

Research Article

IMMIGRATION NATIONALISM, POLICY ESCALATION, AND DEMOGRAPHIC SPILLOVERS: NIGERIA'S EXPERIENCE UNDER UNITED STATES (U.S) RESTRICTIVE IMMIGRATION GOVERNANCE (2017–2025)

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Abstract

U.S immigration policy shifts have increasingly been framed as domestic political and security decisions, yet their effects extend beyond U.S. borders through “demographic spillovers” that shape population dynamics in migrant-sending societies. This article examines Nigeria’s experience under U.S. restrictive immigration governance between 2017 and 2025, focusing on migration-pattern disruptions, remittance-linked welfare vulnerabilities, and return and involuntary non-migration pressures. Drawing on a secondary-data-based descriptive-analytical design, the paper synthesizes evidence from international demographic and migration datasets and authoritative institutional reports, including United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the World Bank, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Homeland Security Statistics, and major policy analyses. The article situates policy change within migration systems and demographic transition perspectives to explain how sustained restrictionism intensified by early 2025 policy actions and subsequent 2025 entry-restriction measures alters the predictability and accessibility of legal migration pathways, with downstream implications for household welfare and reintegration burdens in Nigeria. The findings suggest that persistent restrictionism corresponds with declining access to U.S. legal mobility channels, heightened migration uncertainty, increased non-migration/stalled mobility, and stronger reintegration pressure for returnees. While the paper does not claim

causal inference, the patterns align with established evidence that restrictive destination-country regimes generate cumulative effects for sending-country demographic and welfare outcomes. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for migration-sensitive population planning, remittance-risk resilience, and reintegration support frameworks in Nigeria.

Keywords: United States; immigration restriction; Nigeria; demography; remittances; return migration; involuntary non-migration.

1. Introduction

International migration is a central component of contemporary demographic change, influencing population distribution, labour-market dynamics, household welfare, and development trajectories across regions (UN DESA, 2024). In sub-Saharan Africa, as averred by Castles, et al. (2020), migration is deeply embedded in socio-economic survival strategies and youth aspirations, particularly in contexts characterized by rapid population growth and limited domestic employment absorption. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, occupies a prominent position within global migration systems, with the United States emerging as one of the most significant destinations for its migrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

Migration to the United States has historically facilitated educational advancement, professional mobility, and household welfare for Nigerians. Empirical evidence shows that Nigerian migrants in the United States are disproportionately represented among students and skilled professionals, reflecting selective migration processes and high levels of human-capital investment (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Their transnational ties generate substantial remittance inflows that support consumption, education, healthcare, and housing investment in Nigeria (World Bank, 2018; World Bank, 2023). Akanle, et al. (2021) posited that beyond monetary transfers, migration opportunities shape demographic behaviour by influencing schooling decisions, labour-force participation, marriage timing, and expectations of upward mobility among Nigerian youth.

From 2017 onward, however, U.S. immigration governance entered a prolonged phase of restrictionism. The first administration of Donald Trump marked a decisive shift toward immigration nationalism, emphasizing border security, selective admission, enhanced vetting procedures, and enforcement-driven controls (Migration Policy Institute, 2018; Castles, 2018). Although subsequent administrations moderated immigration rhetoric, structural constraints including administrative tightening, visa backlogs, and procedural uncertainty remained embedded within the immigration system (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

Moreover, the renewed escalation of restrictive immigration governance in 2025 reinforced this trajectory through expanded screening requirements, tighter entry controls, and deterrence-oriented enforcement signals. Migration policy analysis suggests that such continuity in restrictionism is more likely to generate cumulative rather than temporary effects within migration systems (de Haas, 2021; Castles et al., 2020). While these measures were framed within domestic political and security priorities, their consequences extended beyond U.S. borders. Migration systems theory emphasizes that policy changes in major destination

countries generate feedback effects in origin societies, reshaping migration behaviour, household strategies, and demographic outcomes (Abel & Cohen, 2019).

Despite this, much of the academic and policy debate surrounding U.S. immigration governance remains inward-looking, focusing primarily on domestic legal, political, and labour-market implications. Comparatively limited attention has been paid to how sustained restrictive immigration regimes affect demographic outcomes in migrant-sending societies, particularly in Africa (Castles et al., 2020). This study addresses that gap by examining Nigeria's demographic experience under sustained U.S. restrictive immigration governance between 2017 and 2025, with particular attention to migration patterns, remittance-linked household welfare, and return and involuntary non-migration dynamics.

