Growing restrictiveness or changing selection? The nature and evolution of migration policies

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European Research Council (ERC)
Starting Grant
2010-2014
EC’s Seventh Framework Programme Support for Frontier Research
www.migrationdeterminants.eu
Research questions

• Academic debate on the effectiveness of migration policies:
   ➔ Assumption: migration policies have become more restrictive

• Research questions:
   ➔ Have migration policies become more restrictive?
   ➔ How have selection mechanisms shifted?
Methodology

• Migration policies
  = rules (i.e., laws, regulations and measures) that national states enact with the objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of migration flows.

• Policy restrictiveness
  = increase/decrease of the rights granted to a certain migrant group compared to the status quo
  ➔ Policy measure introducing restrictive change coded +1
  ➔ Policy measure introducing less restrictive change coded -1
• 6,500 policy changes recorded
• 45 countries, 1945-2012
  → Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, German Democratic Republic, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Yugoslavia.
• Emigration policies included
• Disaggregation of policy reforms into sub-measures
• Specification of the targeted migrant group
I. Growing restrictiveness?

Average yearly change in migration policy restrictiveness, 1900-2014

--- Average level of restrictiveness change
--- 5 year moving average

More restrictive

Less restrictive
I. Growing restrictiveness?

Average change in migration policy restrictiveness by policy area, 1945-2014

- More restrictive
- Less restrictive
II. Changing selection?

• Sophistication of policies
  ➔ Decreasing number of generic migration policies targeting all migrants
  ➔ Creation of new migrant categories by policy makers
II. Changing selection?

Average change in migration policy restrictiveness according to migration categories (1), 1940-2014

- More restrictive
- Less restrictive

Graph showing the change in migration policy restrictiveness from 1940 to 2014 for different categories of migrants.
II. Changing selection?

Average change in migration policy restrictiveness according to migration categories (2), 1940-2014

![Graph showing changes in migration policy restrictiveness from 1940 to 2014 for different categories: more restrictive and less restrictive.](image)
Conclusion

• Limited methodological value of ‘overall restrictiveness’
• Migration policies are about selection of migrants, not volumes
• Discursive gap: the ‘symbolic’ dimension of migration policies
• Limitation of results: Implementation gap

→ Migration policies have been dominated by less restrictive changes since 1945
Thank you for your attention!