

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN VISA APPLICANTS FORGET THEIR OLD SOCIAL MEDIA IDS?

After being pushed into it by Congress, Customs and Border Protection has been going through the rule-making process on asking visa applicants for their social media IDs. The idea is root out people like Tashfeen Malik, the wife in the San Bernardino attack couple, who spoke in radicalized terms on private messaging areas of Facebook before she came to the country.

At first, the idea was just to ask for applicants to turn over social media sites voluntarily. But given the pressure CBP already uses, even with US citizens, it's easy to see how that "voluntary" request can be made to seem obligatory in the pressure of a border encounter.

But as Access Now points out, at the same time as extending the comment period (presumably hoping to get enough scared people commenting to balance out those who find this problematic), CBP also altered the proposed form to make it obligatory. There's one other problem with the form:



The form requests "social media identifier," not "identifiers."

Now, I've long thought that the whole point of this wasn't so much to find people engaged in radicalized discussions before the fact. Instead, it was about providing an excuse to deport people after they've been discovered, based off a claim they "lied" to CBP and thereby engaged in immigration fraud. Worse, they'll probably dig up some social media account that someone made years earlier and forgot about it –

could you remember every social media account you've ever set up?

Here, they've literally asked for one, singular, ID. Meaning someone could rightly put just their Facebook ID but then get deported for having not offered up their Twitter one.

Like I said: this is designed to be nothing more than a trap to provide an excuse for deporting someone based off something more fleeting than the old "Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party" question.

One final point: CBP *also* expanded how broadly they can share all this information. As I'll write in a follow-up, I suspect it's part of a larger, unannounced effort.