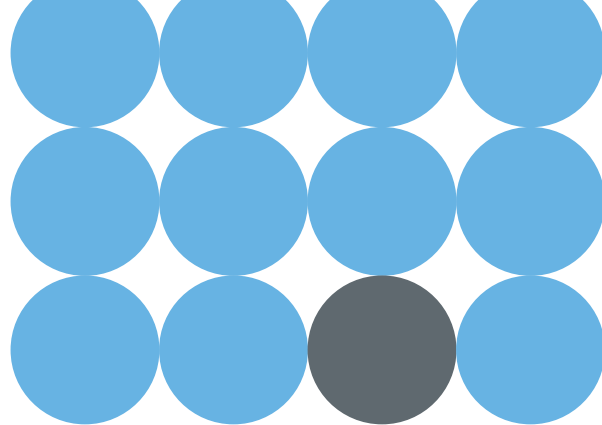


Social Justice Brief

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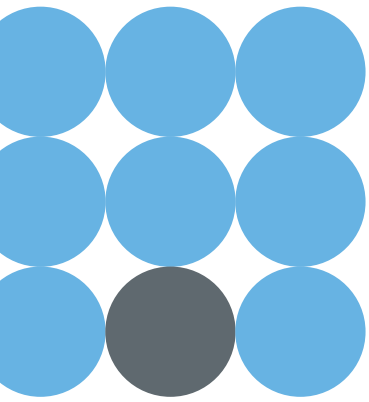
Near Certain Cataclysmic Consequences of a Mass Deportation Program

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.



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The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the United States. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.



Near Certain Cataclysmic Consequences of a Mass Deportation Program

Former President Trump's vehement declaration that he would implement a mass deportation policy immediately after being elected should give most Americans pause. Given that there are millions of noncitizens who would likely be targeted by this policy, mass deportation presents significant social, economic, and humanitarian challenges, including the risks tearing apart families and communities.

Economically speaking, the sudden removal of a substantial portion of the workforce could lead to labor shortages and negatively impact industries reliant on immigrant labor. Furthermore, the psychological toll on individuals facing deportation and their families cannot be understated, as it fosters an environment of fear and instability. Addressing these multifaceted issues requires a nuanced approach that balances the enforcement of immigration laws with compassion and respect for human dignity.

While the likelihood of a mass deportation program becoming an immediate reality is greatly diminished if Trump fails to regain the White House, it would be a mistake for the immigration rights community to let their guards down. For example, should Congress—after the election—remain in control of far-right leadership, mass deportation will continue to be embraced as a viable and necessary policy. Of equal

significance, the Mass Deportation and Family Separation section Project 2025 will continue to be the blueprint for eventual removal of noncitizen—if not for year 2025—but for 2029 and beyond.

As recently stated by a leading advocate against mass deportation, *“Ultimately, we should not be naïve enough to assume that a victory by Kamala Harris would equate with the end of Project 2025, as some commentators have suggested. As is clear both according to the manifesto and the utterances of its supporters, Harris’ victory would only be the first step. The manifesto of the new Republicans constitutes an aggressive long-term plan, which certainly does not end with Trump.”*

For those reasons, the analysis and related discussion in this brief will remain relevant regardless of who occupies the White House after inauguration day, 2025.

Background and History of Mass Deportation Policies

The notion of employing mass deportation as a solution to immigration policy disputes has a complex—and often ugly—history, dating back as early as 1794 with the state of Massachusetts passing a deportation law targeting poor Irish immigrants.

However, it was in the 1880s when U.S. deportation policies focused on large-scale expulsion of noncitizens motivated by racial and ethnic prejudices—mainly targeting Asians. The Chinese Exclusion Act, passed in 1882, declared a 10-year ban on Chinese laborers immigrating to the United States. The flimsy premise for implementing the Chinese Exclusion Act was that it “endangered the good order of certain localities.”

In the 1920s, those of Mexican descent became the objects of large-scale mass deportation. In an effort to remove noncitizen Mexicans, law makers expanded existing deportation policy to make “post-entry infractions” deportable offenses. Under this expanded deportation policy, immigration authorities aimed their enforcement actions mostly at Mexican “immigrants.” There is little doubt that such actions were taken “on racial grounds, for racist reason.” The direct consequences of this policy were that the numbers of Mexicans deported steadily increased—eventually reaching as many as a million people a year. To make matters worse, many Mexican Americans who were caught up in the sweeps and raids not only were U.S. citizens, but can trace their heritage in what is now the United States back many centuries.

