THE MAKING AND REMAKING OF IMMIGRATION POLICY IN CANADA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Immigration has been a defining element of Canada's nation-building project, shaping its demographic growth, economic development, and multicultural identity. This paper examines the historical evolution of Canadian immigration policy from Confederation to the early 2000s, guided by the central research question: How have changes in Canadian immigration policy over time shaped, and been shaped by, Canada's economic, political, and social development? Using a historical–comparative methodology, the study analyzes three major policy periods:1867–1939, 1945–1976, and 1976–2000, through key analytical variables including selection criteria, ideological discourse, policy instruments, state–employer influence, and the treatment of racialized groups. The analysis is grounded in a wide body of academic literature, parliamentary debates, legislative texts, and demographic data. The findings show a long-term shift from racially exclusionary and economically opportunistic policies toward a merit-based human capital model that institutionalized multiculturalism and expanded humanitarian commitments. However, despite Canada's global reputation as a successful immigration country, structural gaps persist in labour market integration, foreign credential recognition, and socioeconomic mobility. Canada's immigration system remains dynamic and adaptive, yet faces mounting pressures linked to absorptive capacity, labour market mismatches, and political polarization.

Key words: *Canada; immigration policy; human capital model; integration; national identity.*

HARTIMI DHE RISHIKIMI I POLITIKAVE TË EMIGRACIONIT NË KANADA: NJË ANALIZË HISTORIKE

Abstrakt

Emigracioni ka qenë një komponent thelbësor i procesit të shtetformimit në Kanada, duke ndikuar në rritjen demografike, zhvillimin ekonomik dhe ndërtimin e identitetit multikulturor të vendit. Ky studim trajton zhvillimin historik të politikave të emigracionit nga Konfederata deri në fillim të viteve 2000, duke u udhëhequr nga pyetja kërkimore: Si kanë ndikuar ndryshimet në politikat kanadeze të emigracionit në zhvillimin ekonomik, politik dhe

shoqëror të vendit, dhe si janë formësuar vetë nga këto zhvillime? Duke përdorur një metodologji historiko-krahasuese, studimi shqyrton tre periudha kyçe (1867–1939, 1945–1976 dhe 1976–2000), përmes variablave analitikë si kriteret e përzgjedhjes, diskursi ideologjik, instrumentet politike, marrëdhënia shtet-punëdhënës dhe trajtimi i grupeve të racializuara. Analiza mbështetet në literaturë akademike, dokumente ligjore, debate parlamentare dhe të dhëna demografike. Gjetjet tregojnë një zhvendosje të vazhdueshme nga politikat përjashtuese dhe të orientuara nga përfitimet afatshkurtra ekonomike drejt një sistemi të bazuar në kapitalin njerëzor, që forcoi multikulturalizmin dhe zgjerimin e angazhimeve humanitare. Megjithatë, pavarësisht reputacionit ndërkombëtar të Kanadasë si vend pritës i suksesshëm, sfida të rëndësishme mbeten në integrimin në tregun e punës, njohjen e kualifikimeve të huaja dhe mobilitetin socio-ekonomik të emigrantëve. Sistemi kanadez i emigracionit mbetet dinamik dhe i aftë të përshtatet, por sot përballet me presione në rritje që lidhen me kapacitetin përthithës të vendit, mospërputhjet në tregun e punës dhe polarizimin politik.