2. Statement of Problem

Research on U.S. immigration policy has predominantly concentrated on destination-country perspectives, including electoral politics, border governance, and labour-market impacts within the United States (Castles, 2018). While this scholarship is extensive, it has produced a notable analytical gap regarding the demographic implications of restrictive immigration regimes for migrant-sending countries. This gap is significant because migration outcomes in sending societies shape household welfare, labour supply, and long-term population dynamics (UN DESA, 2024). In Nigeria, international migration functions simultaneously as an economic strategy and a demographic outlet. Remittances play a stabilizing role in household welfare by supporting consumption, education, and healthcare access, particularly in periods of economic volatility (World Bank, 2018; World Bank, 2023). Migration opportunities also influence youth aspirations and transitions into adulthood, shaping decisions related to education, employment, and household formation (Akanle et al., 2021).

Between 2017 and 2025, Nigeria experienced a convergence of demographic and economic pressures. Population growth remained high, youth unemployment persisted, and household reliance on remittance income increased (UN DESA, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Simultaneously, access to one of Nigeria's most important migration destinations (the United States) became increasingly uncertain due to sustained restrictive immigration governance (Migration Policy Institute, 2018; Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Prolonged disruption of migration pathways generated demographic challenges that remain insufficiently integrated into population policy analysis. Prospective migrants increasingly faced delayed or stalled mobility, contributing to involuntary non-migration (de Haas, 2021; IOM, 2024). Return migration, where it occurred, was frequently unplanned and inadequately supported, placing additional pressure on households and domestic labour markets (IOM, 2024; World Bank, 2025). Remittance-dependent households became more vulnerable as migration opportunities narrowed and employment continuity abroad became less predictable (World Bank, 2023).

The absence of an integrated demographic analysis linking sustained U.S. restrictive immigration governance including its escalation in 2025 to Nigeria's population dynamics limits evidence-based population planning. Without such analysis, migration policy shocks originating in destination countries risk being underestimated as external determinants of demographic change. This study therefore addresses the need for a systematic,

demographically grounded assessment of how prolonged U.S. restrictive immigration governance between 2017 and 2025 has shaped migration behaviour, household welfare, and population pressure in Nigeria.

3. Objectives

Generally the paper examined the demographic implications of U.S. restrictive immigration governance for Nigeria between 2017 and 2025, with particular attention to migration behaviour, household welfare, and population pressure. Specifically, it:

1. Assessed the changes in Nigerian migration patterns under U.S. immigration regimes between 2017 and 2025.
2. Examined the implications of U.S. immigration restrictions for remittance stability and household welfare in Nigeria.
3. Analyzed the return migration, involuntary non-migration, and reintegration challenges associated with heightened immigration enforcement.

4. Conceptual Review

Immigration nationalism refers to a policy orientation that emphasizes national sovereignty, border control, and selective migrant admission based on perceived economic, cultural, or security interests (Castles, 2018). Within this framework, migration is framed primarily as a risk-management issue rather than a component of global mobility or development cooperation. Immigration nationalism is commonly operationalized through restrictive visa regimes, enhanced vetting procedures, administrative tightening, reduced humanitarian admissions, and expanded enforcement mechanisms (Castles et al., 2020). Migration scholarship emphasizes that such policies do not operate in isolation. Migration is embedded in migration systems networks of social, economic, institutional, and policy linkages connecting origin and destination countries (Abel & Cohen, 2019). When immigration restrictions are imposed by a major destination country, these systems are disrupted, generating ripple effects that extend into migrant-sending societies.

From a demographic perspective, migration is a life-course process that shapes education, employment, family formation, and household welfare (UN DESA, 2024). Decisions to migrate are often embedded in household strategies aimed at income diversification, risk mitigation, and intergenerational mobility (Castles et al., 2020). Consequently, restrictive immigration regimes generate demographic spillover effects, defined as population-level outcomes in sending societies arising from externally imposed mobility constraints.

Key demographic spillovers identified in the literature include stalled migration aspirations, delayed transitions into adulthood among youth, prolonged dependence on domestic labour markets with limited absorptive capacity, remittance instability, involuntary non-migration, and heightened return-migration pressures (de Haas, 2021; IOM, 2024). These effects are particularly pronounced in countries where international migration has historically functioned as both an economic strategy and a demographic outlet.

