



REDUCING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION IN MALAWI: BORDER CONTROL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Illegal immigration presents a growing challenge for Malawi, undermining national security, straining resources, and exposing socio-political vulnerabilities. This qualitative study investigates the systemic challenges contributing to the inefficacies of border control, with a focus on the Immigration Department's management. Using in-depth interviews with key informants from the Immigration Department, Police Service, local government, and human rights organisations, the study identifies critical barriers, including insufficient funding, inadequate staffing, outdated policies, lack of advanced technological tools, and corruption. These systemic issues are exacerbated by Malawi's geographical vulnerability, with porous borders facilitating unauthorised migration, particularly from East Africa and the Horn of Africa. Grounded in the Collaborative Governance Framework, this research explores how multi-stakeholder collaboration can enhance border management effectiveness. The study underscores the urgent need for institutional reforms, increased resource allocation, capacity building, and inter-agency coordination.

Keywords: Border control, porous border, illegal immigration, collaborative governance, unauthorised immigration, national security.

ABSTRAK

Imigresen haram merupakan satu cabaran besar untuk Malawi. Ia menjejaskan keselamatan, memakan sumber serta melemahkan sosio-politik negara. Kajian kualitatif ini dijalankan untuk menganalisa cabaran sistemik yang menyumbang kepada ketidakberkesanan kawalan sempadan, dengan tumpuan kepada pengurusan Jabatan Imigresen. Kaedah temubual digunakan dengan pemberi maklumat utama terdiri daripada Jabatan Imigresen, polis, kerajaan tempatan, dan organisasi hak asasi manusia. Kajian ini mendapati halangan kritikal dalam kawalan sempadan di Malawi termasuk dana yang terhad, kakitangan yang tidak mencukupi, dasar lapuk, kekurangan teknologi baru dan rasuah. Isu-isu sistemik ini diburukkan lagi oleh kelemahan geografi, dengan sempadan berliang atau 'porous borders' memudahkan penghijrahan haram, terutamanya dari Afrika Timur dan negara-negara bersempadan. Berasaskan rangka kerja Tadbir Urus Kolaboratif, penyelidikan ini meneroka bagaimana kerjasama pelbagai pihak boleh meningkatkan keberkesanan pengurusan sempadan. Kajian ini menunjukkan keperluan mendesak untuk mengadakan pembaharuan institusi, penambahan peruntukan, pembinaan kapasiti, dan penyelarasan berkesan antara agensi.

Kata kunci: Kawalan sempadan, pendatang haram, tadbir urus kolaboratif, imigresen haram, keselamatan negara.

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Introduction

Illegal immigration remains a pressing global challenge, exacerbating security, socio-economic and governance concerns across borders. In Africa, the interplay of political instability, economic hardship and porous borders has heightened this phenomenon (Ng'andu, 2019; Nkhoma, 2014). Malawi, situated in Southern Africa, faces a significant influx of unauthorised immigrants, particularly from East Africa and the Horn of Africa regions, including Somalia, Ethiopia and Burundi. The country's geographical positioning and extensive land and lake borders, shared with Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, compound the issue, making border control a formidable task (Malawi Government, 2024; Sovereign Limits, 2024). The reasons driving illegal immigration are multifaceted, often categorised into 'push' and 'pull' factor dynamics.

Political instability, poverty, unemployment and armed conflicts serve as potent push factors, while the prospect of better economic opportunities, education and security act as pull factors (Thet, 2014; Nga'ndu, 2019). For Malawi, the socio-economic and political ramifications of illegal immigration are profound. These range from increased pressure on already strained public services to heightened security risks associated with cross-border crimes such as smuggling and human trafficking (Nkhoma, 2014; Kaledzi et al., 2022). Despite the efforts of the Malawi Government, particularly through the Department of Immigration and Malawi Police Service, challenges persist. The influx of illegal immigrants often overwhelms border management systems, exposing gaps in resource allocation, operational efficiency and inter-agency coordination (Chiundira, 2010; Kamazima, 2018). In addition to this, the mountainous and water-bound terrains along Malawi's borders offer unauthorised routes that remain inadequately monitored, further complicating control measures (Kainja, 2012; Sovereign Limits, 2024).

Understanding the challenges associated with illegal immigration in Malawi is essential for formulating robust policies and interventions. Strengthened border control not only safeguards national security but also mitigates the socio-economic disruptions caused by illegal immigration. This study aims to explore the root causes of these challenges, focusing on deficiencies and proposing solutions to enhance border security and policy efficacy by utilising a collaborative governance model.

