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Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Hamma Lakhdar University of El-Oued
Faculty of Arts and Languages
Department of Arts and English Language



**A Critical Analysis of the American Immigration Policy and the
Erosion of the American Dream**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

Submitted by:

Manel GORI

Amel DERKI

Supervised by:

Dr. Mouna HEZBRI

Board of Examiners:

Dr. Ahmed ZELLOUMA

President

University of El-Oued

Dr. Mouna HEZBRI

Supervisor

University of El-Oued

Dr. Dhouha BOUGHAZALA

Examiner

University of El-Oued

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Dedication

First and foremost, praise to Allah for all His blessings.

This work is dedicated to my beloved family. Especially, my mother and father who have always supported me with their love, encouragement and inspirations. To my brothers and sisters who encouraged and motivated me. Also, it is dedicated to all those who have been guiding us throughout this journey.

"Manel GORI"

We did not take the beginnings except with His facilitation, we did not reach the ends without His guidance, and we did not achieve the goals without His grace. So, praise to God who enabled me to appreciate this step in my academic career.

I dedicate the result of my effort to my ambitious self who did not let me down, to the one whose prayers were the secret of my success, my mother, to the one whose name I carry with pride, to my father, to the ones who supported me at all the time, my brother and sisters, the first step companions to all my friends and to my extended family. May God protect them all.

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We hereby declare that this dissertation is free of plagiarism. We take full responsibility for any unintentional errors that may have occurred during its writing.

Abstract

This research investigates the relationship between U.S. immigration policies and the erosion of the American Dream. It aims to explore how the current changes in the United States' foreign policies have affected its ideals, socio-economic opportunities, inclusivity and upward mobility in the light of the restrictiveness of immigration policies. Subsequently, it examines how current political decisions have contributed to the eradication of this symbol. On these premises, a mixed methods approach was employed to critically analyze the development of immigration policies from 2000 to 2022 and their impact on the American Dream. Moreover, the analysis incorporates the historical context of U.S. immigration, from early European migration to today's diverse immigrant groups, to provide a deeper understanding of how immigration patterns have evolved over time. The study, whose findings reflect immigrants' personal experiences and challenges as well as their opportunities through highlighting the measurable impact of stricter policies, yielded both qualitative and quantitative results. Subsequently, the former demonstrates how immigrants face emotional and social struggles navigating the system, while the latter shows significant declines in economic opportunities, employment access and upward mobility. Overall, this research contributes a comprehensive understanding of how restrictive immigration policies have significantly limited immigrants' ability to achieve the American Dream.

Keywords: American Dream, Erosion, Immigration, Policies.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CIRA	Comprehensive Immigration Reform
DACA	Consideration of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals
DAPA	Deferred Action for Parents
LIFE	Legal Immigration Family Equity
MPI	Migration Policy Institute
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Right from the very beginning, the Americas attracted immigrants in search of better opportunities and improved living conditions. The history of the American lands goes back to thousands of years prior to European exploration. While indigenous civilizations had inhabited the Americas for thousands of years, European exploration began with Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean in 1492. By the 1600s, European colonies were formed due to economic and social hardship in Europe. Over time, population density increased and a growing desire for independence from British rule led to the American Revolution. Then, in 1776, the 13 colonies officially declared independence and after the constitution was drafted in 1787, George Washington became the first president (National Archives, n.d.; Howard University School of Law Library, n.d.).

Washington's leadership brought significant legal reforms, including the Judiciary Act and the Bill of Rights. However, the American political system was established based on the Constitution of 1787 with the joint efforts of figures like James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, establishing a constitutional republic with a federal government based on the separation of powers (executive, legislative, judicial) and a system of taxes and balances (National Archives, n.d. Migration Policy Institute, 2023).

- **Historical Waves of Immigration (1850-1964)**

According to Pew Research Center (2024), Germany and Ireland were the most common countries of origin for immigrants in the majority of states and territories between 1850 and 1880. Specifically, Ireland covered 22 of the 39 states while Germany covered 16 states by

1880. Meanwhile, the Chinese immigrants were the majority in western states such as California, Nevada, and Oregon. Additionally, the majority of people in Texas, as well as the territories of New Mexico and Arizona were of Mexican origins. From 1890 to 1919, over 18 million people came to the United States in the next wave. During that period, more than 60% of the population was from Eastern and Southern Europe, with significant immigration from Russia, Poland, Italy, and Austria-Hungary (Pew Research Center, 2024; Library of Congress, n.d.).