Deportation of noncitizen Mexicans and Mexican Americans continued in the 1930s.

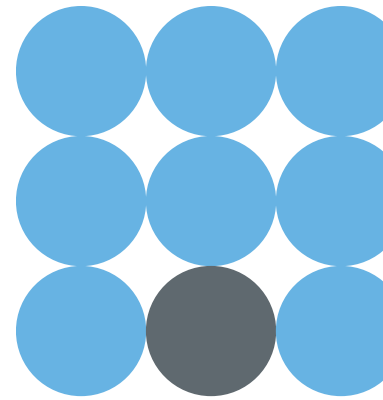
During the Great Depression, as many as 2 million were deported from the United States to Mexico. More disturbing, it has been estimated that close to 60 percent of those deported were U.S. citizens, many of whom were born in the United States.

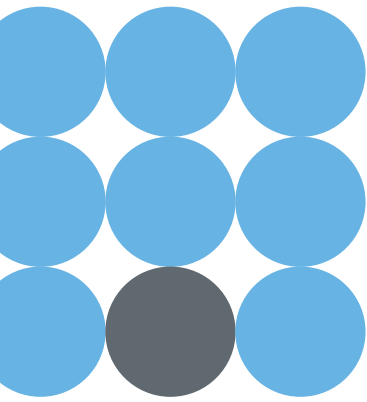
Twenty years later, the U.S. saw the largest mass deportation of undocumented workers in United States history—“Operation Wetback” (at that time, it was considered acceptable to use a racist term such as “wetback” as the title of an official government action). In any event, under this 1954 policy, it is estimated that as many as 1.3 million people were seized, detained, and summarily deported at the direction of the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration. Though short-lived, the operation used military-style tactics to remove people of Mexican descent—some of them American citizens—from the United States. Many of those who were rounded up in the operation had legally entered the country through joint immigration programs developed in the early 20th century.

The raids were led by federal border patrol agents and local law enforcement officials who worked collaboratively to remove those they perceived to be noncitizens. Because “Operation Wetback” was initiated in a national atmosphere of pervasive racial stereotypes and anti-Mexican sentiment, the aggressive raids by law enforcement had public support.

Current Day Resurgence of Mass Deportation as a National Policy

During his campaign, Trump has promised to conduct the “largest deportation operation in American history,” drawing inspiration from





the 1950s operation under President Eisenhower. The Trump plan involves setting up temporary immigration detention centers and using local, state, and federal authorities, including National Guard troops, to remove “undocumented immigrants.”

In truth, the former president has been advocating for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants since his 2016 presidential campaign, when he introduced his policy position to return all detained undocumented people to their home countries—and zero tolerance for “immigrants who commit crimes.” He was greatly assisted with developing his 2016 policy plank on deportation by Stephen Miller—his far-right immigration guru. It is no surprise, then, that he has made mass deportation a priority “day one” executive action should he win the 2024 election.

Anticipated Effect of a Mass Deportation Policy

In its current iteration, targeted “mass deportation” refers to the millions of individuals and families who are currently living unauthorized in the United States—many of whom have lived here for decades. Trump is reported to have stated that he would target between 15 million and 20 million people who he said are undocumented—which is more than an estimated number of people who are living in the United States without proper documentation. According to a variety of sources, there are approximately 10 to 15 million people who could be directly impacted by such a mass deportation, should it come to fruition.

For a clearer picture of the impact, this social justice brief will discuss the following specific issues:

- » Family and child separation
- » Expansion of child detention facilities and centers
- » Need to expand overall detention capacity
- » Detaining legally present individuals with Temporary Protected Status (TPS)
- » Disrupting economic and social stability of mixed-status families
- » Massive expansion of detention facilities overall
- » Role of local law enforcement and military (National Guard)
- » Racial profiling
- » Impact on overall American economy
- » Impact of the federal budget (i.e., cost of implementing a national mass deportation system)

Impact on Children and Families

Deportations fracture families and communities, leaving them forever changed, especially children who lose a parent or caregiver. Mass deportation threatens to break up nearly 5 million families. Since 2011, over 400,000 parents of U.S. citizen children have been deported; 5.2 million children had at least one unauthorized immigrant parent in 2018; and 85 percent of these children, 4.4 million, are U.S. citizens. Children and young people from communities of color bear a higher burden of the costs of deportation, resulting from systemic racism, social inequality, and a punitive immigration enforcement system.