Malawi's Country Profile

Malawi is a small, landlocked country located in Southern Africa, bordered by Mozambique and Tanzania. It has an estimated population of 18.6 million people, with an annual growth rate of 2.6%, and spans a total land area of 118,484 square kilometres (Malawi Government, 2024). Approximately three-quarters of Malawi's terrain consists of plateaus (World Vision Malawi, 2024), and its economy is heavily reliant on rain-fed agriculture. Despite its relatively small size, Malawi features an extensive network of borders (World Bank, 2024). The country operates 24 official national entry points, staffed by the Department of Immigration to regulate the entry and exit of people. These include the Songwe, Mbilima, Mtocha, Chisenga, Namizana, Mchinji, Dedza, Biriwiri, Mwanza, Marka, Chilomo, Muloza, Chiponde, Makanjira, Monkey Bay, Nkhotakota, Likoma, Katuli and Nayuchi border posts, as well as Nkhata Bay, Liwonde Inland, Club Makokola Airstrip, Kamuzu International Airport and Chileka International Airport. Of these, Mozambique alone accounts for 10 land border posts.

Geographically, Mozambique nearly encircles Malawi, with the southern half of Malawi extending deeply into northern Mozambique. This proximity accounts for a shared border length of 1,750 kilometres. Lake Malawi, known as Lake Nyasa in

Mozambique, is divided between the two countries, with significant portions of its waters falling within Malawi's territory. Malawi's border with Zambia spans 976 kilometres (607 miles) and was officially demarcated during the late 19th century under British rule. Both countries revisited these colonial-era boundaries following their independence in the 1960s and have since maintained active boundary commissions, including new survey initiative in 2011 (McCracken, 2012).

In contrast, Malawi's territorial boundary with Tanzania, established in 1890 by agreements between the United Kingdom and Germany, remains a source of dispute. Malawi claims approximately 360 kilometres of the shoreline boundary, while Tanzania asserts that its boundary extends approximately 230 kilometres into Malawi's territory, targeting the northern part of Lake Malawi (McCracken, 2012). This contested area is a significant transit point for illegal immigrants, particularly along the Songwe border in the Karonga district, which borders Tanzania (Yoon, 2014). Many illegal immigrants from the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, Ethiopia and Burundi, use Malawi as either a transit route to South Africa in pursuit of economic opportunities or a destination to establish small-scale enterprises in various districts (Sovereign Limits, 2024; Nkhoma & Kaledzi, 2022).

Overview of Border Control and Illegal Immigration

Border management and control are vital components of national security, as they regulate the inflow of unauthorised immigrants and the movement of prohibited goods, including drugs, weapons and other harmful substances (Ng'andu, 2019; Chirwa, 1998; Chiundira, 2010). In Malawi, the Department of Immigration and the Malawi Police Service play pivotal roles in managing national borders. However, despite these

efforts, illegal immigration remains one of the most complex security challenges faced by the government. Unauthorised immigrants continue to enter Malawi through uncharted routes and, in some cases, even through designated border posts, highlighting weaknesses in border control and management mechanisms. The prevalence of illegal immigration is further evidenced by the daily reports of unauthorised crossings recorded by police, particularly in the northern regions. This growing trend has stretched the capacities of border management and control institutions, creating significant operational and strategic challenges.

Furthermore, illegal immigration is also straining resources and threatening national stability in Malawi. A stark example is the Dzaleka Refugee Camp, originally designed to house 10,000 individuals but now accommodating over 48,000 residents, nearly five times its intended capacity (Migration and Refugees Section, 2021). This severe overcrowding has resulted in mounting pressure on infrastructure, public health systems, and basic services, creating serious risks for both the refugee population and surrounding communities. Additionally, Malawi serves as a transit route for migrants, primarily young males, seeking to reach South Africa for better economic opportunities. This pattern of transit migration further burdens Malawi's already stretched resources and complicates border management efforts. Compounding these challenges is the concern expressed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services over Malawians aiding and abetting illegal entry of foreign nationals, exacerbating security threats and undermining socio-economic development (Malawi Voice, 2022). In the 2022/23 fiscal year, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services only had a budget of K3.10 billion and employed 4,654 staff

members (Department of Immigration and Citizenship Services, 2024). These examples underscore the urgent need for robust immigration policies and coordinated efforts to address the multifaceted impacts of illegal immigration on Malawi's stability and development (Nkhoma, 2014). Although there is international cooperation in border management, such as the African Union Border Program established in 2007, Malawi continues to grapple with rising numbers of undocumented immigrants. Police reports indicate regular apprehensions of illegal immigrants, particularly in northern districts such as Karonga and Chitipa (Kaledzi et al., 2022; Malawi Police, 2010). Many of these immigrants originate from East Africa and the Horn of Africa, including countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Research highlights that illegal immigration exposes Malawi to transnational threats, including crime and the potential spread of infectious diseases (Nkhoma, 2014; Chirwa, 1998). Nevertheless, similar challenges are also observed in other countries. For instance, Algeria faces security threats where illegal immigrants reportedly collaborate with terrorist groups to destabilise peace and hinder economic development (Abdelmalek & Lamara, 2023). These cases underscore the urgent need for coordinated strategies to address illegal immigration, mitigate associated risks, and ensure border security and national stability.