***Fjalët kyçe**: Kanada; politika e emigracionit; modeli i kapitalit njerëzor; integrimi; identiteti kombëtar*

1. Introduction

Historically and today, Canada is one of the major destinations for international immigrants. As revealed by the 2021 Census data from Statistics Canada, nearly two out of ten (18.4 percent) Canadian citizens are foreign born. (Statistics Canada, 2021) "*Today, Canada is viewed as 'exceptional' among immigrant-receiving nations, due to large numbers of 'skilled immigrants', its geographic isolation (which helps deter unauthorized immigration) and relatively high public support for immigration*", - states Bloemraad. (Cit. by Bhuyan et al. 2017, p. 49) The positive support for continued high immigration levels by governments, the business community and the public in Canada is driven in part by the belief that economic challenges associated with the retirement of the 'baby boom' generation will be lessened by maintaining immigrant inflows at high levels. Immigration is presumed to bring long-term fiscal benefits by increasing the labour force, boosting economic growth, filling job vacancies, and addressing demographic challenges. Indeed, just as immigrants have contributed to the growth in Canada's population, to its diversity and to its cities, so too have they contributed to its economy, being an important source of labour for some of the industries.

Canada has maintained the image of a welcoming nation for immigrants and is regularly lauded for its multicultural policies, which promote equality and tolerance for cultural diversity. Promoted since the 1960s, the consensual nexus between immigration, citizenship, and multiculturalism has played an important role in making Canada's immigration process more inclusive. The multicultural frame of government discourse helped to create a Canadian national identity that was clearly reflected in Canada's immigration agenda. Liberal discourse is based on an open and "borderless" post-national identity, where multiculturalism is integral to the nation. (Fiřtová, 2021) Multiculturalism has become a cornerstone of Canada's national discourse and immigration policy, shaping both how the country defines itself and how it manages diversity. Officially adopted as state policy in 1971 and later enshrined in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988, multiculturalism promotes the recognition and accommodation of cultural diversity as a central feature of Canadian identity. In this framework, immigrants are not required to assimilate into a dominant culture but are instead encouraged to maintain their heritage while participating fully in public life.

Over time, Canadian immigration policy has been shaped by a combination of powerful economic interests, shifting domestic values, and international influences. This policy is guided by a set of core principles that distinguish it from many other countries. These include the sovereign right to select immigrants, economic utility, family reunification, refugee protection, and a strong commitment to multiculturalism and integration. Canada employs a points-based system that evaluates applicants on human capital criteria such as education, work experience, age, and language proficiency. Another key principle is absorptive capacity, meaning immigration levels are set in accordance with Canada's ability to integrate newcomers economically and socially. Canada's policies are designed to maintain public support through managed immigration flows, inclusive rhetoric, and visible integration support systems.

The literature on Canadian immigration is extensive, spanning legal, political, philosophical, sociological, and economic perspectives. It explores themes such as human rights, the fiscal costs and benefits of immigration, integration challenges, labour market

transitions, policy effectiveness, and public discourse. This study focuses primarily on the historical evolution of policy and institutional responses. Accordingly, the literature review draws on foundational works by Kelley and Trebilcock (2010), Green and Green (1999), and Bloemraad (2006), among others. These scholars emphasize that Canadian immigration policy has fluctuated between economic utilitarianism and humanitarianism, shaped by both domestic interest groups and international pressures. Vineberg (2011) traces the institutionalization of settlement services, while Bhuyan et al. (2017) critique the neoliberal principles underpinning contemporary immigration governance. Additionally, Vineberg (2012), Reitz (2007), and Ferrer et al. (2014) examine the effectiveness, limitations, and societal impact of these policies.

This study employs a historical–comparative methodology that systematically examines the evolution of Canadian immigration policy across three key historical periods: (1) Confederation to the Second World War (1867–1939), (2) Post–Second World War reconstruction to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1976 (1945–1976), (3) The transition from the 1976 Act to the emergence of a human capital–driven system in the contemporary era. The comparative analysis focuses on a set of analytical variables that remain central to Canada's immigration governance: selection criteria and admission principles; the dominant ideological discourse (e.g., multiculturalism, neoliberalism, integrationism); policy instruments and institutional mechanisms; the relative influence of the state versus employers in shaping immigrant selection; and the treatment, inclusion, or exclusion of racialized and non-preferred groups. The study evaluates a broad range of primary and secondary sources, including historical legislative texts, parliamentary debates, federal immigration regulations, census and demographic statistics, policy reports, and scholarly literature from leading migration researchers. This approach enables a structured comparison of how political, economic, and social forces shaped immigration policy over time and how these shifts have, in turn, influenced the integration pathways and lived experiences of newcomers.

