Immigration in Historical Political Economy

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Abstract

This chapter considers how immigration policy has evolved and considers the significant factors that have affected it. The chapter begins with a discussion of how states have managed immigration, with most of the discussion focused on the Long 19th and 20th centuries, but some attention is paid to earlier periods. It then discusses the major factors that have affected immigration policy: the need for manpower, competition between immigrants and local workers, security and political concerns, the effects of immigrants on the welfare state, and the fear of the other. It discusses how these factors have changed over time and how they have affected immigration policy.

Keywords: immigration policy, nativism, migration, welfare state, trade, globalization

Bio: Margaret E. Peters is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and the Chair of the Global Studies major at UCLA. Her research focuses broadly on the political economy of migration. Her award-winning book, "Trading Barriers: Immigration and the Remaking of Globalization," argues that the increased ability of firms to produce anywhere in the world combined with growing international competition due to lowered trade barriers has led to greater limits on immigration, as businesses no longer see a need to support open immigration at home. She also works on how dictators control emigration and how refugees make their decisions of when, where, and if to move from their home countries.

“Gobernar es poblar" (To govern is to populate) – Juan Bautista Alberdi, 1852[[1]](#footnote-1)

"We asked for workers. We got people instead." ― Max Frisch, 1974[[2]](#footnote-2)

"Why do we want all these people from 'shithole countries' coming here?" –President Donald Trump, 2018[[3]](#footnote-3)

The movement of people has always been an important issue for governments, but concerns over immigration—the movement of people by their own volition into a country and the policy governing who can enter a country—became an issue starting in the Early Modern Period as sovereigns gained more control over their borders.

The terms of the debate on immigration have greatly shifted over the last several centuries. The first quote above, by Juan Bautista Alberdi, a mid-nineteenth century Argentine philosopher and diplomat, shows that governments once encouraged immigration. Yet, today, as illustrated by the quote from former U.S. President Donald Trump, many nations, especially the wealthy nations of the Global North, seek to discourage immigration.

In this essay, I will discuss the reasons for this change and enduring issues in immigration. The first significant issue has been the need for manpower. Throughout much of history, the state has been synonymous with the ruler; the state's goals were the ruler's goals. The ruler wanted to stay in power, get rich, and gain status. The major threats to the ruler were external threats and other elites. To stave off these threats and get rich, the ruler needed people. People to serve in the army, work in agriculture, make things, and so on. The more people subject to the ruler, the more income he could extract, which he could use to fund an army, buy off other elites, and spend on castles, jewels, and other luxury goods that would aggrandize him.

The rise of democratic governance, industrialization, and globalization over the last 200 years has changed this calculus. Democratic leaders must consider the effects of immigration on society. Industrialization and globalization mean that societies do not need as many people as they once did to produce the goods and services they desire.

In addition to the changing needs for manpower, there have been enduring concerns about immigrants. One of these concerns has been the loyalty of immigrants; immigrants have often been perceived as "fifth columns." A second and related concern is the potential effect of immigrants on politics in the state. Especially in democracies, there has been a concern that immigrants simply do not understand the government, and their influence will undermine the state. A third concern has been the cost of supporting poor immigrants. Finally, a constant feature has been the fear of the other.

I begin this essay by explaining immigration and immigration policy and tracing their history over the last few centuries. Much of the literature in the West has focused on immigration policy in Europe and its offshoots; thus, much of this discussion is based on policy in those countries. This is not to say that immigration was not an issue elsewhere but simply that we have less scholarship. After setting the stage, I discuss the major factors that have affected immigration politics and policy.

# What are immigration and immigration policy?

By immigration, we mean the movement of people from one country into another (mostly) of their own volition; this article does not deal with individuals moved as enslaved people, though this movement has made up a large flow of people from ancient times to today. For much of history, people moved shorter distances primarily, from parish to parish, in part due to limits on their mobility like serfdom (Peters 2022). Yet there were always individuals who traveled further as seasonal laborers, soldiers and sailors, and clergy, and cities were always a draw (J. Lucassen and Lucassen 2009). Nonetheless, the 19th century marked a turning point in mobility: with the rise of faster and safer transportation technology, large numbers of individuals could now make cross-countries and cross-continent moves (J. Lucassen and Lucassen 2009).

Immigration policy consists of the policies governing this movement. States began codifying immigration during the Long 19th century. After World War I, most states adopted the requirement to have a passport and vias to enter the country, ending the legal permeability of borders (Torpey 2018). Immigration policy includes entry policies, the rights given to immigrants, and enforcement policies.

