

CHAPTER 6

Inventing a New Order of Uncertainties: Trump's Anti-Immigration Policy and the Dilemmas of African Deportees

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Introduction

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There is no doubt that (anti-) immigration policy is central to President Trump's foreign policy agenda, both during his first term and in the current United States (US) administration. Scholars have extensively commented on Trump's repressive anti-immigration stance (Armenta, 2017; Currier, 2018; Montange, 2022; Odumosu and Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025; Perea, 2020; Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019), often highlighting perceived white nationalism as a driving force behind these policies and the intensified enforcement that accompanies them, suggesting that such measures may exacerbate cultural divides and reinforce the clash of civilisations thesis (Che, 2019; Huntington, 1993).

During his initial campaign, Trump prioritised immigration, emphasising the need to build a wall along the US–Mexico border. He expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the border and was particularly critical of how migrants were allowed to enter the US illegally or were granted temporary stays. Trump infamously labelled Mexican migrants as 'rapists' (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019: 198) and referred to immigrants

from Haiti, El Salvador and African nations as coming from ‘shithole countries’ (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019: 199), suggesting people from these countries were unworthy of entry into the US. Consequently, Trump implemented stringent immigration measures to limit the entry of migrants from these regions. In 2017, his administration introduced the first version of the Muslim Travel Ban, restricting entry for certain non-citizens from Muslim-majority countries (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019). This ban, along with the 2017 suspension of refugee admissions, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in war-torn Syria.

Between 2017 and 2018, Trump’s administration also terminated Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for non-citizens from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan. This status had previously been granted by earlier administrations to protect individuals unable to return to their home countries due to armed conflict, natural disasters, or other crises (American Immigration Council, 2024; Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019). In his 2024 campaign, Trump pledged to carry out large-scale deportations of illegal immigrants and to construct detention facilities at the borders prior to deportation.

Since the beginning of his second term, there has been a surge of scholarly commentary on Trump’s policies. Some studies focus on his unilateral diplomacy and the shift in US foreign policy regarding the Russia–Ukraine war (Crosston, 2025; Kupchan, 2025; Mills, 2025), while others examine his steadfast support for Israel during the conflict in Gaza (Cohen-Almagor, 2025; Othman, 2024; Shavit, 2025). This study, however, specifically addresses Trump’s anti-immigration policy and the challenges faced by African deportees. This focus is crucial given the unique circumstances of African governments, which often lack the institutional frameworks and public support systems necessary to assist deportees upon their return.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: First, immigration and immigration policy is defined; second, drawing on various documents, including scholarly articles, and media and policy reports, Trump’s (anti)immigration policy and its implementation are substantiated. Next, the theoretical framework is outlined, while deploying it to discuss the dilemmas and risks confronting African

deportees. The chapter is concluded by proposing policy measures for redressing the causes of illegal migration from African states.

Conceptualising immigration and immigration policy

In recent years, immigration has become a prominent topic in global discussions. Many nations are hesitant to accept individuals seeking to settle, leading to the implementation of various immigration laws and emergency policies aimed at managing the unprecedented rise in global immigration. Esses et al. (2017) highlighted that international migration is increasing, with diverse reactions from citizens of receiving countries. There is now more consensus than disagreement among nations regarding the definition of immigration. However, policies and approaches to immigration issues vary significantly. Esses et al. (2017) describe immigration as the voluntary or involuntary movement of people to a new country where they intend to reside for an extended period. The United Nations (UN) defines an international migrant as someone living in a country other than their country of birth (United Nations, 2018). Immigration is often viewed as the movement of individuals either voluntarily or through coercion seeking to settle permanently in another country for economic or political reasons.

The surge in immigration has prompted increased scholarly investigation into its motivations, implications for receiving nations, and economic consequences. Developed countries pay close attention to immigration, recognising its potential economic and cultural impacts (Altonji and Card, 1991; Borjas, 2019; Dustmann and Preston, 2004; OECD, 2018). Research indicates that immigration can contribute positively to the economic development of destination countries. Moreover, international migration can benefit both the country of origin and the receiving nation. Kaba (2019) argues that skilled individuals often migrate to societies that effectively utilise their talents. For example, Khullar et al. (2017) note that by 2017, over 160 000 foreign medical graduates were working in the US, many from developing countries. While the US benefits from their expertise, this situation can lead to 'brain drain', resulting in shortages of medical personnel in their home countries.