Problem Statement

Malawi faces a growing challenge in managing illegal immigration, exacerbated by systemic inefficiencies within the Immigration Department and its border control mechanisms. Despite having 24 official border posts and numerous initiatives, the country continues to grapple with porous borders, enabling unauthorised entries, particularly from the Horn of Africa. This influx places significant strain on

national resources, exacerbates security threats and destabilises socio-economic systems. Factors such as insufficient funding, inadequate staffing, outdated policies, corruption and lack of advanced technology hinder the Immigration Department's ability to effectively manage borders and address the complexities of modern migration. The outdated Immigration Act of 1964, which serves as the primary legal framework, fails to address contemporary challenges, such as securing uncharted routes and deploying modern surveillance technology. Furthermore, limited inter-agency collaboration and insufficient community engagement exacerbate these challenges, undermining trust and accountability among stakeholders. Malawi's geographical positioning and socio-economic vulnerabilities further compound the problem, making it an attractive transit and destination point for illegal immigrants. The complexity of these issues calls for a collaborative governance approach, emphasising inter-agency coordination, stakeholder involvement and resource optimisation. Without urgent intervention, the unchecked influx of illegal immigrants threatens to compromise Malawi's national security, public health and economic stability. This study investigates these challenges and proposes solutions to strengthen border control and mitigate the socio-economic and security risks associated with illegal immigration.

Literature Review: Border Control and Collaboration in Managing Illegal Immigrant

Border control serves as a fundamental element of national security. However, recent studies indicate that numerous countries face difficulties in effectively managing their borders due to the challenges posed by porous boundaries. In the field of immigration studies, porous borders are defined by a lack of adequate monitoring,

limited resources, and fragile institutional structures that facilitate unauthorised movement of individuals and goods. Hollifield, Martin, and Orrinius (2014) contend that as the volume of cross-border activities increases, no country, irrespective of its resources, can achieve complete border security without international collaboration. Developing nations, which include Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania, find themselves in a particularly precarious situation as they are especially susceptible to the adverse effects resulting from porous borders that allow for unchecked movement across their frontiers. These countries are confronted with a myriad of ongoing challenges that persistently undermine their efforts, including but not limited to a severe lack of adequate personnel, widespread corruption that infiltrates various levels of governance, and a set of policies that are woefully outdated, all of which significantly compound their struggles to effectively monitor and control illegal crossings that occur at their borders (Ng'andu, 2019; Nkhoma, 2017; Moyo, 2018). In stark contrast to this situation, it is noteworthy that even nations that are abundantly endowed with resources, such as the United States and various members of the European Union, also grapple with considerable difficulties associated with managing their borders in an efficient manner. Taking the United States as a prime example, it is important to highlight that the country significantly intensified its border security measures by implementing a series of comprehensive strategies, which included the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in the year 2002, a direct response that was precipitated by the devastating attacks that occurred on 11th September 2001. Nevertheless, despite the array of efforts made to bolster security, it is crucial to recognise that Alden (2012) points out the inherent limitations of such initiatives by stating that "border control will always remain imperfect," thereby underscoring the multifaceted and intricate challenges involved in the pursuit of achieving borders

that are fully secure and impermeable to illegal activities.

Research indicates that international collaboration has become a critical strategy to address these challenges. European nations have established bilateral and multilateral agreements to pool resources and coordinate cross-border operations. For instance, Spain and Morocco's cooperation reduced illegal Mediterranean entries by 40% in 2005 through joint operations between Morocco's Gendarmerie Royale and Spain's Guardia Civil (Wolff, 2008). Similarly, Australia and Indonesia have demonstrated the efficacy of extraterritorial partnerships. Australia allocated AU\$6.4 million to train Indonesian immigration officers, enhancing Indonesia's border management capabilities (Daliman, 2020). These studies highlight how strategic partnerships and resource-sharing can enhance border security. In Southeast Asia, ASEAN member states have adopted regional approaches to counter irregular migration. Joint maritime patrols by Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia in 2017 illustrate how collective efforts can address illegal immigration effectively (Low, 2021). However, regional cooperation in Southern Africa under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) remains limited. Although SADC includes a security department, immigration agencies within member states, including Malawi, often operate independently, undermining collective border management efforts (IOM, 2023). The study seems to suggest that Malawi should consider internal collaborations rather than external ones. Nkhoma (2017) found in his analysis that collaboration between security agencies and local communities in cities like Blantyre, Lilongwe and Mzuzu showed limited success in curbing illegal immigration and human trafficking. Therefore, a new study is needed to explore further the obstacles that hinder Malawi's effective internal collaboration between various stakeholders in implementing immigration policy.

Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study

To examine the factors contributing to poor border control and management in the northern region of Malawi, this study applied the collaborative governance framework by Ansell and Gash (2008). The framework explains the significance of collaboration between different stakeholders, including various interest groups, such as civil society organisations, local communities, and the private sector (Ansell, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Smith, 1998 & Freeman, 1997). The main assumption of the collaborative governance framework is that, due to the complex challenges affecting the government, such as illegal immigration, collective efforts from all stakeholders are necessary for public decision-making and action to address these challenges effectively. This framework underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, encompassing government agencies, local communities, civil society organisations, and the private sector, in addressing complex societal challenges. Collaborative governance is particularly relevant in the context of Malawi's illegal immigration, where diverse actors must coordinate efforts to address the multi-faceted nature of the problem.

The framework's four core constructs provide a structured approach for analysing Malawi's border control challenges. These include starting conditions that cover resource limitations, power imbalances, and historical institutional weaknesses that influence the success of collaborative initiatives. The second aspect is facilitative leadership for fostering trust, resolving conflicts, and driving collaborative efforts. Additionally, a well-defined rules and frameworks are crucial for successful collaboration. The final aspect of the model is a collaborative process that focuses on dialogue, shared learning, and joint decision-making among stakeholders. Building trust among government agencies, local communities and international partners is

key to fostering a unified approach to border management. The application of this framework allows the study to move beyond isolated issues, offering an integrative perspective on how Malawi can strengthen its border control mechanisms (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Methodology

The research design of this study is an exploratory qualitative case study. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research aims to understand a specific social phenomenon, event, role, group, or interaction in depth. This study employed qualitative methods for data collection, specifically through in-depth interviews with six key informants from the Immigration Department, Malawi Police Service, local communities, and a Human Rights Organisation. Four informants were selected from the Immigration Department and the Police Service, with two individuals from each institution. Additionally, one informant was chosen by the local government and another from a human rights organisation. The participants included the Regional Commanding Officer and Compliance Officer from the Immigration Department, the Officer in Charge and a Criminal Investigation Officer from the Police Service, the traditional leader representing the local communities, and the Director of Civil and Political Rights from the Malawi Human Rights Commission.

These participants were carefully selected to ensure representation from all major stakeholders involved in addressing illegal immigration in Malawi. This approach provided diverse perspectives on border control and management, aligning with the Collaborative Governance Framework proposed by Ansell and Gash (2008). The method allowed the researcher to explore participants' perceptions of the conditions, processes, and effectiveness of border control and management among various stakeholders addressing illegal immigration issues in Malawi's Northern Region. Data

was collected through in-depth interviews. Before commencing data collection, the researcher obtained official permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security. The Ministry issued an authorisation letter, which the researcher delivered to the relevant institutions. These institutions subsequently granted access to the identified informants. This process is consistent with Creswell's (2016) assertion that qualitative researchers must seek permission from participants and institutions prior to data collection. The informants were selected based on their roles and positions, as it was believed that they possessed valuable knowledge and insights relevant to the study. The use of purposive sampling enabled the researcher to target participants with in-depth expertise on the topic.

For data analysis, the researcher utilised ATLAS.ti22 software. To ensure accuracy, all six in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim. Prior to uploading the transcripts into the software, the data was cleaned to minimise errors and ensure that the transcripts represented participants' views. Consistency was maintained throughout the data analysis process to ensure reliability. During the analysis, codes and themes emerged within the software and were subsequently used to interpret and understand the phenomenon under investigation.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal several key challenges undermining effective border control and management in Malawi, particularly in addressing illegal immigration in the Northern Region. These challenges are categorised into three main themes: political, organisational and socio-political. They are analysed within the context of the Collaborative Governance Framework (Ansell & Gash 2008). This framework provides an integrative perspective on the interdependencies between stakeholders and emphasises collaborative efforts as a solution

to complex governance challenges categorised as follows.

Political Challenges: Lack of Political Will

One major challenge contributing to poor border control in Malawi is the lack of political will by the government. This point was emphasised by some respondents, who stated: *'Inadequate funding, lack of political will which is the main problem because we on the ground can do things professionally, but we are frustrated by the conduct of those with political authority who intervene in our operations'* [Respondent 3].

Another participant from the local government echoed this by stating: *'Lack of political will is another hectic challenge, and, superiority among institutions affect the collaboration channels and actions'* [Respond 4].