This study holds significant practical value for the Albanian context because Canada, although home to a relatively small Albanian community, has become an increasingly important destination for

Albanian emigrants over the past three decades, following the collapse of communism in Albania and the Kosovo war. Canada admitted 7,251 Albanian-speaking refugees under the 1999 humanitarian program "Operation Parasol," of whom approximately 4,800 remained permanently (Maffre, 2024). Since then, the number of Albanians in Canada has grown steadily, with the 2021 Census reporting 41,625 Albanian speakers (Statistics Canada, 2021), primarily in Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta, with the real figure likely higher when temporary residents are included. Canada is the fifth most preferred emigration destination for Albanians (INSTAT, 2020), and its share of the global Albanian emigrant population has doubled since the mid-1990s. Notably, the Albanian community in Canada is among the most highly educated in the diaspora, with 70.4 percent holding university degrees (European Training Foundation, 2021), making Canada a key case in discussions of Albanian brain drain. Understanding the historical and contemporary development of Canadian immigration policy is therefore essential for interpreting the institutional frameworks that shape the migration pathways, integration experiences, and long-term socioeconomic prospects of Albanians in Canada, which will be the scope of another broader research project.

2. Immigration and Policy Reform in Canada from Confederation to the Second World War (1867–1939)

As a prototypical 'nation of immigrants', Canada has historically relied on immigrants to fuel economic and population growth, while adjusting immigration controls to preserve the 'Whiteness' of the nation. (Bhuyan et al., 2017) From the earliest stages of Confederation (1867), immigration has been viewed as essential to state-building efforts; expanding territorial sovereignty, cultivating national unity across a vast geography, and populating the prairies through settler migration. For Canada, according to Kelley and Trebilcock, "*to survive as an independent, prosperous nation, economic growth was essential and, in turn, was dependent upon a larger population and expanding market. Since immigrants were needed to promote economic expansion both by their labour and by their consumption, for the first three decades following Confederation there were few obstacles in the way of their admission to Canada*".

(Kelley and Trebilcock, 1998, p. 13) However, the authors argue that although Canada is often described as a "*nation of immigrants*," the majority of its population at Confederation was Canadian-born.

Despite open doors policies, before the economic boom that marked the beginning of Canada's industrialization and urbanization in 1896, the country's six provinces were considered marginal by both the British Empire and global standards, and generally unappealing to migrants looking to build a new life. As a result, Canada was largely bypassed during the massive and historically unmatched waves of migration that defined the nineteenth century, as Verbeeten states "*the country was too cold, too remote, and too backward*". (Verbeeten, 2007, p. 2) Furthermore pre-1914 Canadian immigration policy, maintained a clear preference for Britons or white Americans. Although the statistics on emigration from England, Wales, and Scotland to Canada during the Victorian era seem quite substantial, many of those who came to Canada in this period found their way to the United States. Between 1861 and 1901, the population of Canada actually expanded at a rate below that of natural increase. (Boyd and Vickers, 2000)

Immigration began to play a significant role in Canada's population growth only around the turn of the 20th century. The patterns of migration shifted notably with the onset of an economic boom that carried the Dominion into the twentieth century. As the Canadian economy expanded rapidly, the promise of employment opportunities attracted large numbers of immigrants. Major projects like the construction of the transcontinental railway, the settlement of the prairies, and the growth of industrial production created a heightened demand for labour. The Canadian government's vigorous recruitment campaigns further encouraged immigration and increased the number of arrivals.

