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A Comparison of Immigration Policies[1]

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EXISTING IMMIGRATION POLICY DATASETS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

Hollifield and Wong (2013, 3) have argued that migration research in recent decades has "entrenched itself in the mainstream of political science." Developments in the field of immigration policy research are a very good example of this trend. After a long period in which studies that analysed single cases or a small number of countries predominated, a growing number of researchers have started to compare a relatively large range of cases. This has led to a quantification of the data under study and policy index building. By quantifying this data, migration scholars have followed a trend that has already taken place in other domains of political science such as democracy (Coppedge et al. 2011), state-church relationship (Traunmüller 2012), citizenship (Bauböck and Helbling 2011), rule of law regulations (Skaaning 2010), and electoral systems (Teorell and Lindstedt 2010).

This article aims to give a short overview of recently compiled immigration policy indices and how the Immigration Policies in Comparison (IMPIC) dataset tries to overcome some of their limitations. Table 1 lists most of the existing databases and indices that measure immigration policies (Bjerre et al. 2015).[2] It appears that with the exception of Timmer and Williams (1998), scholars only started to build policy indices just over a decade ago. Although a large number of important studies have already been published, several challenges are yet to be overcome in the field of immigration policy index building.

As far as temporal and spatial coverage is concerned, it becomes apparent that there is a trade-off between the span of time and the number of countries that are covered (Bjerre et al. 2015). For half of the indices, data were collected for one to three years only whereas the other half of indices allow for the analysis of longer periods. Several databases cover twelve years or more, allowing the investigation of developments across time (Givens and Luedtke 2005; Mayda and Patel 2004; Mayda 2004; Ortega and Peri 2009; Thielemann 2003; Timmer and Williams 1998). Peters (2014) has built an index that covers the immigration policies of 18 wealthy countries across four centuries. Three of the immigration policy indices cover a relatively large set of cases (Klugman and Pereira 2009; Ruhs 2011). The rest include a small to medium number of countries, mostly Western European and traditional settler countries.

A closer look at the existing immigration policy indices also reveals that the concept of "immigration policy" is often not defined or clearly specified with the meaning of the term often assumed as commonly understood (Bjerre et al. 2015). By assessing the indicators used in the respective indices it turns out that they cover very different aspects of immigration. It thus appears that the various researchers in this field have different understandings of what immigration policies consist of. "Immigration policy" is a more complex social phenomenon than one might think. It needs to be defined, not only to clarify what we are talking about, but also to enable assessments of how the respective indices are measured and aggregated.

Table 1

Overview of Immigration Policy Indices and Databases

Datasets	Years	Number of Cases and Regions
Cerna (2008)	2007	20 West European and settler countries, Japan
Givens/Luedtke (2005)	1990-2002	3 West European countries
Hatton (2004)	1981-1999	EU 15 (except Luxembourg)
Klugman/Pereira (2009)	2009	28 developed and developing countries
Lowell (2005)	2001	12 West European countries, South Africa, Japan
Mayda (2004)	1980-1995	14 OECD countries, European Union
Ortega/Peri (2009)	1980-2005	14 OECD countries
Oxford Analytica (2008)	2005-2007	13 West European and settler countries, India, Japan, Singapore, United Arab Emirates
Pham/Van (2013)	2005-2009	50 US states
Peters (2014)	18th-21th century	19 wealthy countries
Ruhs (2011)	2009	46 high- and middle income countries
Thielemann (2003)	1985-1999	20 OECD countries
Timmer/Williams (1998)	1860-1930	Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, United States, United Kingdom

Notes: The "settler countries" include Australia, Canada, the US and New Zealand.
Source: Bjerre et al. (2015, 564-565).

Accordingly, we observe that the lack of thorough and transparent methodological discussion and documentation results in indices that are constructed without the benefit of theoretically grounded rules. Of course, there are no general rules for index building in the social sciences, and there is no need for such rules: researchers, including migration policy scholars, should build their indices tailored to the research questions they are interested in answering. However, in this process it is critical that approaches to conceptualization, measurement, and aggregation are made explicit. While different methodological choices are often possible, it is crucial to discuss these choices in a transparent way so that other researchers understand how an index has been constructed. Transparency fosters critical analysis, facilitates replication, and thus builds general knowledge.

Another problem concerns the fact that most of these indices only cover specific aspects of immigration policies like labour migration (Cerna 2008; Lowell 2005; Ruhs 2011) or asylum (Hatton 2004; Thielemann 2003). The aspects covered by Klugman and Pereira (2009) and Givens and Luedtke (2005) have the broadest empirical scope and cover almost every aspect of immigration policies. Many of the limitations can be explained by the fact that researchers in this field have constructed their indices mostly for specific research questions and projects. Accordingly, they measure certain detailed aspects of immigration and have only been used for individual papers. For this reason the datasets are not accessible to other researchers.

There have been few efforts to build more comprehensive datasets with a systematic and transparent methodology to date. A good example is the Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) project, which involved the set-up of a database that covers policy changes in 45 countries for the time period 1946-2013 (De Haas et al. 2014). A major limitation of this dataset, however, is that it focusses on measuring policy changes. This precludes an analysis of changes at the absolute policy levels and, therefore, makes a comparison of the policy levels of different countries or groups of countries impossible. The International Migration Policy and Law Analysis (IMPALA), as well as Temporary versus Permanent Migration (TEMPER) are two other projects that have started to build up larger immigration policy databases (Beine et al. 2016; Consterdine and Hampshire 2016).