In Nigeria, migration occupies a central position within household livelihood strategies and national development discourse. When access to international migration pathways is disrupted

for extended periods, migration disruption becomes structural rather than episodic, altering population dynamics even in the absence of direct domestic population policy change (UN DESA, 2024). Conceptually, U.S. restrictive immigration governance can therefore be understood as an external demographic force shaping Nigeria's population outcomes.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Nigerian Migration Patterns under U.S. Restrictive Immigration Regimes

The United States has long been identified as a major destination for Nigerian migrants, particularly students, professionals, and skilled workers (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Nigerian migration to the United States is characterized by relatively high levels of educational attainment, reflecting both selective migration processes and strong human-capital investment in the country of origin. Migration opportunities to the United States influence educational trajectories in Nigeria, including decisions regarding field of study, postgraduate training, and credential acquisition (Akanle et al., 2021). Households often invest in education with the expectation that migration will yield returns through overseas employment and remittances. As such, access to U.S. migration pathways shapes both migration outcomes and pre-migration demographic behaviour.

More so, research on migration decision-making consistently demonstrates that restrictive destination-country policies do not eliminate migration aspirations. Instead, they produce delayed, fragmented, or stalled mobility, increasing uncertainty and the cost of migration attempts (de Haas, 2021). Enhanced screening, shifting eligibility criteria, visa backlogs, and administrative delays reduce the predictability of migration outcomes and discourage long-term planning. For Nigerian youth, who constitute the most migration-prone segment of the population, prolonged uncertainty has significant demographic implications. Studies indicate that delayed migration may translate into delayed labour-market entry, extended dependence on family support, and postponed household formation (Castles et al., 2020). In contexts of high youth unemployment, stalled migration intensifies domestic labour-market pressure and contributes to underemployment and skills mismatch (UN DESA, 2024).

5.2 Remittances and Household Welfare

Remittances are widely recognized as a critical source of household income in migrant-sending countries. In Nigeria, remittance inflows support household consumption, education, healthcare access, housing investment, and risk mitigation, particularly during periods of economic volatility (World Bank, 2018; World Bank, 2023). Beyond their immediate economic effects, remittances have important demographic implications. Stable remittance flows are associated with improved nutrition, reduced child labour, higher school attendance, and enhanced access to healthcare, all of which influence long-term population health and human-capital outcomes (Castles, et al., 2020). As such, remittances function as a key welfare mechanism within Nigeria's demographic system. However, the literature also highlights the vulnerability of remittance-dependent households to migration disruption. When destination-country policies restrict mobility or destabilize migrant employment, remittance inflows may

become volatile or decline (World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2025). Empirical studies show that remittance volatility exposes households to welfare shocks that can affect schooling continuity, health-seeking behaviour, and household resilience (Akanle et al., 2021).

From a demographic perspective, remittance instability links migration governance in destination countries to population welfare outcomes in sending societies. Sustained restrictionism in a major destination country such as the United States can therefore transform remittance volatility from a temporary risk into a structural challenge for household welfare and demographic stability in Nigeria.

5.3 Return Migration and Involuntary Non-Migration

Recent migration scholarship has increasingly emphasized involuntary non-migration, defined as situations in which individuals who intend to migrate are unable to do so due to external constraints such as restrictive policies or administrative barriers (de Haas, 2021). Involuntary non-migration challenges traditional migration frameworks that focus primarily on movement by highlighting the demographic significance of immobility. Restrictive immigration regimes increase the prevalence of stalled migration, resulting in prolonged waiting periods, repeated application failures, and heightened uncertainty. Studies indicate that such experiences may lead to psychological stress, underutilization of skills acquired in anticipation of migration, and delayed life-course transitions (Castles, et al., 2020; IOM, 2024).

Return migration under restrictive regimes also presents distinct demographic challenges. Enforcement escalation and visa constraints contribute to unplanned returns, often without adequate financial preparation or reintegration support (IOM, 2024). Evidence suggests that such returns can intensify pressure on domestic labour markets and social systems, particularly in countries with limited reintegration infrastructure (World Bank, 2025). In Nigeria, where formal reintegration frameworks remain limited, return migration and involuntary non-migration represent significant demographic outcomes of restrictive immigration governance. These dynamics reinforce the need to examine migration disruption not only in terms of reduced inflows but also in terms of immobility and reintegration pressure.