In response to these dynamics, governments develop and implement immigration policies to manage migration flows. Perez (2015) and Bolter (2019) define immigration policy as a set of measures that allow states to control the influx of individuals seeking to establish residence, work or seek asylum due to conflict or persecution. Essentially, immigration policies are deliberate governmental actions aimed at regulating the number of authorised, undocumented and irregular migrants in a country. Governments often cite several reasons for prioritising immigration policies, including the protection of domestic jobs and the economy. They also consider the cultural and security implications of uncontrolled borders, as is the case with the Trump government (Pengelly, 2024).

Trump's anti-immigration policy

134 From Europe to the Middle East, Latin America, Asia and Africa, virtually every continent is affected by Trump's foreign policy decisions following his return as the 47th US president. Trump's approach to trade, security and immigration has created ambiguities that impact traditional US allies and other nations. For example, reciprocal tariff strategies have strained relationships with European trading partners, while Trump's positions on NATO funding, exclusion of Europe from cease-fire negotiations in the Russia–Ukraine conflict, escalating tariffs with China, stringent immigration measures targeting Latin American migrants, particularly from Mexico and large-scale deportations affecting many African countries, highlight the challenges in his approach to international relations.

During his first term, Trump adopted a stringent stance on immigration, dismantling many established frameworks designed to facilitate the process. The following are some key anti-immigration actions taken during Trump's first term in office:

- In 2017, Trump ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme, which had allowed undocumented individuals who entered the US as children to obtain work permits (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019).

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- Executive Order 13768, titled '*Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States*,' expanded the list of deportable offenses and enabled local law enforcement to work closely with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Odumosu and Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025).
- In June 2018, the Supreme Court upheld the Trump administration's Muslim Travel Ban (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019).
- In July 2018, the federal government separated 2737 immigrant children from their families (Kaba, 2019).
- Trump declared a national emergency to secure funding for the construction of a wall along the Mexican border, ended Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for immigrants from several countries, including El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua and Sudan, and threatened nations that did not comply with US immigration policies (Kaba, 2019).

These measures represent a significant shift in US immigration policy, moving away from previous practices that considered immigrants on specific grounds. Monyani (2021) noted that Trump's 'America First' mantra reflects a nativist approach that disregarded family reunification and the safety and well-being of immigrants. His administration prioritised American workers and industries in its immigration policies, often portraying immigrants as a threat to American interests, values and security. This shift led to significant tensions, protests and international criticism, as was the case with the 2020 travel ban under Presidential Proclamation 9983, which restricted entry into the US for individuals from several Muslim-majority nations. This policy was framed as a measure to protect national security, however, it faced widespread condemnation for being discriminatory and for undermining the principles of religious freedom and diversity that the US is built upon (Odumosu and Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025). Also, the implementation of the US anti-immigration policy under Trump led to the separation of thousands of immigrant families at the US–Mexico border, as adults apprehended for illegal crossing were prosecuted, resulting in their children being placed in separate facilities. While the administration claimed this was necessary to

deter illegal immigration, it faced significant backlash from human rights advocates, leading to widespread protests against the policy due to its traumatic impact on families (Castillo et al., 2018).

In contrast, the Biden administration, which replaced the first Trump administration, took a more tolerant and proactive approach to immigration, focusing on respecting immigrant rights while addressing the increasing number of migrants entering the US for various reasons. According to Mena (2025), in 2023, there were approximately 47.8 million immigrants in the US, contributing US\$1.7 trillion in spending power and paying around US\$652 billion in taxes. Additionally, about 2.8 million people immigrated legally that year, including refugees and individuals on work visas, which accounted for 84 per cent of the country's population growth in 2024 (Mena, 2025).