IMMIGRATION POLICIES IN COMPARISON (IMPIC) DATASET

The aim of the Immigration Policies in Comparison (IMPIC) project was to build a database that is conceptualized in a more comprehensive way than existing databases. This dataset allows us to investigate immigration policies systematically across time, countries and policy fields. The database covers regulations in 33 OECD countries for the time period 1980-2010 and four sub-fields: labour migration, family reunification, asylum and refugees and co-ethnics (Helbling et al. 2017).

In this project, immigration policies are defined as a government's statements of what it intends to do or not to do (including laws, policies, decisions or orders) with regard to the selection, admission, settlement and deportation of foreign citizens residing in its country. Immigration policies are therefore clearly distinguished from integration policies, which deal with migrants that have already crossed national borders and taken up residence. Moreover, the data only covers legal regulations and thereby excludes information on implementation, which might differ considerably from policy outputs.

For the IMPIC project, data was collected for different policy dimensions and policy fields (see Table 2). This allows researchers to disaggregate migration policies and to investigate specific policy aspects. It is thus possible to differentiate between four policy fields that reflect the four main reasons why states accept immigrants: labour migration (economic reasons), family reunification (social reasons), asylum/refugees (humanitarian reasons) and co-ethnics (cultural reasons). The last policy field concerns policies that facilitate access for groups of people with special historical or cultural ties to their new home country. In addition to migrant admission policies, the dataset also looks at regulations establishing migration control mechanisms that monitor whether policies are adhered to. The control mechanisms group includes various aspects relating to irregular migration such as requirements for airlines to control visa or sanctions on employing irregular migrants.

For each policy field, we acknowledge that states regulate and control immigration not only at their borders, but also within their territories. Accordingly, we firstly take into account how difficult it is to cross national borders (external), and secondly how secure the status of immigrants already is in the country, and what rights are associated with a specific status (internal).

As a last differentiation, the dataset distinguishes between several sub-dimensions: following the Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) (MPG 2006), the dataset distinguishes between eligibility requirements and conditions that need to be fulfilled within external regulations. Eligibility and conditions belong to the external dimension because they regulate who is given access in the first place. More specifically, eligibility concerns the question of which types of applicants may be granted access (which nationalities, which kinds of refugees, which family members etc.). Conditions refer to the specific requirements that need to be fulfilled by these groups (economic and cultural requirements, formal application procedures etc.). The internal dimension of regulations is composed of two sub-dimensions,

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[1] This article provides a summary of earlier work published in Helbling et al. (2017), Helbling (2016) and Bjerre et al. (2015).

[2] By "index" we understand a measurement that operationalizes a social phenomenon in a quantitative way and represents an aggregate of data.

Table 2

Conceptualization of the IMPIC Dataset

Policy dimensions			Policy fields			
Modus operandi	Locus operandi	Sub-dimension	Labor migration	Asylum/ refugees	Family reunification	Co-ethnics
Regulation	External	Eligibility				
		Conditions				
	Internal	Security of status				
		Rights associated				
Control	External					
	Internal					

Source: Helbling et al. (2017, 84).

namely security of status and the rights associated with a respective status. While the former concerns the duration of residence and the possibility to renew permits, the latter includes aspects that go beyond the rights of a special status; for example, vocational training rights for labour migrants or labour rights for refugees.

Following the lead of established projects in the citizenship literature, namely the EUDO citizenship project (Vink and Bauböck 2013) and the Indices of Citizenship Rights for Immigrants (ICRI) (Koopmans et al. 2012), data on over 70 aspects of migration policy was collected and coded on the basis of concrete legal regulations with the help of national migration experts (mostly legal scholars) (Bjerre et al. 2016). We did not code whether policies became more or less restrictive, but coded each item individually for each year. Various quantitative analyses were conducted to test the internal and external validity of the IMPIC data (Schmid and Helbling 2016). These tests confirmed the theoretical dimensions of the dataset and showed that the data correlates with other datasets that measure immigration policies. Qualitative validity tests for selected countries showed that the development of migration policies can largely be confirmed by case studies or overview reports (Abou-Chadi and Helbling 2017).

The IMPIC database allows researchers to describe policy variation across time and space, and to study the causes and effects of migration policies in greater detail. Which are the most restrictive and most liberal countries? Have policies become more liberal or restrictive over time? Are there groups of countries whose policies present similar patterns? What factors lead to more restrictive and, conversely, more liberal policies? Do restrictive policies actually lead to lower immigration rates? How great is the impact of immigration policies on immigration rates compared to other factors? It will now be easier to find answers to these and many other questions.

Our first analyses have shown that the conditions and criteria for entering and staying in a country have become more liberal for labour migrants, asylum seekers and people joining their families over the last decades (Helbling and Kalkum 2017). At the same time, however, we observe that more restrictive control mechanisms have been put in place to help monitor whether migration policies are adhered to and to prevent irregular migrants from entering a country. We also find that there is a general convergence trend in the migration policy field that varies, however, in intensity across policy fields. There are only small differences between EU and non-EU OECD countries, and thus we may only partially observe any Europeanisation effects.

We also find that immigration policies have an important effect on immigration rates (Helbling and Leblang 2018). The effect, however, also depends on other factors that attract or deter immigrants. We show that the deterrence effect of restrictive immigration policies increases when unemployment rates are high. We argue that under such circumstances states start to care more about effectively protecting their national economy. Moreover, we show that policies are more effective for migrant groups from former colonies or when the stock of this group is already high in a destination country. We argue that, under such circumstances, information on border regulations is more easily disseminated, which in turn makes such rules more effective.

For more information, visit the project webpage: www.impic-project.eu.

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