These influxes quickly swelled Canada's population. While most early immigrants settled in Ontario, many who arrived later moved further west. Labour recruitment strategies that focused primarily on men led to significant gender imbalances among early settlers in Canada during the first two decades of the 20th century, with men far outnumbering women. Often, men migrated first, either because the move was seen as temporary, making it unnecessary to bring their families, or because they aimed to establish themselves

financially before being joined by their relatives. However, women also migrated for economic reasons during this period. There was a high demand for female domestic workers, making domestic service the most common occupation among adult women immigrants. In contrast, male immigrants were more often unskilled or semi-skilled labourers working in factories, construction, or agriculture, as noted by Boyd and Vickers in their study. (Boyd and Vickers, 2000)

Immigration was central to Canada's economic expansion but also stirred growing public controversy. Employers supported aggressive immigration policies to secure a steady labour force, while trade unions demanded restrictions to protect local jobs. Nationalists called for more selective admissions to preserve Canadian identity. Law enforcement blamed newcomers for rising crime, churches and social service providers were overwhelmed by the needs of urban ghettos, and medical professionals and sociologists, influenced by eugenics theory, warned of admitting those deemed genetically "inferior". (Kelley and Trebilcock, 1998) These tensions reflected a clash between economic goals and social concerns about integration and public welfare.

During this period of intense debate, both Liberal and Conservative governments prioritized economic growth over social or cultural considerations. Immigration policy was designed primarily to serve economic interests, particularly the need for a large, flexible workforce. However, to address the growing concerns of those advocating for a more restrictive approach, the government introduced amendments to the Immigration Act in 1906 and 1910. These changes aimed to allow more selective admissions by identifying and excluding "undesirable" immigrants. Additionally, new powers were granted to the Cabinet, enabling it to exclude any class of immigrants if such action was deemed to be in the national interest.

When immigration legislation was first introduced, it primarily aimed to restrict entry based on poverty, mental incompetence, or non-European origins. For instance, despite the significant role Chinese immigrant workers played in building the transcontinental railroad, the 1885 legislation required all individuals of Chinese origin to pay a head tax upon entering Canada. The Immigration Act of 1906 barred the entry of persons categorized as

"feeble minded," suffering from "loathsome or contagious diseases," "paupers," those "likely to become public charges," criminals, and individuals with "undesirable morality". (Boyd and Vickers, 2000) An amendment in 1908 further restricted immigration by prohibiting the landing of individuals who had not come directly from their country of origin, effectively excluding immigrants from India. During the same period, the Canadian government also established a series of agreements with Japan that limited Japanese immigration.

According to Verbeeten, "*The Laurier* period was a belle époque for Canada: the country had gained its "pull" at last, and, for those who felt the "push" from home to destinations of greater promise, Canada had become a beacon*". (Verbeeten, 2007, p. 4) In order to regulate both the volume and composition of immigration, Parliament enacted legislation that affirmed the sovereign state's authority to define criteria for admission and to deport individuals retrospectively, without the guarantee of due process, if deemed unfit for citizenship. These institutions aimed to regulate immigration flows to align with prevailing ideals of the ideal future citizen; White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant. However, the demands of economic development often undermined the efforts of nationalist and protectionist forces within the government and civil society to completely restrict the entry of immigrants from "non-traditional" regions. As a result, growing numbers of immigrants were recruited from non-Western European countries to fill labour shortages on farms and in factories.

The cosmopolitan spirit of the Laurier era was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I in 1914, though it experienced a partial revival in the 1920s. In the years immediately following the war, Canada maintained a preference for British and American immigrants, especially those with agricultural backgrounds, and implemented restrictive measures. However, these restrictions were gradually loosened when the anticipated numbers of British and American immigrants did not materialize, and business interests pushed for the recruitment of labourers from Continental Europe to satisfy economic demands. The aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution spurred increased migration from countries like Germany, Russia,

* Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the seventh Prime Minister of Canada, serving from 1896 to 1911

Ukraine, Poland, and Hungary. New regulations introduced in 1919 expanded the grounds for deportation and barred entry to enemy aliens, including those who had been designated as such during the war.