Special Focus on Increased and Prolonged Child Detention During Mass Deportation

In a 2020 study by the Harvard School of Public Health on children detained in U.S.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers, it was found that “children detained for a prolonged period in family immigration detention centers in the U.S. experienced mental and physical harm due to inadequate and inappropriate medical care.” The study was conducted at an ICE family immigration detention in Karnes City, Texas. Most of the children were detained at the center for 43 days—well beyond the 20 days maximum allowable time. In addition, children had limited access to basic healthcare due to issues with inadequate staffing, supervision, and documentation of medical care.

The consequence to children would be exponentially worse, should mass deportation actions be implemented. With such a government action, it is not unreasonable to expect to see children—who are separated from their parents—living in detention “cages” and other deplorable conditions seen during the unaccompanied migrant children crisis several years ago. Neither Project 2025 nor the former president have offered strategies to mitigate such unacceptable conditions faced by detained children during a new mass deportation operation.

Mixed Status Families and Family Separation

Trump’s proposed mass deportation plan would have a profound impact on mixed-status families, where some members are undocumented while others are citizens or legal residents. Deportation of undocumented family members could lead to significant emotional distress and economic hardship. Studies indicate that such deportations could reduce the average household income of mixed-status families by nearly half, pushing many into poverty. Additionally, the

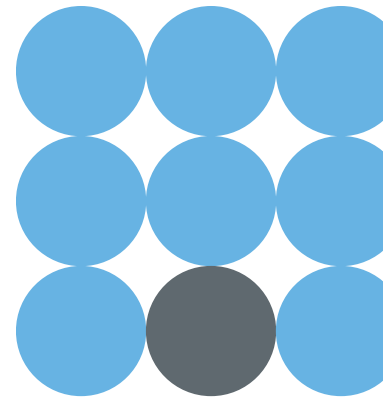
separation of families would disrupt the social fabric and stability of communities, causing long-term psychological and financial repercussions. This plan, if implemented, would affect not only the individuals deported but also the broader community and its economy.

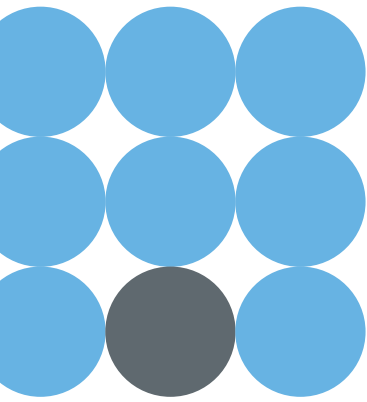
There are about 20 million people in households with mixed immigration statuses, including about 10.3 million people who are undocumented—with California, Texas, Florida, and New York having highest numbers of individuals living in mixed-status households (52 percent).

Family Separation

There is a near consensus that former President Donald Trump’s mass deportation plan would likely lead to an increase in family separations. This assumption is supported by:

- » **Past Policies:** During Trump’s first term, the administration implemented a “zero tolerance” policy that led to the separation of thousands of children from their parents at the border. This policy was intended to deter illegal immigration but resulted in significant trauma and long-term consequences for many families.
- » **High Profile Continuation of Key Family Separation Staff:** Trump has indicated that he would bring back individuals like Tom Homan, former ICE Director, and Stephen Miller, former immigration advisor, both of whom were instrumental in crafting and enforcing the family separation policy. Their involvement strongly suggests a return to similar strategies.





To that point, in a recent TV interview, former ICE director Homan was asked if deporting 4 million children with birthright citizenship—whose parents are undocumented—was achievable without having to separate families, he responded; “Of course there is. Families can be deported together.” Mr. Homan’s rationale for deporting children who have been born and raised in the U.S. was that their parents entered the country illegally, therefore, it was the parents who created the problem, not the U.S. government. The former ICE director’s statement coincides with a long-standing priority of the far-right which is to end birthright citizenship laws—which would effectively declare that children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents, will themselves be deemed as to be noncitizens.

The Need to Expand Detention Capacity in a Mass Deportation Scenario

Projections for the expansion of detention beds needed for a mass deportation plan are substantial. Implementing such a plan would require a significant increase in detention capacity. To detain the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants, the United States would need to build and maintain 24 times more ICE detention capacity than currently exists. The plan would also necessitate the creation of additional facilities specifically for families and children, which would be a logistical and humanitarian challenge. ICE does not have the infrastructure or resources to manage such a large-scale operation. The current system is already strained with existing detention facilities often operating at or above capacity. For example, ICE’s detention capacity is around 34,000 beds, and even during peak times, it has not exceeded 52,000 detainees.