## Entry Policies

States have governed the entry of immigrants in many ways. Throughout much of history, most states had a laissez-faire approach to immigration, placing no restrictions on who could enter the state. This approach was, in part, because most polities could not police their borders; the exceptions included city-states, which in medieval and early modern Europe could control who entered the city,[[4]](#footnote-4) some island nations like Japan from 1639 to 1853, and a few highly developed states like China, which controlled entry from 1661 to 1727.

Starting in the nineteenth century, most states began regulating immigration. These regulations were more about controlling the kind of immigrants who entered rather than trying to decrease the flow. States sought the "right" kind of manpower. To do this, states or localities put restrictions on immigration of the poor, the infirm, and the criminal (Neuman 1993). Yet, at the same time, many states used inducements—from the 1862 Homestead Act in the United States, which provided free land (Zolberg 2006), to the Bounty System in Australia (1835-1841), which paid for transportation (Jupp 2002; Madgwick 1969)—to attract the "right" types of immigrants.

As the nineteenth century wore on, states, and the societies they represented, became concerned that these prohibitions were not enough. There were new, racialized groups that states sought to restrict. Most of the "settler" societies of the New World began by restricting immigration of individuals from Asia and Africa (although there was little free African migration)[[5]](#footnote-5) and then from Southern and Eastern Europe, through prohibitions, national origin quotas, and literacy tests (Borrie 1994; de Lepervanche 1975; Jupp 2002; Gibney, Hansen, and Credo 2005; Hawkins 1991; Henry 2008; Kelley and Trebilcock 1998; Smith 1981; Templeton 2008; Timmer and Williamson 1998; Tsuchida 1998; Zolberg 2006). World War I and the Great Depression intensified opposition to immigration and led to more restrictions (Peters 2015; 2017; Timmer and Williamson 1998).

After World War II, states largely continued their goals of allowing only the "right" immigrants. While the most racist aspects of the pre-war policies were removed, they were replaced with family reunification policies in the U.S. and skills-based policies in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand meant to have the same effect (Jupp 2002; Tichenor 2016). Yet, some states, especially those in Europe, needed workers and signed bilateral labor agreements to hire them (Castles 1986; Peters 2019). It was hoped that these agreements would allow states to bring in labor they needed but not bring long-term immigrants.

In most wealthy states, entry policy has continued along these lines since the 1970s. States increasingly restrict those they see as undesirable but provide additional carve-outs for workers deemed essential. These essential workers typically are on the two ends of the wage spectrum: high-wage immigrants are needed in the modern knowledge economy, and low-wage immigrants are needed for agriculture and the service sector. States further want to encourage the long-term settlement of high-wage immigrants while deterring low-wage immigrants from settling.

## Refugees

Refugees have been something of an exception to this trend of increased exclusions. As a separate legal category, refugees did not exist in international law until after World War I. Before World War I, refugees as we know them today–individuals fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution based on reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951)–of course, existed. The shifting boundaries of religions in the Eastern Hemisphere, especially fights between different Christian sects and along the Christian/ Muslim borderlands, and pogroms against minority groups, including the Jews and Roma, led many to flee. Genocide and politicide were common events, from the destruction of Troy described by Homer to the destruction of indigenous groups during colonization. Individuals fled across borders to avoid advancing armies or criminal gangs (it was often hard to distinguish between the two).

However, these individuals were not recognized as refugees (Hamlin 2021). Societies have had notions of sanctuary from the ancient Greeks onward, but sanctuary was not the same as refugee status. In the case of the ancient Greeks, those seeking sanctuary were not given citizenship but were often confined to temple grounds (Rubinstein 2018). Later in history, some groups fleeing religious persecution, like the Huguenots, were invited to move to England and Prussia, but other groups, like the Palantines or Jews fleeing pogroms, were not (Hamlin 2021).[[6]](#footnote-6)

Instead, most people whom we would now call refugees moved as migrants. They would be accepted, or not, according to the rules of a state. In the nineteenth century, most fled either to a neighboring state or to the New World if they could afford to. If the refugees were not deemed common criminals, disabled, or likely to become public charges, they could enter the state. States in the New World like the U.S. and Argentina even created carve-outs for those convicted of political crimes to enter the state, in what we might consider the first asylum laws (Hutchinson 1981; Iza 1994).

After World War I, the end of the Austro-Hungry, Russian, and Ottoman empires, combined with the creation of the passport and visa system, led to the creation of the refugee regime. The end of World War I led to a large-scale "unmixing" of populations, as many ethnic minorities no longer "belonged" in their state. These individuals, however, often would not have the papers–especially a passport–necessary to move elsewhere because they were effectively stateless (Loescher, Betts, and Milner 2008). Additionally, the Russian Civil War created millions of refugees.