Immigration to Canada declined sharply during the Great Depression of the 1930s, as the country closed its borders to many prospective immigrants. With the onset of the Second World War, new immigration regulations were introduced, prohibiting the entry or landing of nationals from countries with which Canada was at war. Wartime security measures also led to the forced relocation of Japanese-Canadians residing within a 100-mile radius of the British Columbia coastline, many of whom were sent to internment camps under the pretext that they posed a potential threat of collaboration in the event of a Japanese invasion. (Boyd and Vickers, 1998)

3. Post–Second World War Reconstruction and Policy Transformation to the Immigration Act of 1976 (1945–1976)

With the return of peace, both Canada's economy and immigration experienced significant growth. The devastation of the European economy, coupled with an unprecedented economic boom in Canada, created favourable conditions for high immigration levels. In the initial years following the war, British immigrants continued to dominate numerically, due in part to post-war disarray in their country. However, over time, Continental Europeans came to predominate, with substantial numbers arriving from Poland, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands, countries that required years to recover from the widespread destruction of the Second World War.

As in earlier periods, Canada's postwar immigration policies played a pivotal role in shaping the composition and scale of immigration. As formal declarations of who would be admitted and under what conditions, these policies directly influenced the volume of arrivals, the demographic characteristics of immigrants, and their countries of origin. Prime Minister W.L. Mackenzie King continued to uphold the principle of absolute state sovereignty in determining the admission of non-citizens. This is clearly reflected in Prime Minister Mackenzie King's 1947 speech, where he emphasized that immigration was vital for Canada's population growth, national

security, and development, however, immigration should be aligned with the country's annual economic absorptive capacity. King firmly reaffirmed Canada's sovereign authority to admit only those individuals it considers assimilable and desirable as future citizens:

> "Government's long term program is to foster the growth of the population of Canada by the encouragement of immigration. … Canada would certainly need to have a large population if she hoped to hold the country for herself against the ambitions of other countries and to build her strength. … we cannot ignore the danger that lies in a small population attempting to hold so great a heritage as ours. It is of the utmost importance to relate immigration to absorptive capacity. … The figure that represents our absorptive capacity will clearly vary from year to year in response to economic conditions. … Canada is perfectly within her rights in selecting the persons whom we regard as desirable future citizens. It is not a "fundamental right" of any alien to enter Canada. It is a privilege. … there is no fundamental human right which causes us to admit people that we did not think could be assimilated and which would change the composition of our country". (House of Commons,1947, 2644-7)

However, the pressing demand for labour in key primary industries, particularly mining and forestry, led to a relaxation of barriers and a streamlining of the immigration process. Nevertheless, despite the urgency to fill labour shortages, practical limitations such as shortage of both transport and of housing accommodation, restricted the number of immigrants who could be admitted during this period.

Most postwar immigrants settled in urban areas, a pattern that mirrored Canada's broader economic transformation from a predominantly rural, agricultural, and resource-based economy in the early 20th century to one increasingly centered on manufacturing and services. During this period, the overall gender imbalance in the immigrant population began to narrow. (Boyd and Vickers, 1998)

Regulations introduced in the 1950s that expanded and clarified the framework for family-based immigration enabled women to comprise nearly half of all adult immigrants entering Canada.

During the 1950s, sustained labour demand and economic recovery in northwestern Europe led Canada to ease admission restrictions for immigrants from non-preferred regions, particularly Southern Europe. Broader sponsorship rights were extended beyond the traditional source countries. However, as asserted by Green and Green, this resulted in an influx of less-skilled, often illiterate immigrants, primarily from poor rural areas of Portugal, Greece, and southern Italy, who entered Canada through family sponsorship rather than as independent skilled workers. (Green and Green, 1995) Therefore, argue Grubel and Grady in their study, *Immigration and the Canadian Welfare State*, immigrants often face persistent income disparities compared to native-born Canadians, which limits their ability to contribute positively to public finances. Many remain in low-income brackets for extended periods and are disproportionately represented among those living in poverty, placing a strain on public resources. (Grubel and Grady, 2011)

Immigration levels were beginning to fall by 1958, partly because economic conditions were improving in Europe, and partly because, with the Canadian economy slowing, the government introduced administrative policies designed to reduce the rate of immigration. By 1962, however, the economy had recovered and arrivals increased for six successive years.