This shows that stakeholders are willing to work towards addressing the problem if the government is willing to provide adequate support. However, due to the government's negligence, these stakeholders are unable to utilise their potential fully. The lack of political will manifests in the failure to ensure that the security institutions and other stakeholders involved in combating illegal immigration in Malawi are adequately funded and equipped to manage their tasks effectively. To address illegal immigration in Malawi through strengthened border control, the government must enhance efforts to improve border infrastructure, provide adequate personnel, and provide proper incentives to officers. It can be concluded that the absence of political will significantly contributes to the influx of illegal immigrants, which could have negative effects on the security, social and political stability of the country. From the Collaborative Governance Framework perspective, the absence of facilitative leadership, one of the framework's key constructs, could limit the ability of agencies to mobilise resources and coordinate their efforts effectively. The lack of strong political will hinders the creation of an

enabling environment for collaborative initiatives, resulting in poorly funded and under-resourced immigration institutions. Addressing this requires leadership that prioritises investment in infrastructure, personnel, and cross-agency coordination.

Policy Challenges

Malawi's immigration department is governed by the constitution. Additionally, it is regulated by the Immigration Act, which was enacted by Parliament in 1964. This policy document is supported by other policies, such as the Malawi Citizenship Policy which came into effect in 1996, and the Malawi Trafficking in Persons Act, enacted by Parliament in 2017. These policy documents have specific functions and responsibilities that they address. At the centre of all is the Immigration Act of 1964. The preamble statement of this policy outlines its focus as:

“An Act to regulate the entry of persons into Malawi, to prohibit the entry into Malawi of undesirable persons, to make provision for the deportation from Malawi of undesirable persons and to provide for matters incidental to the foregoing” (Malawi Immigration Act 1964, P. 1).

As shown in this preamble declaration, one of its core functions is to ensure that Malawi's borders are secured properly to regulate the movement of travellers entering and exiting the country. However, what is conspicuously missing in this policy's provisions is guidance on how the department and other security arms, like the police, can effectively manage the borders? The normal daily routine and functions of the immigration department officers are to check and stamp the documents of individuals crossing the border post. According to this practice, the immigration officers are not mandated to secure the boundaries of Malawi to ensure that unauthorised persons do not enter the country, either through designated or undesignated entry points.

The Malawi police service, as the law enforcers within Malawi's territorial boundaries, is primarily seen carrying out duties across the country to ensure law and order. Nevertheless, some officers from the Police Mobile Force (PMF) of the Malawi Police Service are deployed in borders to help the immigration department in regulating the movement of travellers, ensuring that only those with legal documents can enter or exit the country. However, their presence at the borders is extremely limited, with only a few officers stationed at the border posts, such as the Songwe border. It is doubtful that they are present in areas far from the designated border posts, where they could secure the boundaries of Malawi from illegal entries. This could be due to lack of adequate resources to enable them to patrol the boundaries effectively.

Section 11 of the Immigration Act, titled “Place of entry by prohibited immigrants”, states that:

“No prohibited immigrant who is permitted by or under this Act to enter or re-enter Malawi shall enter or re-enter Malawi at any port of entry other than that through which his entry or re-entry has been authorised by an immigration officer” (Immigration Act 1964, P.5).

This is one of the few places where the Act addresses the entry of prohibited individuals into Malawi. Specifically, it addresses illegal entries through designated ports of entries, such as land borders and airports. However, throughout the entire Act, there is no mention of efforts by the department and other security entities to secure and prohibit entries through undesignated pathways, such as uncharted routes known to the immigration department and police. Additionally, there is no mention on how the department and other security institutions can deploy their personnel to secure areas that are suspected to often be used by illegal immigrants, such

as crossing the Songwe River in Karonga, which lies between Malawi and Tanzania. This river serves as a geographical landmark and a natural boundary between the two countries. Consequently, the Immigration Act does not adequately address border control and management issues. The lack of such provisions contributes to the challenges of porous borders.

Another crucial point is that the Act, enacted in 1964, is outdated and fails to address Malawi's evolving immigration challenges. The Act still holds outdated penalties. This is evident in Section 34 (a), which stipulates the punishment for the 'misuse of documents', Section 35 for 'forgery of documents', and Section 37 for 'other offences'. The punishment prescribed is minimal and outdated. For instance, any person found guilty of these crimes is liable to a fine of K500.00, which is equivalent to USD0.29. This insufficient fine does not reflect the severity of such offences. By any measure, this amount is insufficient to deter individuals from contravening Malawi's immigration laws. Logically, laws and hefty punishment are put in place to deter people from engaging in activities that may disrupt peace in society. However, this is diametrically opposed to Malawi's immigration laws, particularly regarding the punishment for those who violate immigration rules, such as aiding illegal immigrants in entering Malawi through unlawful procedures. To ensure that illegal immigration challenges are addressed effectively, there is a need to review the Act to better address the current immigration challenges facing Malawi. From the institutional design perspective of the Collaborative Governance model, an effective policy framework is crucial for fostering structured collaboration among stakeholders.