5.4 Empirical Review

Cross-national empirical work and institutional reporting show that restrictive immigration regimes correspond with reduced inflows, altered mobility patterns, and higher rates of stalled or return migration in multiple sending regions (IOM, 2024). Data-oriented migration research also emphasizes that migration systems respond to policy signals through changed application behaviour, rerouting, or delays not solely through immediate cessation of movement (Abel & Cohen, 2019; de Haas, 2021). For Nigeria, international sources document the importance of remittances and the sensitivity of remittance trends to destination-country shocks and constraints (World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2025). Policy-focused analyses of 2025 immigration governance changes also suggest expanded vetting, entry restriction measures, and heightened enforcement posture that may further compress mobility predictability (The White House, 2025a; The White House, 2025b; New York City Bar Association, 2025). DHS statistical reporting provides a foundation for describing

enforcement posture and system dynamics without requiring primary data collection (DHS OHSS, 2025).

This study therefore treats the 2017-2025 period as one of cumulative restrictionist pressure, with escalation signals in 2025, and evaluates demographic implications through a trend-based synthesis rather than causal estimation.

6. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in migration systems theory, which conceptualizes migration as a dynamic process sustained by interconnected economic, social, institutional, and policy linkages between origin and destination countries (Abel & Cohen, 2019). According to this framework, migration flows are maintained through feedback mechanisms such as migrant networks, labour demand, educational exchange, remittances, and regulatory regimes. When a major component of the system, particularly destination-country immigration policy changes significantly, the effects reverberate throughout the entire system (Castles et al., 2020).

Migration systems theory is particularly relevant for analyzing the demographic implications of restrictive immigration governance. Rather than viewing migration as a series of isolated individual decisions, the theory emphasizes the structural conditions that shape mobility and immobility. Restrictive immigration policies disrupt migration systems by increasing uncertainty, weakening network-based feedback mechanisms, and reducing the predictability of outcomes (Abel & Cohen, 2019). These disruptions affect not only migrants but also households and communities in sending societies.

In the Nigerian context, migration systems linking Nigeria and the United States have historically been sustained through education pathways, professional networks, family reunification channels, and remittance flows (Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Sustained restrictionism weakens these linkages, transforming migration from a relatively predictable livelihood strategy into a high-risk and uncertain endeavor. As a result, households and individuals adapt by delaying migration plans, redirecting aspirations, or absorbing the costs of involuntary immobility (de Haas, 2021).

The analysis is further informed by demographic transition theory, particularly contemporary interpretations that recognize migration as a modifying factor in population change. While classical demographic transition models focus on fertility and mortality, recent scholarship emphasizes that migration significantly influences population growth rates, age structures, and dependency ratios (UN DESA, 2024). In migrant-sending countries, emigration can moderate population pressure and contribute to demographic dividends by absorbing surplus labour.

When migration pathways are persistently restricted, however, these moderating effects are weakened. Sustained barriers to migration may delay demographic dividends by retaining surplus labour within domestic economies that lack sufficient employment opportunities, thereby increasing youth dependency and unemployment (UN DESA, 2024). From this perspective, restrictive immigration governance in destination countries functions as an external constraint on demographic transition processes in sending societies.

By integrating migration systems theory with demographic transition perspectives, this paper conceptualizes U.S. restrictive immigration governance as an external demographic determinant shaping Nigeria’s population dynamics. This framework provides a coherent theoretical basis for interpreting observed trends in migration disruption, remittance instability, involuntary non-migration, and return migration between 2017 and 2025.

7. Methodology

The paper adopts a secondary-data-based descriptive and analytical research design. It relies exclusively on existing datasets, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed literature to examine the demographic implications of U.S. restrictive immigration governance for Nigeria between 2017 and 2025 (IOM, 2024; UN DESA, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

Table1. Directional Trends in Nigerian Migration to the United States and Remittance Dynamics, 2017–2025

Indicator	2017-2019	2019-2021	2021-2023	2023-2025	Primary Data Source
Access to U.S. legal migration pathways (students, family, skilled)	Declining	Declining	Relatively stable	Declining	Migration Policy Institute; White House policy actions
Nigerian migrant inflows to the United States	Declining	Declining	Relatively stable	Declining	UN DESA
Stability of remittance inflows to Nigeria	Relatively stable	Declining	Relatively stable	Declining	World Bank
Incidence of involuntary non-migration / stalled migration	Increasing	Increasing	Relatively stable	Increasing	IOM
Return migration and reintegration pressure	Increasing	Increasing	Relatively stable	Increasing	IOM; World Bank

Note: Trend categories represent directional movement derived from publicly available institutional reports and do not constitute numerical estimates.