Additionally, there are legal constraints, such as the Flores Settlement Agreement, which limits the detention of children to no more than 20 days and requires that they be held in the least restrictive setting. This agreement makes it challenging to detain large numbers of children for extended periods.

Authors of the mass deportation section of Project 2025 appear to be undeterred by the challenges. In fact, they have already developed a plan to clear all possible legal and legislative barriers to operationalizing deportation actions. Led by former ICE Director Homan, the new Trump administration plans to use the Alien Enemies Act of 1798—a wartime authority that allows the president to detain or deport the so-called natives and citizens of a nation determined to be an enemy of the United States. Furthermore, the law permits the president to target these immigrants without a hearing and based only on their country of birth or citizenship.

Although the law was enacted to prevent foreign espionage and sabotage in wartime, it can be—and has been—used against noncitizens who have broken no laws, exhibited no signs or acts of disloyalty, and are lawfully present in the United States.

While it is certain that use of the Alien Enemies Act will be disputed in court, there is little doubt that a Trump administration will go forward with citing the act as its authority to mass deport people who are undocumented (and possibly also those in the United States legally).

It should be noted that the immigration detention system—unlike jails or prisons—is

subject to civil law. This means that someone detained in an ICE facility does not have many constitutional protections available under criminal law. For example, immigrants can be detained indefinitely; there is no federal right to legal representation for detainees—and most noncitizens are not entitled to government-appointment lawyers.

Questionable Use of Local Law Enforcement and Military (National Guard)

As with deportation raids of the early 1950s, a massive deportation requires ceding authority to many local law enforcement agencies. Under current U.S. immigration policies, local law enforcement agencies can collaborate with ICE to arrest and detain people with undocumented status. This cooperation is often facilitated through programs like the 287(g) program, which allows local law enforcement officers to perform immigration enforcement duties under ICE supervision.

Given the magnitude of the undertaking and to help ICE carry out sweeping raids, a new Trump administration would reassign other federal agents and deputize local police officers and National Guard soldiers—voluntarily contributed by Republican-run states.

In anticipation of legal challenges, the former president has explicitly stated that he does not believe his plan will be hindered by having to seek congressional approval. The administration—in line with Project 2025 recommendations—is prepared to invoke the Insurrection Act, which states that under certain limited circumstances involving the defense of constitutional rights, the president can send troops unilaterally—thereby circumventing Congressional approval.

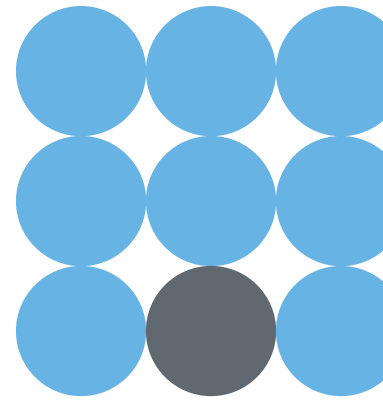
Militarizing this operation is deeply concerning because:

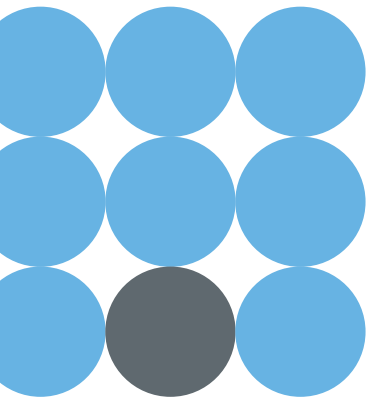
- » Using the military for civilian law enforcement, including immigration enforcement, is generally prohibited under the Posse Comitatus Act unless specifically authorized by Congress. This could lead to legal challenges and potential violations of civil liberties.
- » As referred to earlier, mass deportations will result in family separations, affecting millions of U.S.-born children who have undocumented parents. Soldiers are not trained to understand early childhood trauma caused by forced detention and family separation. The psychological and social impact on these families could be profound and long-lasting.

The plan to use the Insurrection Act to circumvent Congressional approval of mass deportation could and should face significant opposition from various sectors, including immigrant rights groups, legal experts, and the general public.

Effect of Mass Deportation on Those with Temporary Protected Status

The recent plight of Haitian noncitizens living in Springfield, Ohio, has increased awareness of the many thousands of people who are legally present in the United States via TPS—a designation that grants people from selected countries the ability to stay in the country legally, due to severe adverse conditions in their home country. Both Project 2025 and statements from former President Trump directly propose plans to target individuals covered by TPS for deportation. Project 2025 explicitly calls for the repeal of all TPS designations, which would result in nearly 700,000 people losing their legal protection





and work authorization, making them deportable. Additionally, Trump has stated that he would force individuals with TPS to leave the country if he wins a second term.

