

A constructivist approach to immigration politics

Constructivism is distinctive from other analytical perspectives due to the emphasis attached to the social construction of reality, the contingency associated with social relations, or the importance attached to ideas in human perception of social reality. For research on immigration politics, these premises would entail important consequences on the research over public behaviour towards immigration and the development of immigration policies.

The available research indicates that immigration is a non-obtrusive issue for public opinion, whilst the fluctuations on public concern and attitudes towards immigration seem unrelated with structural regularities such as economic growth or size of the immigrant population. This paper suggests that the meaning and importance attached to immigration across public opinion is a contingent political process that is heavily influenced by social actors, like the media and political elites. In this perspective, the naturalization of public opposition to immigration seems counterproductive whilst comparative approaches enhance the evaluation of cross-national variations on the perception of immigration.

Regarding immigration policy, a constructivist approach contends that there are multiple pathways to similar policy outcomes and discards monocausal explanations for policy developments. This analytical perspective acknowledges the interdependence of immigration with other social spheres and considers causal factors behind policy developments according to the structure and agency duality. Thus, a constructivist approach explores the discourse employed by political actors to induce the ideas and interests that support proposed policy options. In sum, a constructive approach stresses the inherent contingency of immigration politics.