Organizational Challenges: Insufficient Financial Resources and Staffing

One of the most significant findings of this study is the crucial role financial resources and staffing play in shaping the effectiveness

of border control efforts. The immigration department face considerable financial limitations, which directly affect their ability to manage illegal immigration. The lack of sufficient funding for operations and personnel severely hampers efforts to control borders effectively. The need for adequate funding for security institutions was highlighted by several participants. One respondent emphasised: *"Additionally, I feel that the government should ensure that security institutions are well funded."* (Participant 3).

This sentiment underscores the critical importance of financial resources in enhancing the effectiveness of security operations. According to the respondent's views, the current situation reveals that these institutions are significantly underfunded by the central government. This hampers their ability to address illegal immigration issues in northern Malawi. Adequate funding can provide necessary equipment, training, and personnel needed to combat illegal immigration more effectively through strengthening borders. Recommendations for ensuring proper funding include budget allocation from the government for immigration and security agencies to ensure they have the resources necessary for their operations. Encouraging partnerships with private entities could also enhance resource availability, promoting joint efforts in combating illegal immigration, and establishing systems to track funding and resource utilisation can ensure that financial support is effectively implemented and utilised for intended purposes. By addressing funding challenges, the government can bolster the capabilities of security institutions in their fight against illegal immigration.

Additionally, there is evidence that the immigration department, a key player in border control, is underfunded by the government. Due to this challenge, the department does not carry out regular border patrols to ensure that no illegal entries occur via pathways other than the main entrance. One informant from Department of

Immigration said *"We fail to do our job well because we have no resources. For example, can you believe that here at Karonga district immigration office, we do not have a vehicle?" So how can we discharge our duties which require us to patrol areas where we suspect illegal immigrants might use to enter Malawi? "Even at the border, we have inadequate vehicles and sometimes we do not have enough fuel"* [Respondent 1]

It is clear from this response that Malawi's immigration department is underfunded and hence, does not discharge their duties effectively. Another challenge is lack of transport. Transport is a very crucial element in all security work, easing rapid responses to ensure that border boundaries are well protected. It is difficult for any security entity to respond promptly to security issues without adequate transportation mechanisms. There is no doubt that the immigration job requires sufficient and necessary equipment to enable effective discharge of duties. However, the situation is different with Malawi's immigration department, which faces significant resource challenges.

In addition to this challenge, the department also has an exceedingly small number of officers at the border. Most of them are stationed at the main border entrance office, checking and stamping the documents of cross-border travellers. The entrance gate is always wide open, giving travellers easy access to pass through without being thoroughly checked before proceeding to the building where they present travelling documents to the officers. The distance between the main entrance gate and the offices where checking of the travelling documents is done is not far. However, since the security personnel do not properly regulate the movement of people, individuals can enter Malawi without presenting documents, as there is no security presence to direct or deter them from illegal entry. Upon entering the main gate, people can use other routes at the border, walking into Malawi's territory. These routes are known by the

immigration officials but are left unsecured. This negligence by the immigration officers is a significant issue and a security concern that contributes to poor border control and management, with detrimental results for the national security.

Malawi police officers are often seen assisting the immigration officers at the Songwe border. However, their workforce is also insufficient. Observations during the data collection exercise revealed that only about five police officers were stationed at the border daily, a number far too small compared to the volume of travellers passing through. Additionally, the immigration department has a total of approximately 2,500 officers nationwide (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023). This highlights that the number of immigration staff in Malawi is very insignificant compared to the task of providing services at all twenty-four entry ports of the country. This number is alarmingly inadequate for managing services at all 24 entry points across. Such staff shortages significantly undermine the department of immigration's capacity for effective border control and management.

Consequently, the findings of this study confirm that there is government negligence in effectively funding security departments to ensure they have sufficient resources to perform their duties. The construction of border barriers, for example, is the government's responsibility. At the Songwe border, and other border posts across Malawi, the situation is similar in that the borders are poorly constructed, with fencing covering only a few metres from the main entrance. Beyond this limited fencing, large areas remain unsecured, making it easier for illegal immigrants to enter.

Generally, the inferences drawn here suggest that without addressing the underlying funding challenges faced by security institutions, efforts to curb illegal immigration will remain ineffective. Adequate resource allocation, therefore, emerges as a critical area of intervention to

strengthen border control in Malawi, ultimately contributing to a reduction in illegal immigration. The Collaborative Governance Framework underscores the importance of starting conditions, such as resource availability, for enabling collaborative processes.