Canada eliminated explicit discrimination based on race or religion in its immigration policy in the 1960s. On January 18, 1962, new Immigration Regulations were approved, removing barriers related to racial or colour discrimination and allowing individuals to immigrate to Canada based on their education, training, and skills. The new framework emphasized selection criteria focused on professional qualifications rather than ethnic or religious background. This shift was further advanced by the introduction of the Immigration Regulations of 1967, which established a points-based system for evaluating economic immigrants. This system represents "*Canada's, and the world's, first objective points system for the selection of immigrants*." (Vineberg, 2011, p. 211) As Bhuyan et. al. argue, the points system proved effective in recruiting skilled

immigrants from around the world, contributing to dramatic shifts in the demographic profile of the nation. (Bhuyan and et al. 2017) Additionally, Green and Green in their analyze observed that, while the points system influences the types of occupations among independent immigrants, only significant adjustments to the points criteria have led to noticeable changes in the composition of newcomers. This is because the system is designed to serve multiple objectives, limiting its ability to precisely target any single trait in the immigrant population. (Green and Green, 1995) As a result of these policy changes, immigrants who entered Canada from 1967 onward came from a wider range of countries and brought more diverse cultural backgrounds than earlier cohorts. By the 1970s, individuals of Asian origin constituted the largest proportion of new arrivals. In addition to policy reforms, Verbeeten argues that other factors also contributed to this phenomenon:

> … economic boom times and higher standards of living transformed non-communist Europe from an emigrant font to an immigrant hub … developing societies, or those already advanced societies beset by war, economic recession, or political instability, have produced a match between local "push" and Canadian "pull" factors which has engendered human movement. This match is absent in the case of a fully developed society at peace (most members of which feel little "push" or "pull" to Canada), and moot in the case of an undeveloped society (most members of which cannot get the required "points" to move to Canada). (Verbeeten, 2007, p. 6)

During the 1970s when Canada, like other countries, experienced reduced growth, inflation, and persistently high unemployment, the government substantially reduced the level of immigration. In addition to the level cuts, the government introduced new rules in 1974 making skills selection more stringent. Furthermore, in April 1976, a new Immigration Act was decreed. One of its key provisions required the minister to present projected immigration levels to Parliament each fall. The Act also formally recognized humanitarian considerations as a basis for admission, marking a shift toward welcoming a significant number of refugees annually, rather

than limiting such admissions to exceptional global crises. The Act outlined specific policy goals, including the following:

- Supporting the attainment of such demographic goals as may be established by the Government of Canada;
- Facilitating the reunion in Canada of Canadian citizens and permanent residents with their close relatives from abroad;
- Ensuring that standards of admission do not discriminate on grounds of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, or sex;
- Fulfilling Canada's international legal obligations with respect to refugees and upholding its humanitarian tradition with respect to the displaced and the persecuted;
- Fostering the development of a strong and viable economy and the prosperity of all regions in Canada; and
- Maintaining and protecting the health, safety, and good order of Canadian society. (Immigration Act, 1976)

4. The Shift Toward a Human Capital–Based Immigration System: From the 1976 Act to the Early 2000s

Immigration levels in Canada fluctuated from the 1970s to the 1990s, but the overall effect remained a strong contribution to the country's population growth. During the 1990s, policy focus shifted away from addressing specific occupational shortages and moved toward attracting immigrants with higher levels of general human capital to better align with labour market demands. This change was primarily due to the challenges in effectively managing occupation-specific selection processes. As a result, the points-based immigration system was revised in the early 1990s to prioritize factors such as education, leading to a notable rise in the educational qualifications of newcomers throughout the decade. Applicants were assessed based on personal attributes believed to facilitate both short and long-term integration into the Canadian economy. Alongside economic immigrants, the system also placed high importance on family class and refugee class immigrants, reflecting Canada's commitments to family reunification and its humanitarian and treaty responsibilities.