Widespread Racial Profiling as a Tool for Identifying Noncitizens

In the context of enforcing mass deportation, we must recognize that racial profiling is likely to play a significant role in mass deportation efforts. Historically, immigration enforcement in the United States has often involved racial and ethnic profiling, which disproportionately affects nonwhite communities. This suggests that during mass deportation operations, individuals may be targeted based on their race or ethnicity, undoubtedly leading to the wrongful detention and deportation of U.S. citizens and legal residents.

Often when discussing immigration-related racial profiling we primarily focus on those of Latino decent—for justifiable reasons.

However, it is important that we view racial profiling through a much broader lens. During a mass deportation operation, not only will Brown people be profiled, but also Black migrants/immigrants from African nations. This becomes especially true when the pretext for removing people who are undocumented is based on having a criminal record—which is a stated justification for deportation in Project 2025.

According to the American Bar Association, “today, immigration removals fall disproportionately on communities of color. Focusing on ‘criminal aliens’ in removal efforts exacerbates the racial impacts because of the racially disparate impacts of the criminal justice system in the United States. Black immigrants as well as Latinx immigrants

are those most at risk of removal.” It is essential that, in advocating for equity, we become acutely aware of racial and ethnic disparities.

Overall Impact of Mass Deportation on the American Economy

Implementing a mass deportation of over 12 million people would be an incredibly complex and lengthy process. Experts estimate that even with significant resources, it would take far longer than a single presidential term to complete. Deporting 12 million people—perhaps more—would require an unprecedented increase in law enforcement staffing, detention capacity, and immigration court resources. The cost of a one-time mass deportation operation is estimated to be at least \$315 billion. This figure includes the expenses associated with arrest, detention, legal processing, and removal. Relatedly, the economic impact will include:

- » **Long-Term Costs:** If implemented, the mass deportation operation will need to be sustained and will have ongoing costs. For example, sustaining a mass deportation operation over a decade—with an objective of deporting 1 million people per year—would have a price tag of approximately \$88 billion annually, totaling nearly \$968 billion over 10 years.
- » **Economic Impact:** The potential mass deportation proposed by Donald Trump could have significant and far-reaching impacts on the American economy.
- » **Labor Market Disruption:** Undocumented immigrants play a crucial role in various sectors, including agriculture, construction, and hospitality. Removing them could lead to severe labor shortages, disrupting these industries and potentially leading to

higher prices for goods and services.

- » **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Impact:** The U.S. GDP could decrease by 4.2 percent to 6.8 percent due to the loss of workers and consumers.
- » **Tax Contributions:** People who are undocumented contribute significantly to tax revenues. In 2022, they paid approximately \$46.8 billion in federal taxes and \$29.3 billion in state and local taxes. Their removal would result in a substantial loss of these contributions.
- » **Social Services and Programs:** The deportation would also impact social services and programs. For example, people with undocumented status contributed \$22.6 billion to Social Security and \$5.7 billion to Medicare in 2022. These programs, already facing financial challenges, would be further strained by the loss of these contributions.

While Project 2025 and the former president's team extoll their mission to expel people from the United States, they fail to inform the country of the severe human and economic cost their plan will have on all of us for generations to come.

Conclusion

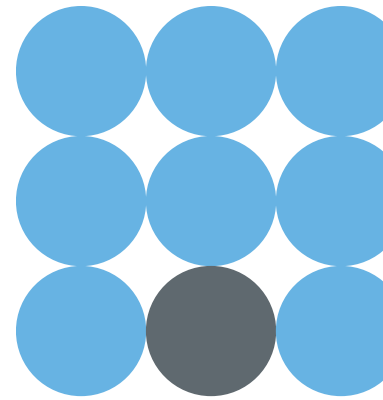
Few would disagree that Project 2025's and former President Trump's mass deportation agenda—if it comes to fruition—is a massive undertaking that will have a disruptive and potentially devastating effect on the lives of many millions of people. The takeaway about the far-right's strategic effort to make mass deportation a reality is that the effort is serious—having unlimited funding and political support to become a reality. The millions of individuals and families who will

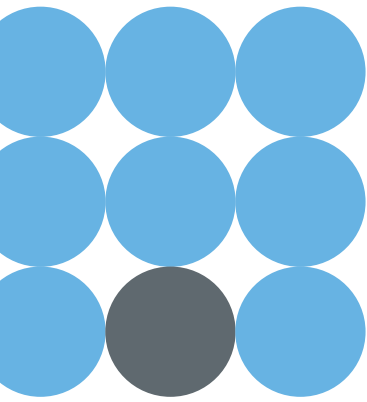
be directly targeted have a right to be apprehensive—on an immediate basis—about their family's social and financial stability.

