# Saving cities or empowering regions: A Comparative Study on Recent Regional Immigration Policies in Canada and Australia

Deniz.cevik@enap.ca



Deniz Çevik, Policy Analyst & PhD Candidate École nationale d'administration publique, Montréal



Fact: In recent years, Canada and Australia have pursued different plans to settle more immigrants in the regions. Research Question: Why do these two countries had different policy outcomes?

### Introduction

# Regionalization of immigration

Recently, regionalization of immigration reappeared in the agenda of policy makers in Canada and Australia, two countries that rely on immigration for population growth. Although recent policies in the two countries share a common goal which is to achieve a better geographic distribution of newcomers, the process of agenda-setting in those countries did not follow the same pattern. The need for regional immigration policies was not problematized the same way in Canada and Australia. In Canada, population decline, and economic revival of the regions were used to define the problem whereas Australia followed a different pattern where policy makers emphasized the infrastructure problems in metropolitan areas. Using Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), this study compares the policy narratives emerged in both countries.

## Theory

# Narrative policy framework (NPF)

- When: A policy process theory and an empirical approach to study narratives developed in the early 2000s.
- **What:** Its main analytical concept is "policy narratives" which are stories and discourses strategically mobilized by the policy makers to influence the policy process<sup>1</sup>.
- Why: NFP theory postulates that those narratives have impacts on policy outputs and this impact can be systematically studied.
- **How:** Although narratives may seem to be unique to a specific context, NFP offers a universally applicable methodology that optimizes the concepts to become generalizable and travel across contexts. NFP can be used in both experimental or quasiexperimental quantitative designs and in non-experimental qualitative inquires.<sup>2</sup>
- Importance: One of its assumptions is that the policy reality is socially constructed and transmitted in narrative form so human cognitive capacity can make sense of it.

# Application of NFP in this study

**Type of inquiry:** Qualitative comparative case study Level of analysis: Meso level (how groups construct policy narratives) **Units of analysis:** Two countries (Canada and Australia) **Policy narrative:** The need for regionalization of immigration Phases of the policy process: Agenda-setting and implementation

# Methodology and methods

### Comparative case analysis

Criteria for case selection: Canada and Australia **Similarities:** 

- Population growth depends on immigration
- Federal regimes with a process of federalization (decentralization) of immigration<sup>3</sup>
- Asymmetrical distribution of immigrants across regions
- Recognition of the policy problem and agenda-setting around the same time (late 90s and then in 2017-2018)

### Difference:

Different problem definition leading to different policy outcomes

### Data and methods

- 1. Governmental press releases
- 2. Speeches from ministers 3. Reports from interest groups
- 4. Journal articles (2018-2020)
- Policy narratives can be found in: Themes for document analysis<sup>4</sup>:
  - Population decline and aging 2. Immigrants' preference for urban areas
    - 3. Economic development
    - 4. Problems in big cities (infrastructure and congestion)

# Analysis & Key Findings

### **Evolution of the policy debate**

90s: Federalization of immigration in both countries Late 90s: Regionalization of immigration becomes an important policy problem – first agenda setting attempts

Early 2000s: Statistical evidence about population aging integrated into the debate to justify problem definition – first problem definition attempts

Early 2000s: Statistical evidence about immigrants' preference for urban areas integrated into problem definition

**2017-2018:** An urgent need for regionalization of immigration is problematized

**2018-2019:** Accelerated decentralization of immigration with targeted regional programs

Permanent migration in Canada, 2019

**Net overseas migration in Australia, 2019** 

**Policy output** 

**More immigrants** 

Regional

immigration

population

**Economic** 

development

## **Major differences**

The two counties differ in four areas:

- 1. Problem definition 3. Regionalization method 2. Policy response
  - 4. Policy objectives

As in the rest of our society,

Canada's population is aging

in smaller communities.

urban centres have

Canada's cities and larger

Canadian path

Moral of the



Reduction in

Policy output

**Narrative Policy Framework Analysis** 

Federated system of immigration

Demographic asymmetries

Heros: Federal government

cities and congestion

Regions have not benefited from Immigration flow to urban areas

Australia

Aging population

Declining birth rate

settlement in big cities)