Canada's immigration system underwent significant transformation, in the 2000s, becoming more complex and involving a broader range of programs and stakeholders. Central to these

changes, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2002 aimed to enhance the economic integration of newcomers, address short-term regional labour market demands, particularly in areas affected by resource-driven growth, and encourage the settlement of immigrants beyond the country's largest urban centres, promoting a more balanced regional distribution. (Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2001) With the introduction of the Act, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) fully shifted away from using the Federal Skilled Worker Program to address immediate labour market needs. Instead, it reinforced a "human capital" approach that prioritized broad qualifications, such as education, work experience, and language proficiency, over occupation-specific selection. The rationale was that these attributes, especially education, would enable immigrants to adapt more effectively to both short-term economic fluctuations and long-term structural changes, ultimately leading to stronger economic outcomes.

A series of new immigrant programs, including the Canadian Experience Class, the Provincial Nominee program, Ministerial Instructions, and the Federal Skilled Trades program were developed and implemented in partnership with, or exclusively by, the provinces. Through the Provincial Nominee program provinces started playing a role in immigrant selection, making immigration a shared federal and provincial responsibility. This program aims to locate more immigrants in the regions and provinces outside of the major cities, and to meet the workforce needs of employers in those provinces, often short-term labour market needs. Additionally, The Canadian Experience Class program (CEC) was introduced in 2008, "*as a means to 'fix' Canada's broken immigration system; as necessary for Canada to secure its place as a leader in the world economy*". (Bhuyan and et al. 2017, p. 56) The CEC enables certain skilled temporary workers and international graduates with a Canadian degree and a minimum of one year of Canadian work experience to apply for permanent residency without needing to leave the country. This streamlined approach relies heavily on the contributions of temporary migrants, who are expected to prove their ability to integrate independently, without the traditional public support once available to new arrivals. As a result, employers and post-secondary

institutions have assumed a more active role in the immigrant selection process.

As the focus shifts toward addressing immediate labour market needs and boosting economic immigration, there is a growing demand for timely and reliable labour market data to guide policy decisions, particularly regarding immigrant levels and occupational mixes. Ferrer et. al. debates that existing research offers limited clarity on the long-term economic impact of immigration, while data on local and short-term labour shortages remains insufficient. Furthermore, the authors note that the use of employer-driven selection methods, like arranged employment, has gained prominence but raises concerns about transparency, long-term integration, and equity. (Ferrer, et al., 2014) Additionally, Verbeeten argues that by emphasizing skilled immigration through its points system, Canada has selected individuals who are highly mobile in the global economy. As a result, they may have less incentive to remain in Canada or settle permanently. Skilled migrants are by nature mercurial: they may choose to return home to burgeoning markets. (Verbeeten, 2007)

The Conservatives' 2008 platform promised to enhance the responsiveness of the immigration system to Canada economic needs, by "*attract[ing] more skilled workers through immigration*". (Fiřtová, 2021, p. 270) The Conservative Party questioned the established elite consensus on immigration and the symbolic role of multiculturalism. While the Liberal tradition viewed multiculturalism as a means of inclusion, Conservatives framed cultural diversity as a potential source of division that could weaken national unity. In a 2009 speech, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, posed a key question: "*How can a country that maintains such a high level of immigration, while embracing the diversity that it brings, maintain a sense of social cohesion, a common purpose, and a national identity?*" (Fiřtová, 2021, p. 274).Their emphasis on the need to "protect Canadian citizenship" suggested an internal threat to public safety, shifting attention away from external dangers. In this view, limiting access to citizenship and revoking it in certain cases was justified by the perceived failure of some individuals to properly integrate - specifically, to use the words of then–Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Chris Alexander, "*to develop a stronger*

connection to Canada, encourage their sense of belonging here, and foster their full participation […] to demonstrate and reaffirm their commitment to Canada". (Fiřtová, 2021, p. 274)