However, from 1920 to 1964 immigration saw a sharp decline in the number of new immigrants. As a result, throughout the following few decades, there was little change in the main immigrant groups in each state. German immigrants made up the largest group in 11 states in 1920, compared to 18 in 1910. Furthermore, in an increasing number of states, Russian and Italian people became to be the major groupings. Though, Germany (17 states), Italy (10 states), and Canada (10 states) made up the majority of immigrants in the most states by 1960 (Pew Research Center, 2024).

- **Immigration Trends and Shifts**

From 1965 to 2007, particularly in 1965 a new migration wave began. The majority of immigrants during this period came from Asia (27%), or Latin America (49%). Approximately 25% of these migrants were from Mexico alone, while China, India, the Philippines, Central America, and the Caribbean also contributed significantly (Pew Research Center, 2024).

Nevertheless, the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States rose rapidly after 1990, increasing from 3.5 million to 12.2 million in 2007. Mexico, which was also the main source of legal immigrants at the time, became the leading country of origin for unauthorized immigrants entering the U.S. As a result, the demographic composition of many states changed significantly due to both legal and undocumented immigration (Pew Research Center, 2024).

By 1980, Mexican immigrants had become the largest immigrant group in 10 states, followed by Germans in 19 states and Canadians in 11 states. However, by 2000, Germans were no longer the largest immigrant group in any state. Instead, Mexican groups became the dominant in 31 states. Additionally, in 11 states, the largest groups were from Cuba, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, the Philippines and India (Pew Research Center, 2024).

In 2008 to the present, patterns of immigration shifted when the Great Recession hit. After 2007, Mexican immigration to the United States sharply decreased. As a result, the number of Mexican immigrants stopped increasing. Although Mexico remained the leading country of origin for U.S., the percentage of Mexican immigrants decreased from 12.2 million to 10.2 million. However, since then, the number has risen again, reaching 11.0 million in 2022 (Pew Research Center, 2024).

In terms of state-level trends, Mexico continued to be the most common country of birth for immigrants in 29 states. Meanwhile, India became the most common country of birth for immigrants in six states. For the first time, certain states and districts had immigrant populations from new origin groups, such as Ethiopians in the District of Columbia, Guatemalans in South Dakota, and Louisianans with unspecified immigrants' origin (Pew Research Center, 2024).

When it comes to international migration, the United States is the most popular destination. According to Pew Research Center (2024) analyzed Census Bureau data, over 70 million immigrants have come to the U.S. since 1965. In 2022, there were 46.1 million immigrants in the country, making up 13.8% of the total population. These immigrants have ancestry from almost every country in the world. With Mexico and India being the largest sources, representing 10.6 million and 2.8 million immigrants, respectively. In contrast, in 1920, Germany and Italy had the highest immigrant populations. This increase in immigrant numbers since 1965 largely

attributed to changes in U.S. immigration laws. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 made legal immigration from Asia and Latin America possible by eliminating laws that had primarily restricted immigration from these regions, favoring those from Northern and Western Europe (Pew Research Center, 2024).

In addition to these legal reforms, unauthorized immigration contributed to the growing immigrant population. The rise in unauthorized immigration began in the 1970s, which led to an overall increase in the U.S. population. In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act granted legal status to many individuals who had arrived before 1982, but unauthorized immigration continued to increase. Furthermore, modifications to U.S. immigration laws in 1990 opened more pathways for legal immigration, allowing a broader range of people from different regions to enter the U.S. Hence, many of these immigrants came to pursue the American Dream, seeking better opportunities and a higher quality of life (Pew Research Center, 2024).

The American Dream represents the national ethos of the United States, emphasizing individual rights, freedom and the opportunity to achieve success and change their life for the better (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). In the beginning, the term focused on democracy, freedom and equality, over time it changed, as in the recent period the focus has been more on achieving material wealth and social mobility. In the late 19th century, immigration increased as people from all over the world left their home countries for coming to America for various reasons such as crop failure, lack of land and jobs, high famine and taxes, and mainly because the American lands were considered a land of opportunity to achieve success.