Lack of Advanced Training and Modern Equipment

One respondent cited lack of training as one of the contributing factors affecting the border control by the immigration department. He said *“majority of us since we graduated from our elementary training some years ago, we have not attended any refresher training. You know illegal immigrants now use different new methods and tricks to cross borders, but we still use same old tactics to combat them which I feel does not balance.”* [Respondent 2].

This signifies that border control and management is a hefty task which really requires significant efforts from the government, such as well-trained officers, and modern technology to combat illegal immigration through proper borders management (Koslowski, 2011). However, it should be pointed out that there is a need for different stakeholders, not just the government, to collaborate when addressing complex social challenges affecting the society. Border control and management is such a complex task that requires collective efforts. This concurs with the collaborative governance model and integrative framework for collaborative governance that emphasised the importance of involving various stakeholders when addressing complex issues that cannot be tackled by the government alone or by any other single institution.

While countries are now using new technological devices at their ports of entry, it is unfortunate to note that Malawi’s immigration department still relies on outdated methods and equipment at entry ports, except for airports where a computerised system is used to record

travellers' data. At all inland entry borders, officers manually record data using register books. This shows a significant lag in technology adoption compared to many countries around the world. Even illegal immigrants nowadays have adopted new methods to circumvent the system. One officer at Songwe border said *“sometimes we even run short of stationery. We reuse the already used papers, and we do not have enough computers, this is why we record data manually”* [Respondent 6]. It can be argued that lack of advanced technology and training worsens border control challenges, making it difficult for Malawi’s immigration department to manage the borders.

The study also found that interdepartmental training could encourage officers to work more professionally. This aligns with the findings from collaborative governance studies, which emphasise that capacity building through joint training fosters shared understanding, skill alignment, and stronger relationships among stakeholders (Huxham & Vangen, 2013). By initiating advanced training programmes, agencies involved in combating illegal immigration can enhance overall effectiveness. Joint training programmes for the Police, immigration department, and Military can strengthen interagency relationships, and enhance collaboration. The finding reflects deficiencies in capacity-building efforts, which are essential for fostering shared understanding and skill alignment among stakeholders. Collaborative governance principles stress the importance of inter-agency training to build trust and operational coherence.

Unethical Conduct and Negligence by the Security Agents

This factor was identified by a respondent who lamented that some police and immigration officers have immoral behaviours. When asked to shade more light on this point, he said *‘our subjects inform us that some officers connive with illegal immigrants to allow them pass, something*

raises doubts about the effectiveness of dealing with illegal immigration and protecting our borders' [Respondent 5].

This behaviour is detrimental to the border control and management measures that the government aims to implement. There is also a tendency of negligence among officers when discharging their duties at the border. During the data collection of this study, the researcher noticed that some officers, both police and immigration, merely sit and watch people crossing in and out without checking them. Some were seen to have bonds with people who were crossing, hence no proper security checks were conducted. These factors are connected to a lack of professionalism and working standards among the officers, which may be a result of insufficient training and dedication to their duties.

Corruption

Corruption, particularly bribery, was identified as a significant obstacle to effective border control. Respondents highlighted its negative impact on Police and immigration operations. Although respondents did not shed more light on this issue, nevertheless, there were some hints from their responses. Some highlighted that they do not understand why officers do not act on tips they make about illegal immigrants spotted in their localities. The community leader said, *'I would not precisely say yes because I do not have tangible evidence but by the look of things and the way some officials involved in the department of immigration and police and even at the ministry conduct is suspicious.'* *Even when we give the information, they do not handle the matter well there it gives suspicion that may be there is something that makes them not to be serious and that could be related to corruption practices. Here in Karonga we chiefs we know many roots illegal immigrants use our people inform us and if we report nothing happening'* [Respondent 5].

It can be inferred that corruption is among the key factors affecting border control and management in Malawi. Community suspicion stems from officers' behavior of the, particularly, their inaction on reported issues. The lack of a quick response creates the impression that unusual conduct, possibly linked to corruption, hinders their ability to act.

Social-Political Challenges: Impact on National Security

According to the data, participants indicated that illegal immigration poses serious threats to the national security of Malawi. This point was emphasised by a security officer at the Songwe border who highlighted that: *".... Let me add something important here, as we do not have everything in place. This is why our country is at danger because these illegal immigrants are threat to our national security. I can tell you that when sometimes we apprehend them, we find some of them with unlawful materials and substances like drugs, even guns, because many of them came from war-torn countries like the DRC where access to weapons is not difficult and once, they are successful enter Malawi they use these guns for burglary and other serious crimes"* [Respondent 1]. This suggests that porous borders allow illegal immigrants to enter Malawi unchecked, posing a serious security threat. When national security is compromised, the country experiences increased incidents of burglary and theft, which in many cases result in the loss of innocent lives. In Malawi, joint operations by the police, Army and immigration department have frequently reported the arrest of illegal immigrants, some of whom were found in possession of lethal weapons such as guns. In some cases, some are found in possession of substances used for drug abuse. This indicates that the challenge in border control directly translates to national security risks, a challenge that Malawi continues to face. When national security is compromised to this extent, the country faces economic challenges, as it fails to attract foreign investors who could contribute to

national development. Additionally, such threats may also strain cross-border relations between Malawi and its neighbouring countries. Therefore, the government must ensure that borders are managed effectively to mitigate illegal entries and the associated threats to national security. Collaborative governance framework emphasises stakeholder interdependence, shared goals and institutional alignment among stakeholders.