Also, we should not overlook the degree to which the mass deportation plan is having and will continue to have an impact on America's image as a democracy, domestically and internationally. For a number of reasons, recently the image of America as the beacon of democracy, human and civil rights, and humanitarianism has diminished. If a new Trump administration goes forward with mass deportation, its standing in the international community will be further tarnished.

To that point, here are a few key points to consider:

- » **Human Rights Concerns:** Mass deportations could lead to widespread human rights violations, including the separation of families and the detention of individuals without due process. This could tarnish America's reputation as a defender of human rights and democratic values.
- » **Legal and Ethical Issues:** Implementing such a plan might involve bypassing existing laws and protections for immigrants, which could be seen as undermining the rule of law. This could raise questions about the commitment to democratic principles and the fair treatment of all individuals.
- » **International Perception:** The global community might view these actions as contrary to the values of democracy and freedom that the United States has historically championed. This could lead to strained diplomatic relations and a loss of moral authority on the international stage.





» **Economic and Social Impact:** The economic and social upheaval caused by mass deportations could also reflect poorly on the country's stability and governance. The potential for civil rights violations and the disruption of communities might further damage America's reputation.

In summary, the plan to impose a mass deportation on people who are undocumented, those with Temporary Protected Status, mixed-status families, and even those who have legal status to reside in the United States, is a threat to democracy, endangering the human and civil rights of millions of people—not to mention causing severe hardship on school-age children.

Therefore, it is incumbent on the immigrant rights community and political leaders to—as we have done so often in the past—take actions to eliminate such a destructive plan. The first act is, of course, to vote against any candidate that supports mass deportation. It is also incumbent on those who oppose such policies to remain in active opposition even after the 2024 election—regardless of who is elected to the White House.

The social work profession in general and the National Association of Social Workers specifically are significant stakeholders in what is bound to be a national mobilization to prevent mass deportation from occurring—or in greatly mitigating the impact of this policy on those who are already marginalized and vulnerable. In particular, because mass

deportation could have a devastating effect on children and families, social workers who offer services or work on policies in child welfare spaces will likely be called on to lend their expertise as appropriate.

Resources

American Immigration Council.

Mass Deportation: Devastating Costs to America, Its Budget and Economy.

www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/mass-deportation

Children Thrive Action Network (CTAN).

Afterthought: The Children of Deported Families.

<https://childrethrivemotion.org/2024/06/afterthoughts-the-children-of-deported-parents/>

The Guardian.

Trump's Mass Deportation Plan Would Be an 'Economic Disaster' for the US.

www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/30/trump-deportation-plan-economic-disaster

Immigration Hub.

Urgent Threats to the Immigration System in the First 100 Days of a New Trump Administration

Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights.

Immigrant Rights

PolitiFact.

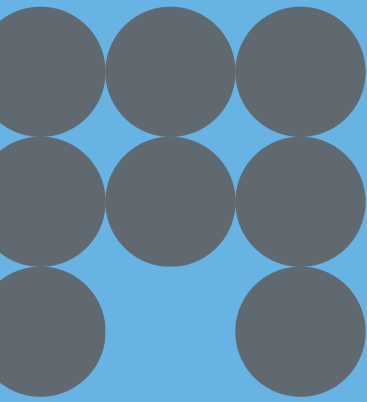
Can Donald Trump Use a 1798 Law to Carry Out Mass Deportations?

www.politifact.com/article/2024/oct/18/can-donald-trump-use-a-1798-law-to-carry-out-mass/

Scientific America.

Trump's Massive Deportation Plan Echoes Concentration Camp History.

www.scientificamerican.com/article/trumps-massive-deportation-plan-echoes-concentration-camp-history/



NASW Resources

NASW » [SocialWorkers.org](https://www.socialworkers.org)

NASW Foundation » [NASWFoundation.org](https://www.naswfoundation.org)

NASW Press » [NASWPress.org](https://www.naswpress.org)

NASW Assurance Services, Inc. » [NASWAssurance.org](https://www.naswassurance.org)

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