However, America has remained one of the most preferred destinations for immigrants seeking better life opportunities, as it has formed a dynamic immigrant society due to changes in immigration laws, which have led to an increase in both legal and illegal immigration.

The American Dream still promises success and remains a source of inspiration for people around the world. Moreover, immigrants have played a crucial role in shaping the country, making the United States a land rich in cultures and aspirations. While previous studies provide insights into either immigration policies or the American Dream separately, they lack a critical analysis of how these policies contribute to its erosion. This study aims to fill this gap by arguing that stricter U.S. immigration policies have an impact on the opportunities of immigrants to achieve the American Dream.

2. Statement of the Problem

The American Dream promise has long been used to promote the U.S. as a land of opportunity. However, this image is deeply connected to the historical debates about the country's origin and its idealism of a melting pot society. While this idealism suggests inclusivity, it has often masked systematic attempts to alienate ethnic minorities and lower socioeconomic groups. Throughout history, American immigration policies have played a crucial role in shaping the national identity, frequently emphasizing restriction rather than integration. These restrictions have all played a part in weakening the possibility of achieving the American Dream, limiting opportunities for those seeking upward mobility.

3. Research Questions

This study is guided by the following main question and sub-questions:

- How have U.S immigration policies contributed to the erosion of the American Dream?

Sub-questions:

- How have policy shifts affected the immigrants' pursuit of the American Dream?

- To what extent have recent U.S. immigration policies impacted immigrants' access to employment, education, housing and health insurance?

4. Aims of the Study

This study intends to fill a gap by focusing on the intersection between immigration policy and the erosion of the American Dream. While several studies have explored immigration and the American Dream separately, there is a noticeable lack of critical analysis examining their intersection. Also, this study aims to investigate the impact of immigration policy shifts on immigrants' access to upward mobility, stability and inclusion in American society. By analyzing these changes, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how immigration policies shape the lived experiences of immigrant populations.

5. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, contributing valuable insights to fields such as economics, sociology, political science, and cultural studies. By critically examining the tension between the ideal of the American Dream and the reality of restrictive immigration policies, this research provides a deeper understanding of the challenges immigrants face in the U.S. Academically, it provides scholars with a nuanced understanding of the contradictions in American values and their implications for broader discussion on migration. Also, it serves as a source for students and advocates to raise awareness about systematic injustices embedded in immigration policies.

6. Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of how U.S. immigration policies contribute to the erosion of the American Dream. The quantitative aspect of the study involved statistical analysis of secondary data while the qualitative aspect involved document analysis to explore immigration policy shifts and how immigrants' perception of the American Dream has been shaped by these policies. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a richer and more nuanced understanding of the issue.

7. Structure of the Study

This study is divided into two chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between American immigration policies and the erosion of the American Dream. The first chapter provides the conceptual framework and literature review of the study. This chapter introduces the conceptual framework that outlines the key concepts guiding the study, including a historical overview of the American immigration policies and the American Dream's evolution and definitions through different eras. Also, this chapter incorporates a literature review that examines existing research and gaps related to U.S. immigration policy. Whereas the second chapter is devoted to the research methodology and empirical analysis. It explains the mixed methods approach adopted, including both qualitative and quantitative tools used for data collection and data analysis. Additionally, it details the procedures for gathering data- through document analysis and policy reviews- and the techniques used to analyze them. Moreover, the chapter presents the results, which illustrate the effects of restrictive immigration policies on the realization of the American Dream among immigrants. The discussion section interprets these results offering critical insights into how institutional and psychological barriers influence the lived

experiences of immigrants in the United States. Finally, this chapter connects empirical evidence with broader policy implications and contributes to ongoing discussions about immigration reform and social justice.