Conversely, the 'Trump 2.0' approach views immigration through a lens of suspicion, often categorising migrants as undocumented or illegally present. Upon his return to the White House, Trump signed seven executive orders related to immigration, which included:

- an order outlining the military's role in protecting US territorial integrity;
- an order emphasising the meaning and value of American citizenship;
- an order realigning the US Refugee Admissions Programme;
- an order ending taxpayer subsidisation of open borders;
- an order securing US borders;
- an order protecting the American people against invasion; and
- an order safeguarding the US from foreign terrorists and other national security threats (Bustillo, 2025).

These actions reflect a shift back to a more restrictive immigration policy focused on national security and border control. Following these executive orders, there has been a significant crackdown on immigrants and undocumented individuals in the US. Trump has taken deliberate steps to enforce deportations, securing agreements with countries like

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Costa Rica, Panama and El Salvador to accept deportees from the US who are not from those countries (Jacobson, Uribe and Sherman, 2025).

However, the deportation of immigrants may have negative repercussions for the US economy. Analysts argue that the US relies on immigrant labour, and Trump's policies could have severe consequences for various industries and overall economic growth. For instance, Allianz Trade estimates that Trump's crackdown on both illegal and legal immigration could reduce the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate to below 2 per cent annually by 2026. The Brookings Institution predicts that growth could drop to 0.4 per cent in 2025 if Trump continues to restrict legal immigration and conducts 3.4 million deportations (Mena, 2025). In the first quarter of 2025, the US GDP fell by 0.3 per cent. President Trump refused to take responsibility for this and instead blamed the Biden administration for poor economic management and excessive spending.

Pivoting from elite theory to strain theory to understand the dilemmas of African deportees

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Elite theory, articulated by thinkers such as Vilfredo Pareto, Roberto Michels, Gaetano Mosca and José Ortega Gasset, provides a framework for understanding Trump's anti-immigration and deportation policies. This theory emphasises the interplay between American populist sentiment and elite interests as key motivators of these policies. According to elite theory, Trump's anti-immigration stance reflects the relationship between political, economic and cultural elites and the electorate. Trump positioned himself as an outsider challenging the political elite, appealing to American working-class voters who perceived immigration as a threat to their jobs and security. His hard-line approach resonated with these voters, while also aligning with certain American business elites and interest groups that favoured a labour market focused on American workers, reducing competition from immigrant labour. This alignment was evident in the United Steelworkers Union strike actions in 2015 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). By adopting a nationalist immigration

policy, Trump consolidated support from his political base and addressed the frustrations of those feeling marginalised by cultural elites advocating for diversity. Ultimately, his re-election and anti-immigration approach illustrate how elite dynamics can shape significant political decisions.

While elite theory effectively highlights the influence of elite interests on US immigration policy, its focus on domestic politics limits its applicability in predicting the outcomes and challenges posed by America's unauthorised migrant deportation policy, particularly for African countries. Many African nations are among the least developed, most corrupt and most affected by inequality, repression, climate change, poverty and insecurity, driving both voluntary and involuntary emigration to the US and other developed countries. Given that stress is a key factor in prompting economic, environmental and security-related migration from Africa, theories that emphasise the challenging conditions in migrant source countries are more suitable for understanding the dilemmas faced by African deportees.

138 Strain theory from sociology is particularly relevant in this context. According to the traditional version of strain theory (Merton, 1938), individuals may engage in crime, conflict, substance abuse, anti-government protests and other non-conformist behaviours as 'normal' responses to 'abnormal' political and socio-economic structures that fail to meet citizens' security and welfare needs. Deportees often experience significant stress during forced repatriation, losing their jobs, income, and social networks, which complicate their reintegration into their home countries. This stress is exacerbated by feelings of frustration over their losses. General strain theory posits that such frustration can lead to alienation, depression, irritability and an increased risk of engaging in violent or criminal behaviour (Agnew, 1992; 2001; 2005).

Several sources of emotional and social strain are associated with deportation. Deportees may struggle to reconnect with family and friends, leading to feelings of isolation. Many returned without financial resources or job opportunities, heightening anxiety about their livelihoods. They may also face social stigma or discrimination, which contributes to emotional distress. The trauma of deportation can result in mental health issues, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), further

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aggravated by the challenges of adjusting to life back home. Navigating local bureaucracies, often characterised by corruption and inefficiency and obtaining necessary identification documents can create significant obstacles, adding to their frustration.