Villains: Population density in

contributed to problems in big

Decreasing permanent migration

with more regional immigration

programs to achieve economic

prosperity in regional Australia

Infrastructure problems in big

Inadvertent cause (immigrants'

Regional immigration

policy narrative

**Problem definition** 

**Congestion in cities** 

Policy response

Less immigrants per

year + regional

settlement programs

<u>Regionalization</u>

Top-down approach

initiated by the

federal government

Declining regions

Congested cities

Canada

immigration

local actors

Canada

Population decline

Declining birth rate

Aging population

Federated system of

Declining regions

Demographic asymmetries

Villains: Population decline

Heros: Federal government and

immigration as much as urban

Increasing permanent migration

with more regional immigration

programs to achieve economic

prosperity in regional Canada

Inadvertent cause (population

### Regional immigration Narrative policy narrative

**Problem definition** Aging population



<u>Policy response</u> New programs to welcome more immigrants

**Regionalization** Bottom-up approach initiated by communities

**Policy objective** Better geographic distribution of immigrants + **Empowerment of** 

regions

More persuasive

narrative

traditionally benefited from immigration, but smaller cities and rural communities have struggled to do the And thanks to these communities, we will be able to test new ideas and to test community-based immigration. What that means is that it will be up to the communities to create a blueprint for what works for them locally and how immigration can help them meet their local economic development plans. By creating an immigration pilot aimed at rural and northern communities, we're looking to ensure that the benefits of immigration are

shared across the country.

Right now, the vast majority of new migrants go presently to the big capitals and so reducing the migration rate is the first step to easing the pressure on Melbourne and Sydney particularly. The fact is that 87 per cent of all skilled migrants are going

Narrative

to Sydney and Melbourne, Regional migration and nearly all of the numanitarian intake. We Municipal Nominee want to have a more even Program distribution, as I will explain

Infrastructure

problems

Hence, settling even a slightly larger number of new migrants to the smaller states and regions can take significant pressure off our big cities.

Regional

immigration

Less immigrants

Regional settlement programs, incentives and measures

**Economic** 

development



**Policy objective** Better geographic distribution of immigrants+ Saving metropolitan areas

Less persuasive narrative

# Limitations

- The impact of COVID-19 pandemic as an exogenous shock has been excluded from this study due to its coverage.
- 2. This study explains the impact of problem definition on the policy outcome. Therefore, it treats problem definition in the process of agenda-setting as an explanatory factor, not as a dependent variable. The factors that explain why these different problem definitions occurred is beyond the scope of this study.
- 3. The resources used in this study cover records for public consumption only. Since Canada and Australia have different public spheres, there is an asymmetry in the availability of resources. Australian minister has delivered more speeches on the subject that are publicly available whereas Canadian minister was less involved in the debate, providing less material to document the policy narrative.

### **Contributions & Conclusion**

- 1. Similar systems, similar goals, different policy responses:
  - This study shows why two similar immigration countries ended up having different policy outcomes to address the same policy problem. The evidence drawn from documents analyzed through the NFP lens demonstrates that the problem definition is an explanatory factor.
- The analysis suggests that Canada's problem definition led to an increase in number of immigrants and introduction of new programs whereas Australia's problem definition led to a decrease in number of immigrants and incentives to settle immigrants outside the capital cities.

### 2. Role of narratives in problem definition:

- This study shows that this explanatory factor, problem definition, can be analyzed in narrative form.
- Canadian policy makers mobilized a narrative of population aging and economic decline in the regions whereas Australian policy makers mobilized a narrative of congestion in the cities and infrastructure problems.

### 3. First attempt to mobilize NFP to explain a recent policy phenomenon in immigration:

 Although Canada and Australia have been compared in numerous comparative studies, this study offers new insights into immigration policies from a narrative perspective.

# Notes and bibliography

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- 3. Paquet, M. (2017). Wicked problem definition and gradual institutional change: federalism and immigration in canada and australia. Policy and Society, 36(3),
- 4. In this study, the coding scheme for NPF proposed by Shanahan et. al. was used.

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