This situation led to the creation of the League of Nations High Commission on Refugees. Under the League, a group-based definition of refugees was created (Loescher, Betts, and Milner 2008), and the so-called Nansen passport, named after the first High Commissioner on Refugees, Fridtjof Nansen, was created to help the stateless move. The League succeeded in moving Russian refugees and assisted in the Greek-Turkish population exchange, but it failed to help Jews fleeing the Nazi regime, Chinese fleeing the Japanese invasion, and Ethiopians fleeing the Italian invasion (Loescher, Betts, and Milner 2008).

The plight of displaced persons in Europe after World War II led to the creation of the modern refugee regime. Even before the war's conclusion, Allied leaders realized they had to deal with many displaced persons in Europe, including Jews living in concentration camps and former slave laborers from Eastern Europe in Germany. With the Soviets' movement westward came migrants from the Baltic, many of whom were concerned about reprisals for their collaboration with the Nazis during the war (Nasaw 2021). At first, the Allies, including the Americans, planned to simply return the displaced to their country of origin (Nasaw 2021). When the displaced refused to return—either in the case of the Jews unwilling to return to the site of their persecution or those from Eastern Europe unwilling to live under Soviet rule—the Allies had to devise a new plan (Nasaw 2021).

After several institutional changes, the U.S. and its allies created the U.N. High Commission on Refugees[[7]](#footnote-7) and adopted the 1951 Convention on Refugees, creating the modern definition. This individual-based definition differed from the League's group-based definition, and it only covered those fleeing events in Europe before 1951.

Even before the 1951 Convention was formally adopted, this definition was challenged by states and events outside of Europe. The Indian and Pakistani governments wanted a more inclusive definition and assistance in dealing with the displacement crisis arising from the creation of the two states (Nasaw 2021) and there were no provisions for those fleeing the Chinese civil war or the Korean War or the displacement of Palestinians during the creation of the state of Israel. In this last case, the U.N. acted because it was argued that the U.N. was partly responsible for the crisis (Hamlin 2021). Nevertheless, instead of expanding the definition of a refugee to include Palestinians and giving the UNHCR authority over the situation, the U.N. created its Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

The creation of the UNHCR and limited definition of a refugee was essentially a product of the desires of the U.S., which wanted a limited regime. The sentiment in the U.S. was against immigration (Nasaw 2021), making support for a large agency difficult. In addition, the U.S. increasingly wanted to use refugees fleeing the Soviet Union and its satellites as evidence of the illegitimacy of communist rule (Loescher, Betts, and Milner 2008). The U.S. thus wanted nothing to do with international organizations that allowed the Soviet Union as a member and so created its own limited organization, the UNHCR (Karatani 2005; Loescher, Betts, and Milner 2008; Nasaw 2021).

Since 1951, the UNHCR has expanded its mission. It took on responsibility for other crises and pushed to remove the temporal and geographic restrictions on who is defined as a refugee. It also expanded to care for internally displaced persons (Hamlin 2021).

Another important aspect of the 1951 Convention was the creation of the principle of non-refoulment. As enshrined in the Convention Against Torture, this principle does not allow countries to return migrants to their home countries if the migrant faces torture or other harm to their physical integrity. Yet, increased fears that immigrants have been using asylum policy and non-refoulment as a back gate to enter the Global North has led to more draconian enforcement policies. For example, there is increased interdiction at sea, and the U.S., the E.U., and Australia increasingly cooperate with transit countries to keep potential asylum seekers from reaching their shores (FitzGerald 2019).

## Rights and Citizenship

While the idea of citizenship goes back to at least Ancient Greece, the modern concept of citizenship with its notions of shared governance of a nation-state—rather than subjecthood with its notion of subjugation to the rule of a higher status individual—began with the French Revolution and its redefinition of state-society relations (Brubaker 1992). With the slow demise of monarchies in Europe and early decolonization movements, citizenship rather than subjecthood spread throughout European and the Western Hemisphere. Nonetheless, the British remained subjects, rather than citizens, until the 1948 British Nationality Act (Spencer 1997), even though people living in British Dominions like Canada and Australia became citizens in 1867 (Kelley and Trebilcock 1998) and 1903 (Lynch and Simon 2003), respectively. And much of the world remained colonial subjects until their countries were granted their independence in the 20th century.

In addition to entry policy, governments have used citizenship and other rights to attract or repel immigrants. During the 19th century, most immigrants were bound to the United States; thus, other countries seeking immigrants had to compete with the U.S. (Timmer and Williamson 1998), offering to pay for transportation, land, and, for those settling in rural areas, tools, and other supplies to get started (Browne 1972). Once states sought to decrease immigration, they limited rights in hopes of deterring entrants. For example, the 1996 IIRIRA Act in the U.S. limited access to welfare and other social programs specifically to deter immigration. Similar limitations have been passed on asylum seekers' access to the right to work and the social welfare system in the U.S. and Europe (Geddes 2003).