Interpretation

Table 1 indicates a pattern consistent with sustained restrictionist pressure on legal access pathways and rising uncertainty around mobility. The interpretation aligns with policy analyses that emphasize tightening, vetting expansion, and enforcement escalation signals, particularly within the 2025 governance environment (Brookings, 2025; The White House, 2025a; The White House, 2025b). In Nigeria, the demographic relevance of these patterns lies in the combined welfare and labour-market pressures associated with reduced mobility predictability and remittance volatility (World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2025; IOM, 2024). Consistent with the study design, these observations are treated as associative patterns rather than causal effects.

8. Conclusion

This study examined the demographic implications of U.S. restrictive immigration governance for Nigeria between 2017 and 2025, situating immigration policy within a transnational demographic framework. Drawing exclusively on secondary data from authoritative international institutions, the analysis demonstrates that sustained restrictionism initiated in 2017 and reinforced by renewed enforcement signals in 2025 has produced cumulative demographic spillover effects rather than isolated or short-term disruptions (Castles, 2018; Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2020).

The findings indicate that prolonged restrictions on U.S. legal migration pathways have reduced access and predictability for Nigerian migrants, particularly in education-, employment-, and family-based categories (Migration Policy Institute, 2018; Migration Policy Institute, 2022). These constraints have reshaped migration behaviour by delaying mobility, increasing uncertainty, and weakening established migration systems linking Nigeria and the United States (Abel & Cohen, 2019; de Haas, 2021). As a result, migration disruption has become structural, altering household strategies and demographic expectations even in the absence of direct changes in Nigeria's population policy (UN DESA, 2024).

Remittance-linked household welfare has also been affected. Although Nigeria continues to receive substantial remittance inflows in absolute terms, evidence indicates that growth rates have slowed and volatility has increased during periods of heightened migration restriction (World Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2025). Empirical studies demonstrate that such volatility exposes remittance-dependent households to welfare shocks that may affect schooling continuity, healthcare access, and long-term human-capital formation (Akanle, et al., 2021;

Castles, et al., 2020). These outcomes underscore the linkage between destination-country immigration governance and population welfare in migrant-sending societies.

The study further highlights the demographic significance of involuntary non-migration and return migration. Restrictive immigration regimes have increased the prevalence of stalled migration among Nigerian youth, contributing to underemployment, delayed transitions into adulthood, and psychosocial stress associated with unmet migration aspirations (de Haas, 2021; IOM, 2024). Where return migration occurs, it is often unplanned and inadequately supported, intensifying pressure on domestic labour markets and social systems (IOM, 2024; World Bank, 2025). These dynamics reinforce the importance of examining immobility and reintegration alongside migration flows in demographic analysis.

9. Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and consistent with international population and migration policy literature, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Integrate Migration Uncertainty into Population and Labour Planning:** National population projections and labour-market policies in Nigeria should explicitly incorporate prolonged migration restrictions in major destination countries. Planning frameworks should account for reduced external labour absorption and increased involuntary non-migration, particularly among youth cohorts (UN DESA, 2024).
- 2. Strengthen Household Welfare Resilience to Remittance Volatility:** Given the vulnerability of remittance-dependent households to migration disruption, social-protection and economic-diversification strategies should prioritize income stabilization. Policies that expand domestic employment opportunities, vocational training, and small-enterprise support can reduce household dependence on external migration outcomes (World Bank, 2023).
- 3. Institutionalize Return and Reintegration Support Frameworks:** Comprehensive reintegration policies should be developed to support return migrants and involuntary non-migrants. These should include skills recognition, employment placement services, psychosocial support, and targeted reintegration funding to reduce pressure on local labour markets and households (IOM, 2024).
- 4. Adopt Youth-Focused Employment and Skills Utilization Strategies:** Youth employment policies should address the demographic consequences of stalled migration by expanding domestic opportunities for skills utilization and career progression.

Aligning education and training systems with local labour demand can mitigate the effects of prolonged immobility (UN DESA, 2024).

5. **Enhance International Migration Policy Engagement:** Nigeria should strengthen its engagement in international migration dialogues to highlight the demographic externalities of restrictive immigration regimes. Evidence-based advocacy can contribute to more balanced migration governance that recognizes shared development responsibilities between origin and destination countries (Migration Policy Institute, 2022).

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