Additionally, deportees may find that their previous support systems have changed or disappeared, leaving them without essential emotional and financial support. After living abroad, they may struggle to adapt to local customs and norms, feeling out of place in their own country. For instance, deportees from war-torn areas in Africa or African nations still experiencing armed conflict face harsher and unimaginable experiences beyond mere stigma. Presently, African nations like Ethiopia, Somalia, Cameroon, Mozambique, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, etc., have all, however, at different times, relapsed into either subtle violent conflict or internal political instability, while nations like Sudan are still facing devastating civil war.

Deporting asylum seekers to these areas not only counteracts international laws and obligations, but it may also be a quick invitation to death. For instance, it is worth noting that the eruption of conflict in 2017 in Cameroon led to a mass exodus of people. Arieff (2018) asserted that the outbreak of violent confrontations in Cameroon between the '*Ambaboy*s' (the separatist fighters) and government forces in 2017 resulted in colossal destruction of many villages and communities such as Mamfe, Bali, Bafut, Kumba, Kumbo and some parts of Bamenda. It is known that Cameroonians deported from US in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 experienced abuses by Cameroonian authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2024). These abuses, according to the report, include rape, torture, physical abuse, forced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, unfair prosecutions and confiscation of their national identity cards, restrictions on freedom of movement and the targeting of relatives (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Thus, Somalia and Nigeria, which have the highest number of deportees (see Appendix 1 below), face stiff socio-economic and political dislocations, with sections of the countries under severe security threats. Generally, most West Africa states grapple with the increasing incidence of unemployment, abysmal infrastructural facilities, poor foreign direct

investment flow, lack of technology, corruption, political instability and poor healthcare delivery system, produce primary commodities with precarious prices, highly indebted and some unable to meet their debt servicing obligations, wars, conflicts, endemic military interventions, low life expectancy and high level of illiteracy. As a result, West African deportees face more misery. For instance, a Nigerian deportee from the US in 2016 lamented his ordeals in the US and how his family rejected him when he was deported to Nigeria. According to the said deportee, 'my family members felt I had brought added burden upon them when I should be helping them with their needs, as a result, they simply rejected me for coming with nothing' (Ojoye, 2016: 61). For this individual, starting life again is shrouded with all manner of fear and uncertainty.

The above situations face many deportees in Africa, because many African states are yet to establish a credible and sustainable scheme or support framework for their citizens in difficult times (Alumona and Odigbo, 2017). This is largely because the African landscape is replete with many illegitimate and unstable governments which emerged from the ruins of insecurity, corruption and wars (Aja, 2024; Collier, 2009). For instance, the Sudan civil war has been described as having resulted in one of the world's worst displacements, with millions of people already killed. Presently, conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces has internally displaced millions of Sudanese with attendant humanitarian consequences. Therefore, deporting people to this war-torn country is a tacit invitation to further endanger their lives. The fact that virtually all African nations appear to lack any public support systems to ameliorate the sufferings of the deportees means that people are likely to be disposed to a crueller condition beyond rupturing their socio-economic lifelines.

Indeed, it is even unlawful to return a person to an unsafe environment against their wishes. A deportee who does not have access to psychological therapy in a society coupled with unchecked stigmatisation for being deported may dehumanise the person, cause such a person to commit suicide or be lured to crimes and thereby, adds or compounds the rising crime rates in Africa. In addition to stigmatisation, returnees face daily economic struggles, a situation that has only become worse with

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the rising conflicts and instability that have a severe impact on Africa's already struggling economy (Zandonini, 2020). Some states like Nigeria will arrest and abandon such person(s) in prison without trial for years. Udegbe (2013) lamented that to-date, Nigeria still has deportees held in Kirikiri Prison. In most cases, African deportees are either not been compensated by the deporting nation or accepted and assisted by the receiving native country.