Research has shown that more fundamental rights can attract immigrants. For example, J. Fitzgerald, Leblang, and Teets (2014) and Leblang and Helms (Forthcoming) find that fewer requirements for citizenship, and the rights that go with it, lead to increased immigration flows. Similarly, Ruhs (2013) finds that rights like permanent residence and family reunification help attract highly educated migrants. However, Zavodny (1997) finds that any correlation between welfare access and immigration is a correlation. Once she controlled for migrant networks and economic opportunities, the relationship between welfare access and migration disappeared (Zavodny 1997). These conflicting results may stem from the types of rights and populations studied. It is possible that all immigrants greatly care about fundamental rights but pay less attention to issues like welfare (likely because most migrants plan to work) and that highly skilled migrants care much more about rights because they are in higher demand than those who plan to work a low-wage job, who simply want a high-paying job somewhere.

Citizenship laws have largely tracked along the same lines as other rights: states made getting citizenship easier when seeking to attract immigrants and harder when trying to decrease their numbers. For example, in 1867, the new Canadian government enacted a citizenship law in which the only requirement was three years of residency in the country (Kelley and Trebilcock 1998). Australia in 1903 only required two years of residency (Department of Immigration 1988). In contrast, many European countries today required ten years of residency or longer (Wallace Goodman 2010).

## Enforcement

The final component of immigration policy is enforcement. Most states had relatively little formal enforcement of immigration laws until the late 19th/ early 20th centuries.[[8]](#footnote-8) For instance, early in the 19th century, U.S. states essentially outsourced enforcement by requiring ship owners to return those non-admissible immigrants to the port of embarkment (Neuman 1993).

Immigration enforcement began in earnest in the early 20th century as states regulated immigration to a much larger degree. Now, immigrants had to pass through inspection points like Ellis Island to enter. There was also the widespread adoption of the passport during World War I. While passports had been used earlier by revolutionary France and by Prussia, they became almost ubiquitous in Europe during World War I to prevent the entry of "enemy aliens" (Torpey 2018). What was meant to be temporary became permanent as immigration restrictions were kept in place due to the economic recession in many countries after WWI (Torpey 2018). The passport then spread to the rest of the world (Torpey 2018).

States have generally increased their enforcement measures since the early 20th century. The U.S. created the Border Patrol in 1924; other countries followed suit. States began to use carrier sanctions, transit agreements, and sea patrols to push the border back further beginning in the 1980s (FitzGerald 2019).

In sum, states did not focus much attention on immigration prior to the Long 19th Century as most people could not move long distances. Once mass migration was possible, states were open to immigration in the first half of the Long 19th Century; began restricting immigration in the latter half of the century; most reopened some after World War II; and have greatly restricted immigration since the 1970s (Peters 2015; 2017).

# What have been the primary considerations on immigration?

## Manpower

A significant consideration for states on immigration has been their manpower needs. Immigrants have primarily been regarded as a source of labor for the state. Due to the relatively low level of productivity gains prior to the industrial revolution, the only way to increase the amount produced in the state was to increase the number of people. We see numerous examples of rulers seeking to increase their population through immigration. In the High Middle Ages, rulers in the relatively unpopulated lands of Eastern Europe sought immigrants from Western Europe to farm the land (Anderson 1979; Epstein 2009). Beginning in the 17th century, large-scale colonization efforts began in areas deemed to be "unpopulated," including North America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the Southern Cone. After World War I, France recruited additional workers from Algeria and its North African colonies to the Metropol (Ageron 1991), along with workers from other European countries (Cross 1983; Libet 1995), and after World War II, other European countries, West Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland among others, followed suit signing bilateral labor agreements (Peters 2019).

States also sought manpower for fighting. Immigrants can be drafted into the military or can provide manpower at home, freeing up locals to fight (Mirilovic 2010). In the late 19th century, France encouraged immigration and the naturalization of young men to fight in its armies. Foreign residents of France at that time—even those who were second or third-generation immigrants—were not required to serve in the military (Brubaker 1992). In 1889, France extended citizenship to those born in France in part to equalize immigrant and native-born French obligations to the military (Brubaker 1992, 106).

