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EDITORIAL

Trump's xenophobic travel ban punishes Americans above all

The president's recent anti-immigration move is breaking up American families.

By The Editorial Board,
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People hold signs showing their support of ending a travel ban on Muslim-majority countries at a news conference outside of the US Capitol last month. Senate and House Democrats are calling for the passage of the NO BAN Act to end President Trump's travel bans, which they call discriminatory.
Sarah Silbiger/Getty

A rational president, making decisions untainted by racial bias, would know that Nigerians are among the most successful and highly educated immigrant groups in America: [61 percent hold at least a bachelor's degree](#). More than [1 in 3 Nigerian immigrants](#) work in the US health

care industry; compared to the general population, they're also more likely to work in science, technology, and engineering fields.

Then there's President Trump. Shown statistics about Nigerian immigration in the United States, he lamented in 2017 that once Nigerians were in the United States, they would never "[go back to their huts](#)" in Africa.

That ignorant, bigoted comment tells you everything you need to know about the administration's latest immigration restrictions, which primarily affect African nationals and their US-based families. The administration has tried to rationalize the policy as a national-security move. But they're not kidding anyone, and it shows why Congress needs to limit the president's ability to issue sweeping bans affecting entire countries.

As of Feb. 21, the president instructed the US Department of Homeland Security to bar citizens of Myanmar, Eritrea, Kyrgyzstan, and Nigeria, which has the largest economy in Africa, from seeking permanent admission to the United States. The order also bans citizens of Sudan and Tanzania from participating in the diversity lottery program, which issues green cards to as many as 50,000 foreigners annually. In a press release, DHS insisted that the new "restrictions do not reflect animus or bias against any particular country, region, ethnicity, race, or religion"; instead, they are the "result of these countries' unwillingness or inability to adhere to our identity management, information sharing, national security, and public safety assessment criteria."

It is a dramatic expansion of Trump's previous attempts to bar Muslims and other foreigners. Yet this time, the main victims are American citizens. Unlike the previous travel bans, this new restriction does not apply to refugees, students, tourists, or visitors coming under temporary visas. But it will prevent nearly all parents, children, wives, husbands, and other eligible relatives of US citizens from applying for a green card. The new travel ban will hurt more than 336,000 naturalized US citizens, who won't be able to reunite with relatives living abroad.

Under the new rule, a tourist from Nigeria can still visit, but a Nigerian seeking to join her husband who is already here will be barred from moving here. As immigration experts have pointed out, the "underwear bomber" — the only Nigerian individual charged with terrorism in the United States — came here on a tourist visa and thus would have been allowed in under the new travel restriction. Others have noted that, in the last two decades, no Americans have been killed on US soil by terrorist extremists from the six countries included in Trump's new travel ban.

It's hard to take the Trump administration's argument for the new ban seriously. If one is to believe that DHS is targeting these countries for their inability to provide certain safeguards when issuing passports or for failing to share information on certain individuals, presumably that would apply to tourists or other short-term travelers as well. Why ban only the grandfather seeking to move to be with his US-based family?

Congress can and should do something, of course. The NO BAN Act — or the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act — was filed last year by US Representative Judy Chu of California. It's a fair and sensible policy solution that inserts fundamental checks

and balances into the president's executive power to indefinitely restrict or bar foreigners from coming to the United States. The bill would amend the section of the Immigrant and Nationality Act that grants the president such broad discretion and, aside from repealing all Trump's travel ban orders, it would require that all future presidential travel limits be reported to Congress and the public, and that they be supported by credible evidence.

Taken together, all Trump's travel bans are closing the doors of America on a half-billion foreigners and roughly a quarter of Africa's population. Let's not forget Trump's own words when referring to immigrants from Africa. In a now-infamous remark directed at immigrants from Africa and Central America, he whined: "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?"

It should be self-evident by now that Trump's new travel ban is not grounded on real national security concerns. Instead, it's about selectively deciding who should be an American.

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