



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on September 24, 2015

## Pope Francis' U.S. Political Agenda

Pope Francis spent a busy day Wednesday in the United States, beginning with a White House welcome reception before an adoring crowd of 15,000 people and a pope-mobile parade around the National Mall attended by thousands more, continuing with an address to several hundred clergymen in Washington D.C.'s Catholic cathedral, and ending with an outdoor Mass at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception for 25,000. But during the course of his hectic day the wildly popular pope stirred controversy.



In a short [speech](#) at the White House Wednesday morning, with themes more fitting a UN bureaucrat than a Roman pontiff, he outlined the political agenda of his visit to the United States. Without specific mention of the recent Supreme Court ruling in favor of so-called gay marriage, he pledged American Catholics to be “committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination.”

Francis then turned briefly to [climate change](#) by praising President Obama's extremist environmental policies, and making the emotional and unsubstantiated claim that climate change adversely affects an “excluded” group of “millions of people ... which cries out to heaven.” Quoting Martin Luther King, Jr., he said, “We have defaulted on a promissory note, and now is the time to honor it.” Next came Cuba and a tribute to Obama's renewed diplomatic ties with that unapologetically Communist nation. Finally, the pope plugged liberal immigration policies by urging people to support “the international community to protect the vulnerable in our world and to stimulate integral and inclusive models of development.”

Later in the day, Francis delivered a longer [address](#) with more religious tones to several hundred bishops in Washington's Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle, announcing that the primary reason for his U.S. visit is “the cause of life and that of the family.” Yet his main advice to the Catholic hierarchy — the part of his speech trumpeted by major media — shifted back again to immigration: “Now you are facing this stream of Latin immigration which affects many of your dioceses ... do not be afraid to welcome them.”

His political views are admittedly uncharacteristic of the papal office, but so far none of his remarks comes as a surprise. The implications are nonetheless profound. The [Washington Post](#) reports that Francis' comments about climate change have “provided a potentially big boost for President Obama” and “amounted to a papal endorsement of Obama's climate strategy.” And since the pontiff obviously omits any distinction between legal and illegal immigration, Democrats [thrill](#) at his support for what they call “immigration reform.” Considering the pope's liberal bent on other issues, such as economics, international relations and homosexuality, [Politico](#) says, “Democrats are quietly gloating, Republicans are plainly nervous.” [Reuters](#) predicts that Francis' left-leaning views will lose the Hispanic vote for the Republican Party. And [CNN](#) summed up the situation most succinctly with the headline, “The Pope vs. the GOP.”



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Though it may seem to traditional-minded Catholics like the premise of a bad *Twilight Zone* episode, the reality is that the Roman Catholic Church, with more than a billion adherents, now has an openly [leftist pope](#). What explains it? “The Holy Father is a product of his environment,” said Iowa State Senator Rick Bertrand, a Catholic Republican, who told the [Des Moines Register](#), “Coming from South America, he’s about social justice ... he’s a socialist.”

*Photo of Pope Francis and President Obama: AP Images*



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