Clearly, deportation inevitably inflicts unquantifiable damages to 'African deportees' and might compel many to resort to crime or adopt desperate means of survival. Overall, these challenges and the overwhelming stress they create can lead some deportees to engage in violent or illegal activities as a coping mechanism. The lack of institutional support for reintegration, combined with increased risks of insecurity, creates a challenging order of uncertainties for African deportees in their home countries.

Conclusion

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This paper's analysis of Trump's immigration policies highlights the intricate relationship between US domestic politics, elite interests and the significant challenges faced by African emigrants. The stringent measures implemented during Trump's tenure not only exacerbate the difficulties encountered by migrants, but also underscore the vulnerabilities of African nations in managing the return of deportees. As these individuals grapple with the trauma of forced repatriation, economic instability and social reintegration, it becomes imperative to address the root causes of illegal migration from African countries.

To redress the root causes of unauthorised migration, African governments should prioritise the establishment of transparent and accountable institutions that can manage migration and support deportees while investing in job creation and sustainable economic development through partnerships with international organisations and private sector investments that focus on creating opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy and simple consumer goods manufacturing. Additionally, implementing comprehensive education and vocational

training programmes can equip individuals with the skills needed for local job markets, thereby enhancing human capital and reducing the economic pressures that lead to migration. Furthermore, African nations should collaborate on migration management strategies, sharing best practices and resources to address the challenges of deportation and reintegration. It is also essential for governments in conflict-affected countries, notably Cameroon, DRC and Sudan, to actively engage in conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives to address the root causes of migration, including political instability, violence and human rights abuses. The ongoing Anglophone crisis has resulted in significant violence and repression against English-speaking communities, leading to widespread displacement and prompting many individuals to flee the country in search of safety. The recent suspension of TPS for Cameroonian nationals in the US (Aleaziz, 2025) exacerbates these challenges, as it increases the risk of deportation for individuals. TPS suspension not only threatens the safety and well-being of those affected by conflicts in Southern Cameroon, but it also places additional strain on Cameroon's already fragile systems, which lack the capacity to support returning individuals. By promoting inclusive governance, protecting human rights and addressing the grievances that fuel unrest, governments in Africa can create a more stable environment that reduces the pressures driving their citizens to migrate and helps mitigate the negative implications of US immigration policies.

Ultimately, raising awareness about the challenges faced by deportees and fostering a culture of acceptance can help reduce social stigma. Public campaigns promoting understanding and support for reintegration efforts can encourage communities to embrace returnees as valuable contributors. By adopting these measures, which align with strain theory's emphasis on addressing the socio-economic pressures that lead to migration, African countries can create an environment that not only addresses the immediate challenges of deportation but also tackles the underlying issues that compel individuals to seek refuge elsewhere.

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Appendix: 6.1: Number of African immigrants awaiting deportation in the United States

African region	Country	Number of people awaiting deportation in the US
West Africa	Benin	102
	Burkina Faso	303
	Cape Verde	314
	Gambia	1035
	Ghana	3228
	Guinea	1897
	Guinea-Bissau	48
	Liberia	1563
	Niger	642
	Nigeria	3690
	Senegal	1689
	Sierra Leone	1563
	Togo	427
	Total	16501
North Africa	Algeria	306
	Egypt	1461
	Libya	89
	Morocco	495
	Sudan	1012
	Total	3363

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African region	Country	Number of people awaiting deportation in the US
East Africa	Djibouti	29
	Eritrea	973
	Ethiopia	1713
	Kenya	1282
	Madagascar	5
	Malawi	56
	Mozambique	14
	Rwanda	338
	Somalia	4090
	South Sudan	136
	Uganda	393
	Zambia	174
	Zimbabwe	545
	Total	10210
Central Africa	Central African Republic	82
	Chad	169
	Congo	795
	Equatorial Guinea	20
	Sao Tome and Principe	1
	Democratic Republic of Congo	1068
	Cameroon	1736
	Gabon	60
	Total	3931
Southern Africa	Angola	662
	Botswana	12
	Namibia	19
	South Africa	379
	Total	1072

Source: Adapted from Sulaimon (2025)