require changes to federal programs but was a victory for America's English-only movement, which has ties to efforts to restrict immigration and bilingual education.

By Luke Broadwater
New York Times

President Trump signed an order designating English as the official language of the United States, the White House said on Saturday.

The order did not require any changes to federal programs and appeared to be largely symbolic. But the pronouncement was the biggest victory yet for the country's English-only movement, which has long been [tied to efforts](#) to restrict bilingual education and immigration to the United States.

More than 30 states have already designated English as their official language.

“Establishing English as the official language will not only streamline communication but also reinforce shared national values, and create a more cohesive and efficient society,” the order said.

The [executive order](#) rescinds a Clinton-era mandate that required agencies and recipients of federal funding to provide language assistance to non-English speakers, but allows agencies to keep current policies and provide documents and services in other languages.

While [more than three-quarters of Americans](#) speak only English at home, there are about 42 million Spanish speakers in the country and three million Chinese speakers.

The White House appeared eager to deliver on another of Mr. Trump's “America First” promises, but the order was notable in its lack of sweeping changes. G.O.P. officials have in recent years mixed nativist calls with outreach to Spanish-speaking voters, with whom they have made gains.

Reports of the planned order on Friday were quickly cheered by those aligned with Mr. Trump's anti-immigration policies.

“This is HUGE,” Charlie Kirk, a conservative political activist, wrote on social media. “In an era of mass immigration, asserting that the English language as the American language, is a message of national UNITY.”

But the plan also prompted backlash from pro-immigration groups and Democratic leaders.

“Like dozens of the other executive orders and actions that have been taken, we’re going to have to examine if what he’s doing is actually in compliance with the law and the U.S. Constitution,” Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the House minority leader, said on Friday. “And to the extent that it’s not, I’m confident that he will be sued.”

United We Dream, a youth-led group, noted that the United States had never designated an official language in its history.

“We mean this with all disrespect: No gracias,” said Anabel Mendoza, the group’s communications director. “We see exactly what Trump is trying to do by continuing to put a target on the backs of Black and brown immigrants and communities who speak different languages, and we won’t tolerate it.”

News of the planned order also brought resistance from the American territory of Puerto Rico, where 94 percent of residents speak Spanish.

“The president’s order declaring English as the only official language of the United States reflects a vision of American identity that conflicts with our Puerto Rican identity,” said Pablo José Hernández Rivera, the resident commissioner of Puerto Rico and a nonvoting member of the House. “There will be no statehood without assimilation, and Puerto Ricans will never surrender our identity.”

The president has long supported efforts to promote English-only practices in the United States. When he was first seeking the presidency in 2015, he mocked his rival Jeb Bush, who at times answered questions in Spanish.

“This is a country where we speak English, not Spanish,” [Mr. Trump said](#).