CHAPTER ONE

Exploring the Conceptual and Empirical Foundations of U.S. Immigration Policy and its Impact on the American Dream

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Introduction

In an attempt to understand how American immigration policies influence the American Dream, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview to the historical, political and economic landscapes of the United States. It begins with a historical overview to the U.S. immigration policies across different historical periods and examines the evolution of the American Dream to establish a foundational context. Next, it explores the intersection of these two concepts to highlight how foreign policy affects access to opportunities. Furthermore, this chapter discusses how these policies are formed and implemented, and reviews key aspects that shape immigrant experiences. Finally, it reviews previous studies that are relevant to the topic.

1.1 Conceptual Framework on U.S. Immigration Policies and the American Dream

This research is grounded in two primary themes: U.S. immigration policy and the American Dream. Understanding these policies is essential, as they regulate the status, rights and opportunities to immigrants in the United States. Therefore, the conceptual framework provides a foundation for understanding the mechanisms through which policies shape access to opportunities for immigrant communities.

By definition, immigration is to move and live in a different country, whereas policies are a set of laws that have been agreed and implemented by a government (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). These policies address issues such as border control, visas, refugee resettlement, employment and deportation. Immigration laws are significant in this study because they directly affect immigrants' access to social, educational, and economic opportunities. Nevertheless, any changes to these regulations can either facilitate or hinder immigrants' ability to achieve the American Dream, as these opportunities are closely tied to its foundational principles.

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.), the American Dream embodies the national ethos of the United States, emphasizing individual rights, freedom and the opportunity for success, prosperity and upward mobility through hard work. However, for immigrants, achieving this dream often depends on overcoming legal and social barriers created by restrictive immigration policies. This study examines how increasingly restrictive laws contribute to the erosion of the American Dream within immigrant communities, offering a critical analysis of the intersection between immigration policies and the ideal of upward mobility. For instance, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) outlines the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which grants temporary relief from deportation and work authorization for certain individuals who entered the U.S. as minors, provided they meet specific criteria (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, n.d.). While DACA offers deferred action for a renewable two-year period, it does not provide permanent legal status, creating instability and anxiety about the future. In addition, policies such as travel bans, visa restrictions and deportation measures often serve as significant obstacles, further contributing to the erosion of the American Dream for those affected.

1.2 Historical Overview of the American Immigration Policies

The American history of immigration policies reveals a complicated and evolving journey shaped by political, economic and social shifts. From the very beginning to the present day, the U.S. has continuously updated its domestic policies to respond to national and global developments. This section provides an overview of American immigration policies, focusing on their evolution through history.

1.2.1 Early U.S. Immigration Policy

In the early 1800s, the United States continues to preserve the most liberal immigration laws in the world and has been a significant part of its history. America promoted

relatively unrestricted immigration to populate its empty territories before the era of rapid communications and transportation. In the 1876, the supreme Court decided that the federal government was responsible for managing immigration after certain states enacted immigration laws following the Civil War. Thus, the Bureau of immigration was established by legislation in 1891 and 1895 (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.). This development was continuous along with the government's growing role in regulating immigration, which increased in the late 19th century (Ngai, 2004).

1.2.2 The Great Wave and Quota System (1900-1924)

Known as the “Great Wave”, almost 24 million immigrants entered between 1900 and 1920. The beginning of World War I decreased European immigration, once the war ended, mass immigration returned, leading Congress to enact a new immigration law known as the national-origins quota system which was passed in 1921 and modified in 1924. Though, each nationality was provided with a quota based on its presence in previous U.S. census data, which helped to control immigration. Hence, Northwestern European immigrants were particularly favored by this quota (Nagi, 2004). In 1924, Congress also established the Bureau of Immigration's U.S. Border Patrol. However, the next 20 years saw very little immigration and during the Depression period, net immigration actually decreased below zero for some years (Daniels, 2004).