Community Distrust

This study indicates that there is community dissatisfaction with how the government authorities handle issues of illegal immigration in Malawi. One respondent highlighted that “... *there are some issues which are tackled by specific institutions like in this case, mainly the immigration department is forefront. In this regard, the district office sometimes faces a significant challenge as the immigration department often acts individually. As local leaders we work closely with communities. We have been reporting to the council issues regarding illegal immigrants, but when we raise such issues to the immigration office there is no much effort and no feedback provided to us. This practice demotivates local people because they are not happy with the way we handle issues, especially our friends at the immigration office*” [Responded 5]. It can be inferred from this response that communities and their traditional leaders in Karonga are not satisfied with how the immigration offices handle illegal immigration, particularly when communities report immigration issues that require action. This indicates a lack of trust in the immigration officers due to their tendencies towards negligence. During the data collection exercise at the Songwe border, it was observed that entry points are not seriously regulated. For instance, some travellers were seen crossing into Malawi through the main entrance gate but bypassing the immigration counter by using shortcut pathways. Local communities residing near the border premises report such cases to their

leaders, who raise the issue with immigration offices. However, the inadequate responses from these offices leave the communities feeling discontented.

This dissatisfaction and distrust contribute to the influx of illegal immigration. Community distrust regarding how immigration issues are handled has a detrimental impact on efforts to fight illegal immigration. Lack of collaboration could discourage communities from reporting suspicious incidents that they observe in their communities regarding the presence of illegal immigration. Therefore, it is important for authorities to ensure that security officers perform their duties diligently and professionally. Building trust between security officers and the public could foster collaborative efforts, enhancing the effectiveness of combating illegal immigration. Additionally, the government should create an environment where communities feel comfortable reporting their concerns and receiving feedback on their reports. For instance, when communities report the presence of illegal immigrants residing in their area, authorities should take prompt action to address the issue. Furthermore, local communities should be recognised as integral to efforts in combating illegal immigration.

Solutions, Recommendations and Conclusion

This study examined the border control challenges contributing to the rise of illegal immigration in Malawi, with a focus on deficiencies within the immigration department's management. Utilising a qualitative approach, the findings revealed that the department is ineffective in managing Malawi's borders due to several critical factors. These include corruption, lack of political will, unethical conduct by security personnel, outdated policies, inadequate training, lack of advanced modern equipment, and insufficient funding. These systemic issues have facilitated an influx of illegal immigrants, primarily from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of

Congo (DRC). Additionally, Malawi's geographical location and porous borders further exacerbate the country's vulnerability to unauthorised migration.

To address these challenges effectively, this study offers the following recommendations:

1. The government of Malawi should increase funding to the department of immigration so that it can purchase vehicles and other necessary equipment to manage the national borders effectively.
2. The government of Malawi should recruit and train more Malawians as immigration officers to ensure the department has an adequate number of employees. This will allow for sufficient deployment at all borders to strengthen the staff list.
3. Officers found indulging in malpractices such as corruption should be punished severely, as their actions put the country at risk, including the potential spread of strange ailments from other countries where illegal immigrants originate.
4. The government of Malawi should ensure that land border posts are equipped with modern technological tools such as computers, surveillance gadgets and other advanced equipment. This will improve the security management of the borders by the department.
5. The Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal Security, in collaboration with the immigration department and other relevant stakeholders, should review the Act to address emerging contemporary immigration challenges affecting the country.

Implementing these recommendations requires a collaborative approach, aligning with the principles of the Collaborative Governance Framework. By fostering inter-agency coordination, investing in resources, and engaging stakeholders at all levels, Malawi can strengthen its border control systems, mitigate the socio-economic and

security impacts of illegal immigration, and safeguard national stability.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the management of the International Institute of Islamic Thought [IIIT] for the scholarship, which has enabled me to cover both my educational and daily needs. I am also deeply thankful to my supervisor and the co-supervisor for their tireless academic support and guidance. Furthermore, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Malawi's Ministry of Home Affairs and International Security for granting me the opportunity to collect data within their departments.

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Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies,
1, 75.

Article History

Received: 27 September 2024

Accepted: 16 December 2024