However, the need for manpower has declined with industrialization and globalization, leading to less support for immigration among elites and increased restrictions. While earlier inventions like the windmill, the heavy plow, horse collar, and the use of plow horses instead of oxen (Epstein 2009, 21, 35, 200), allowed farmers to grow much more food with less labor, which in turn allowed for increased population growth and urbanization (Barnebeck, Jensen, and Skovsgaard 2016, 3), there was still a great need for labor in most states prior to industrialization.

The industrial revolution, beginning around 1760, sparked a tremendous and continuing wave of automation and labor-saving. In agriculture, developments in the mid-19th century like better plows, seed drills, and threshers led to dramatic declines in the need for labor (Atack, Passell, and Lee 1994); by the end of the century, the amount of labor needed to produce wheat reduced to less than a tenth of what was needed 70 years before (Atack, Passell, and Lee 1994, 269). The decline in manpower needs in agriculture led to a decrease in support for immigration as fewer new farmers or agricultural laborers were needed, and as former farmers/ agricultural workers and their children moved to the cities to take jobs in the new industrial sector, fewer immigrant workers were needed in the industrial sector (Peters 2017). In turn, elites in these sectors reduced their support for immigration (Peters 2017).

As each country industrialized, it first increased support for immigration among elites. The first mechanizations of production in the 1760s through the 1890s changed production from using craft labor—in which one craftsman (and they were usually men) built the entire good—to factories and assembly lines in which unskilled labor made and assembled different parts of a good. This change necessitated much labor, relying upon the unskilled labor of immigrants, women, and even young children. Beginning in the 1890s, manufacturing switched again to continuous and batch-processing, which needed relatively fewer but more skilled labor (Goldin and Katz 1998). Later industrializers (e.g., those industrializing after 1950) often began the process with the most labor-intensive industries, such as textiles or toys, which too necessitated much labor before moving on to more capital-intensive industries. Like the change in agriculture, this change from more labor-intensive to more capital-intensive industries led to less support for immigration as industry needed fewer workers, and with less support from industry, governments restricted immigration (Peters 2017).

Globalization in the 19th and 20th centuries led to a decrease in support by elites for immigration as well. In both eras, technological changes—from canals to railroads and steamships to modern containerships—significantly reduced trade costs. Communication devices like the telegraph, telephone, and internet have allowed businesses to control production worldwide.

These changes allowed production to move where it was most efficient and profitable for firms. In the U.S., for example, manufacturing of low-wage intensive textiles and clothing moved from the Northeast, where labor costs were high, to the South, where labor costs were low (Wright 1981). These firms used to rely on immigrant labor but now use the cheaper, locally born labor of the South, taking their support for immigration with them (Peters 2017).

Similarly, manufacturing that relies on low-wage labor has moved from the Global North to the rest of the world, where labor costs are lower. In some cases, this movement has been caused by offshoring and foreign direct investment. Once firms moved abroad, they no longer cared about immigration at home, leading to less support for immigration and increased restrictions (Peters 2014; 2015; 2017; 2020). In other cases, new entrants arose in the Global South and traded their goods to the Global North. Global North firms could not compete with these new entrants and closed their doors (see Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2016). These firms were also the firms that had employed much low-wage immigrant labor. When these firms closed, they took their support with them (Peters 2014; 2015; 2017; 2020).

Further, when these firms closed, they laid off their workers, lowering wages in the area. Businesses that remained in operation took advantage of the laid-off local labor instead of lobbying for more immigrant labor (Peters 2014; 2015; 2017; 2020).[[9]](#footnote-9) Together, increased trade, increased ability to move production overseas, and increased automation and use of labor-saving technology have significantly changed the politics of immigration by reducing the need for labor. The decline in business support for immigration also explains the long-run increase in restrictions in the Global North discussed above (Peters 2015; 2017).

## Competition with Domestic Labor

The flip side of the need for manpower is competition with local workers. The same demand for labor that attracts immigrants can potentially lead to higher wages in their absence, depending on whether immigrants are complements or substitutes for local labor.

Scholars disagree about whether immigrants lower wages for low-skilled natives (Borjas, Grogger, and Hanson 2008; Longhi, Nijkamp, and Poot 2005). There is some evidence that immigrants lower wages; for example, Hatton and Williamson argue that wages in the New World in 1910 would have been 2 percent higher in Brazil and 46 percent higher in Argentina if immigration had stopped after 1870 (Hatton and Williamson 1998, 224–25). Borjas has also found evidence using more recent data that higher levels of immigration lead to lower wages for similarly skilled natives (Borjas 2006; Borjas, Freeman, and Katz 1996). Other scholars have found that immigrant labor seems to complement local labor, leading to higher wages for natives (Card 2005; Clemens and Hunt 2019; Ottaviano and Peri 2012). In this case, low-wage immigrant labor can be used to perform the least-skilled tasks, and low-wage local labor can perform tasks demanding more skill. Then, the local labor is used more productively; instead of being "wasted" on the very low-skill tasks. For example, in the 1860s, hiring Chinese laborers to work on the railroads allowed unskilled white laborers to advance their position to straw bosses, supervisors, teamsters, and skilled craftsmen (Saxton 1971, 63).

