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

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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: Developed in the early 2000s, a policy process theory and an empirical approach to study narratives.
- **What:** Its main analytical concept is "policy narratives" which are stories and discourses strategically mobilized by the policy makers to influence the policy process¹.
- 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.²
- 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 immigration³
- 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
- 4. Journal articles (2018-2020)
- Policy narratives can be found in: Themes for document analysis⁴:
- Population decline and aging 2. Speeches from ministers 2. Immigrants' preference for 3. Reports from interest groups 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, 2019⁵

Net overseas migration in Australia, 2019⁶

Major differences

The two countries differ in four areas:

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

Form	Canada	Australia
Setting	Federated system of immigration Demographic asymmetries Declining regions	Federated system of immigration Demographic asymmetries Declining regions Congested cities
Characters	Heros: Federal government and local actors Villains: Population decline	Heros: Federal government Villains: Population density in cities and congestion
Plot	Regions have not benefited from immigration as much as urban areas	Immigration flow to urban areas contributed to problems in big cities
Moral of the Story	Increasing permanent migration with more regional immigration programs to achieve economic prosperity in regional Canada	Decreasing permanent migration with more regional immigration programs to achieve economic prosperity in regional Australia
Narrative Content	Canada	Australia
Beliefs	Population decline	Infrastructure problems in big

Narrative Policy Framework Analysis

Content		
Beliefs	Population decline	Infra
	Aging population	cities
	Declining birth rate	Aging
		Decli
Strategies	Inadvertent cause (population decline)	Inad settle

g population lining birth rate dvertent cause (immigrants' lement in big cities)

* *

Canadian path





Australian path

Reduction in

Regional settlement

programs, incentives

and measures



Regional immigration Narrative **Policy output** Narrative Policy output As in the rest of our society, Right now, the vast majority

policy narrative **Problem definition**



<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

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.

Canada's population is aging

in smaller communities.

urban centres have

Canada's cities and larger

traditionally benefited from

immigration, but smaller

have struggled to do the

Sydney particularly. cities and rural communities The fact is that 87 per cent of Regional migration Municipal Nominee Program

all skilled migrants are going to Sydney and Melbourne, and nearly all of the numanitarian intake. We want to have a more even distribution, as I will explain

of new migrants go presently

reducing the migration rate is

to the big capitals and so

the first step to easing the

pressure on Melbourne and

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

Infrastructure

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



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

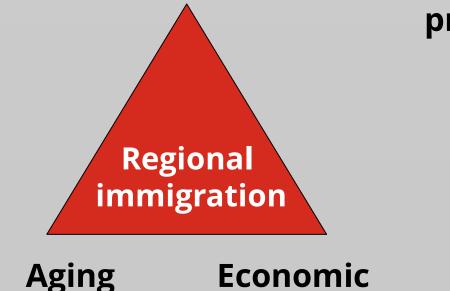
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population development

More immigrants

development problems Regional immigration Less immigrants

Economic