The Conservative government shifted the discourse from multiculturalism to integration, emphasizing immigrants' responsibilities to integrate. Moving away from Canada's multiculturalist tradition, where the state actively supported immigrant inclusion, the Conservative narrative emphasized civic duty, portraying integration as an imperative, a one-sided obligation imposed on newcomers, rather than a shared goal or privilege. Immigration was framed as too costly to 'Canadians'. This marked a departure from earlier policies like the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2002), which emphasized reciprocal obligations between immigrants and Canadian society. This inward turn became particularly evident with Bill C-24, the *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act* (2014), which introduced stricter requirements for acquiring and retaining citizenship, including the revocation of citizenship for dual nationals under specific conditions.

Under the Justin Trudeau Liberal government (2015–2025), Canada's immigration policy has been characterized by high intake targets and a welcoming humanitarian stance, but it has also faced mounting challenges and political tensions. Key issues include significant backlogs and processing delays, especially post-COVID; concerns over irregular asylum claims and system pressures; and increasing public anxiety about housing affordability, infrastructure strain, and labour market mismatches. Although immigration is largely supported by the public, debates around integration, foreign credential recognition, and the exploitation of temporary workers have intensified. Provinces like Quebec have demanded more control, while political polarization has deepened, with critics arguing that immigration growth has outpaced Canada's capacity to absorb it effectively.

5. Conclusions

The evolution of Canadian immigration policy reveals a long history of adaptation shaped by shifting economic priorities, political ideologies, social values, and international pressures. From the racially exclusionary legislation of the 19th and early 20th centuries

to today's highly managed, points-based system, immigration has remained central to Canada's nation-building project and economic development. Over time, governments have adjusted policy frameworks in response to demographic needs, labour market demands, humanitarian commitments, and broader ideas about identity, diversity, and social cohesion.

The historical comparison of major policy phases demonstrates a clear progression toward a more structured and economically strategic model. Early exclusionary practices gave way after the Second World War to more humanitarian approaches, and later to the technocratic human-capital orientation that characterizes contemporary policy. This transition reflects not only the influence of domestic actors and economic cycles, including periods of war, reconstruction, and recession, but also Canada's engagement with global migration networks, international obligations, and changing social expectations. The introduction of the points system and subsequent reforms under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act illustrate how economic utility, multiculturalism, and neoliberal governance have become intertwined in shaping immigration priorities.

Despite Canada's reputation as a global model for multiculturalism and managed migration, this historical analysis confirms that significant gaps persist in immigrant labour market outcomes, access to services, foreign credential recognition, and socioeconomic mobility. These challenges are not incidental but are structurally linked to the very policy frameworks designed to attract highly educated migrants. The continued underperformance of many newcomers, particularly those selected for their human capital, raises pressing questions about the coherence of Canada's selection mechanisms and integration infrastructures. In this sense, the study highlights that policy success cannot be measured solely by intake numbers or global rankings, but must be assessed through long-term socioeconomic outcomes and lived experiences.

Ultimately, Canada's immigration system stands at a critical juncture. Balancing high immigration targets with declining public confidence, addressing structural inequities in the labour market, strengthening credential recognition, and managing pressures on housing, services, and infrastructure will shape the future of Canada's

multicultural model. As global migration patterns continue to evolve, Canada's ability to reconcile its humanitarian commitments, economic needs, and social cohesion will determine whether it can sustain the inclusive and forward-looking immigration system it has worked to build over more than a century.

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