Regardless of immigration's actual economic effect on wages, local labor has often opposed immigration because it lowers wages. Opposition by labor has at times been channeled through more formal channels through unions and at other times has been relatively unorganized and often more violent. For example, white miners attacked Chinese immigrant miners in California in the 1850s (Boswell 1986) and Australia in the late 1800s (Smith 1981) over the perceived competition. Around the same time, the budding labor unions in California pushed for the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act (Saxton 1971). This anti-immigrant stance was echoed in labor unions later in the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially by the AFL in the U.S. (Briggs 2001; Fine and Tichenor 2009).

## Security

A third issue that often arises with immigration is the issue of security, and especially concerns over so-called "fifth columns." A "fifth column" is a group that undermines the state from within. Immigrants, especially those from enemy countries, are often stereotyped as "fifth columns" due to their imagined or real loyalties to their home states.

The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 in the United States are early examples of how security concerns affect immigration policy. In particular, the Alien Enemy Act of 1798 allowed the President to imprison and deport non-citizens from an enemy nation, and the Alien Friends Act authorized the President to deport non-citizens deemed "dangerous." The fear of immigrant fifth columns is a through-line in U.S. immigration history: examples include the Enemy Alien Acts in World War I and World War II, the Red Scare after World War I and during the start of the Cold War, the internment of Japanese nationals and citizens of Japanese heritage in World War II, and the Patriot Act today.

The U.S. is not the only country that has been concerned about fifth columnists. The German Empire in the late 1800s was greatly concerned that its Polish citizens and Polish immigrants were a likely fifth column. Prussia, the forebearer state of the German Empire, had only gained control over its section of Poland about a century before the unification of Germany and many Polish noblemen and elites harbored dreams of a reunified Poland. At first, German leaders tried forced assimilation of Poles into German society, but when this failed, forced expulsions of Polish citizens and immigrants from the Austrian and Russian-controlled areas of Poland began (L. Lucassen 2005, 59).

Additional examples of concerns of immigrants and their descendants as fifth columnists abound. Australia followed the example of the U.S. and enacted restrictions on immigration from non-allied countries during World War I (Jupp 2002). In 1942, New Zealand similarly placed restrictions on individuals from Axis countries who had naturalized (Beaglehole 2009). States have also expelled populations that they think are not loyal: China, for example, expelled ethnic Russians who lived in border regions with Russia after the Sino-Soviet Split in 1959 (McNamee and Zhang 2019), and Vietnam expelled ethnic Chinese during the Sino-Vietnam War (Stern 1985).

## Political effects

Similar to security concerns, there have been arguments that immigrants might irredeemably alter the politics of a country. Immigrants are not simply workers, but many can vote in local elections and/or eventually become citizens and vote. Immigrants, thus, can change the nature of politics.

This line of argument has a long history in the U.S. Part of this was driven by the fact that non-citizens could vote in many states in the Midwest, West, and South (Rusk 2001, 32). Similar to other rights, new territories and states in the Midwest and West granted suffrage to attract settlers (Varsanyi 2005), and states in the South extended the franchise after the Civil War to attract more white settlers and have more white voters (Rusk 2001).

One reason for opposition has been the idea that those raised in autocracies cannot understand how to participate in a democracy. Benjamin Franklin complained in 1753 that Germans were "not used to liberty, they know not how to make a modest use of it" (Franklin 1753). This idea has been articulated more recently by political theorists like Walzer (2008).

The second version of this argument has focused on how those of different religions, especially Catholics, might affect politics. There has long been a concern that Catholics would be loyal to the Pope rather than the U.S. government. In the colonial and early Republic eras, these concerns led to laws that stayed in place until 1806 that prohibited Catholics from naturalization or serving as elected officials under the New York Constitution unless they renounced their faith (Duncan 2005). These fears resurfaced as late as the 1950s and 1960s with the concern that President Kennedy would be loyal to the Pope. While concerns about Catholics have subsided, we can see echoes of these fears in anti-Muslim sentiment in the U.S. and Europe. In this case, locals fear that immigrants will change and implement laws consistent with their religion instead of the local political traditions (Dancygier 2017).

A third strain, mainly present in the U.S. but also seen in Canada and Australia, has been concerns over the spread of radical economic ideas. In the wake of the French Revolution, the arrival of refugees from France and radical sympathizers from Great Britain and Ireland led to fears that immigrants would spread their radical ideas about the nature of society and ownership, leading to the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts (Cogliano 1999, 662). These concerns resurfaced in the twentieth century around the spread of socialist, communist, and anarchist ideas (Higham 1963). In 1903, the Alien Exclusion Act banned anarchists, and a 1906 law denaturalized anarchists (Kraut 2020, 59). At the height of the 1920s Red Scare, approximately 3,000 immigrants were held as radicals at Ellis Island, and 556 were deported (Kraut 2020, 74). Concerns about the spread of leftist ideas also helped motivate the 1921 and 1924 Quota Acts (Kraut 2012; 2020). Concerns about anarchists were not just an American phenomenon; Australia passed a law banning anarchists in 1901, and Canada followed suit in 1926 (Mills 1930, 33–35, 83–86).

These concerns have even affected the reception of refugees. During debates over the admission of Jewish displaced persons after World War II, many U.S. politicians claimed that Jews were likely communist sympathizers. For example, Congressman Gossett (D, TX) said in 1947 that "at least a good many of those [displaced persons] were more or less induced to come into our camps with the idea of being troublemakers, … They were professional revolutionaries" (Nasaw 2021, 309). In the 1970 and early 1980s, Vietnamese refugees were often portrayed as communist enemies, even though most were fleeing their government's policies (Wooten 1975). The Thai government even described Vietnamese refugees as communist sympathizers and a potential "vanguard" for a Communist invasion (Flood 1977, 39).

## Fiscal effects

Another factor that has long affected opinions on immigration and immigration policy is concerns over the fiscal effects of immigrants. Although most immigrants move to places with economic opportunity (Zavodny 1997), there is fear that they may use the social welfare system more than locals or more than they provide in taxes (Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007).

While the rise of the large social welfare state is relatively recent, these fears go back, at least in Europe, to the Early Modern Period and the Reformation. Before the Reformation, social welfare services were the purview of the Catholic Church, and this remained the case in Catholic countries (Kahl 2005). Newly Protestant countries, however, moved the provision of these services to the state. Reform Protestant Church and Calvinist states adopted a low level of government-provided welfare due to their belief that poverty is a sign of sin. In contrast, Lutheran states created the most generous social welfare states, as they believed that poverty was simply bad luck (Kahl 2005). As early as the 1530s, Lutheran municipalities in Germany provided basic, government-supported social insurance (Brubaker 1992).

The rise of social insurance and the welfare state meant that poor migrants were more costly to society. As these groups, almost by definition, had fewer social ties in the dominant society, they had less recourse if they lost a job or could no longer work. Because an immigrant, without naturalizing, was not necessarily eligible for the full welfare benefits, there was an incentive to restrict citizenship and membership in the nation. A series of Prussian laws governing freedom of movement and internal migration was intended to "permit the state to exclude unwanted—that is, poor—foreigners" (Brubaker 1992, 71). The concern over poor immigrants later affected the citizenship law in 1913. While Social Democrats offered a variety of paths to naturalization based on birth and residency, their proposals were soundly rejected in part based on the desire to maintain the ability to expel migrants "deemed 'burdensome'" (Brubaker 1992, 121).

Even with more limited relief for the poor, the American colonies, the later U.S. states, and eventually the U.S. Federal Government limited immigration to the U.S. based on concerns over the fiscal effects of immigrants. During the colonial period, colonies enacted laws to prevent the movement of the poor into their territories and then later codified this into state laws and federal laws (Neuman 1993). The laws against becoming a public charge remain in force today. European and British Commonwealth states, including Australia and Canada, have had similar provisions (Kelley and Trebilcock 1998; Lynch and Simon 2003).

## The other

Finally, the last major determinant of immigration policy has been the fear of the other, or what we might call nativism. Nativism is the dislike of immigrants for their very foreignness that their outsider status ensures that they can never fully assimilate into the society. Of course, this fear of the other overlaps with the labor market, security, political, and fiscal concerns but is a more nebulous concern.

Nativism, or the fear of the other, has been a constant throughout history. Early American colonists were wary of immigrants from outside of England–Benjamin Franklin famously called Germans "swarthy" and implied that they could not assimilate in the 1750s (Franklin 1753). The U.S. saw the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment against the Irish and Germans in the 1840s (leading to the rise of the virulently anti-immigrant party, the Know-Nothings), Chinese and other Asians in the mid-1800s, Southern and Eastern Europeans in the late 19th and early 20th century, Japanese in the early 20th century, Mexicans beginning in the 1920s, and currently Latinos/as, Muslims, and, with the COVID-19 pandemic, Asians. The British Dominions (Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand) had similar waves of anti-immigrant sentiment (Jupp 2002; Kelley and Trebilcock 1998; Peberdy 2009; Tagupa 1994; Templeton 2008).

Nativist concerns helped lead to the rise of racist immigration legislation in the early 20th century in most of the New World. The U.S., followed by Brazil (La Cava 1999), enacted national origin quotas in 1921 and 1924, favoring people from Northern and Western Europe and prohibiting most others. In Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, there were "White-[country]" policies beginning in the early 20th century, banning the migration of Asians and limiting European migration to those deemed acceptable (Jupp 2002; Kelley and Trebilcock 1998; Tagupa 1994; Templeton 2008). Similar laws were passed in South Africa, already on its road to Apartheid (Peberdy 2009). Germany also prohibited immigration based on ethnicity (e.g., Berger 1997; Brubaker 1992; Confino 1997; Greenfeld 1992; Vick 2002).

After World War II, we see the continuation of concerns over race and ethnicity affecting immigration policy. While the U.S., Australia, Canada, and New Zealand got rid of their explicitly racist policies in the 1960s and 1970s, they replaced them with race-neutral policies that were meant to have the same effect (Jupp 2002; Kelley and Trebilcock 1998; Tichenor 2016; Winkelmann 2000). At the same time, the U.K. limited migration from its former colonies to white, or at best, mixed-race individuals by creating patriality—the ability of only a white grandfather (but not grandmother) born in the U.K. to pass down citizenship (Booth 1992). In the rest of Europe, increased concerns over the immigration of former colonial subjects and people of color fleeing civil strife helped lead to increasingly restrictive immigration laws (Hammar 1985). Similarly, Japan limited the migration from its former colonies, South Korea and Taiwan, even going so far as to make it extremely difficult for children of immigrants to gain citizenship (Chung 2010). This concern over the other continues to be salient today.

# Conclusion

For most of human history, polities did not have immigration policies, largely because people couldn't move very far and polities' control over their borders was relatively weak. Of course, new groups moved into territories controlled by other polities. Yet these movements were often either the movement of conquering armies or the flight of those fleeing the conquering armies.

Large-scale immigration—the movement of individuals of their own volition—only started in the Early Modern Period and took off during the Long Nineteenth Century due to changes in transportation technology that made it faster and safer to travel long distances (J. Lucassen and Lucassen 2009). With the rise of mass migration came the rise of political fights over immigration. On the one side have been the winners of more open immigration: the (mostly) elites who want to increase the manpower of the state, including monarchs who gain more people and production to tax and soldiers to fight; agricultural barons and captains of industry who gain lower labor costs; and, in something of a Baptist-Bootlegger coalition, the migrants themselves, who gain higher wages than at home, and the humanitarian groups who favor immigration for normative reasons (Freeman 1995). On the other side are the real or imagined losers: local labor, who fear job or wage loss; taxpayers, who fear increased fiscal demands; and nativists, who fear a change in politics, their political power, or culture

The 19th century was a brief period in which many states welcomed immigrants on a large scale. Given the limited franchise in most states, it is not surprising that the elites won. Policymakers pushed aside the concern of laborers who feared competition and those who disliked immigrants because of their very foreignness to bring in labor to build their countries' new industries and agriculture.

This period did not last long. With the rising power of labor (Eichengreen 1996) came the social welfare state and concerns about immigrants' effects on the labor market (Timmer and Williamson 1998), and the fiscal system became more prominent (Kalm and Lindvall 2019). With productivity, open trade, and the increased ability to offshore production, business support for immigration waned (Peters 2014; 2015; 2017). This opened space for nativist concerns to gain more traction. Finally, security concerns have ebbed and flowed as states entered into conflicts. These forces have combined to make a much more restrictive immigration system than we saw 150 years ago.

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1. Alberdi (1852). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Frisch (1974, 219). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Watkins and Phillip (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. European city-states often did not restrict entry but restricted citizenship (Van Zanden and Prak 2006). Ancient Athens was somewhat similar too (D. Fitzgerald 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. By the time slavery ended, it had decimated the population of Africa. This, in combination with increased activity in commodities production in Africa, led few Africans to migrate voluntarily outside of Africa. There was much migration within Africa though (Schuler 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the case of the Palantines, many were transported to Ireland or the North American colonies (Dickinson 1967). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Nasaw (2021) for a detailed account of these institutions and the negotiations. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Japan and China during their periods of closure were outliers as they enforced their borders to a much greater extent. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. They may still have lobbied but it was likely to be on another issue (Peters 2014; 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)