1.2.3 Post-World War II Immigration Law Reform

Following World War II, Congress re-codified and consolidated all prior immigration and naturalization laws into the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which maintained the national-origins system of the 1920s and preserved immigration law for the next 20 years (Nagi, 2004; Tichenor, 2002). By 1951, a formal agreement between the United States and

Mexico, as had been conducted during the war by American farmers (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

1.2.4 Immigration Act of 1965 and Shifting Origins

In 1965, Congress adopted a preference system for the national origins system in an attempt to bring skilled immigrants to the U.S. and their families together. Due to this bill, immigrants' countries of origin significantly changed away from Northwestern Europe. During the next few decades, Asia and Latin America began to account for more immigration visa applications than Europe (Zolberg, 2006; Daniels, 2004). By the 21st century, the annual influx of immigrants would have more than tripled from approximately 320,000 in the 1960s to over a million according to this legislation (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

1.2.5 The 1980s Refugee Act and IRCA Amnesty

In the 1980s, Congress continued to respond to refugees with special legislation, and the preference system continued to restrict the annual amount of immigration visas available. However, the United States did not have a general policy controlling the admission of refugees until the Refugee Act of 1980. Though, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed by Congress in 1986. The two main elements of this law were enforcement and amnesty. IRCA granted amnesty to foreign nationals who fulfilled two requirements: they had to have lived in the United States continuously since January 1982 or they had to have worked in agriculture for 90 days between May 1985 and May 1986. In addition, about 3 million people were eventually granted legal status as a result of the amnesty applications, which had an acceptance rate of almost 94%. Moreover, an estimated 25% of the cases that were approved were inaccurate. IRCA was extended via Late Amnesty in 2000, allowing individuals who were contesting their initial denial to reapply. Though, it still has 15,000 unresolved Late Amnesty cases as of June 2007. In order to

stop future illegal entry, the 1986 legislation included enforcement provisions. However, few resources were placed aside to implement the regulations that forbade the hiring and protection of illegal foreigners. Enforcement officers' hands were effectively constrained by inadequate budget. Later generations of illegal immigration were encouraged by the unfair "grand compromise" that resulted from this (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

1.2.6 The 1990s Expansion

In 1990, congress changed immigration laws once more. By modifying and expanding the 1965 Immigration Act, the 1990 Immigration Act increased the overall number of immigrants to 700,000 as well as the number of available visas by 40%. While employment-related immigration more than doubled, the legislation kept family reunification as the main entry way. Additionally, the bill established a lottery system for the admission of immigrants from "underrepresented" nations in an effort to vary the immigrant flow. A study on immigration, which became known as the Jordan Commission, was also required by the 1990 Act (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.; Tichenor, 2002).

Named for its chairwoman, former representatives Barba Jordan, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform conducted from 1990 to 1997. Many aspects of immigration policy were covered by the Commission, but it began with the belief that "a simple yardstick can measure the credibility of immigration policy: people who should get in, do get in; people who should not get in, are kept out; and people who are judged deportable are required to leave." Consequently, the commission examined every aspect of immigration policy in four reports. Firstly, it discovered that both inside and at the border, enforcement was weak and needed to be strengthened. As a result, it suggested that an automated employment verification system be developed for internal enforcement so that employees could differentiate between legitimate and

unauthorized workers. Priority should be given to skilled workers and nearest family members, according to the second report, which addressed legal immigration difficulties. Immigration and refugee issues were discussed in the third report. Lastly, the fourth report restated the necessity of a new immigration policy as well as the main ideas of the other studies. However, not many of these recommendations were carried out (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

In 1996, the immigration Responsibility and Illegal immigrant Reform Act (IIRIRA) was passed by congress. By requiring more Border Patrol and Immigration and Naturalization Service agents to be hired, the act strengthened border controls. A border fence for San Diego was proposed, and penalties for illegal immigration were tightened. Though, the goal of the electronic employment verification pilot program was to make worksite enforcement easier. Using the 287(g) program, the Act also permitted state police staff to enforce immigration law. Hence, the actual execution of the laws was hindered by inadequate funds, despite the fact that the IIRIRA increased de jure enforcement (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

The 1990s also saw the passage of four smaller amnesties by Congress. In 1994, the first amnesty, known as Section 245(i), was passed, releasing some 578,000 illegal aliens who had been punished \$1,000 each. A second renewal of this amnesty was granted in 1997 and 2000. Approximately one million illegal aliens, primarily from Central America, who had been in the United States since 1995 were granted legal status in 1997 when the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) was passed. Also, the exclusion of Haitians from NACARA was considered discriminatory, and as a result, the Haitian Refugee Immigration and Fairness Act (HRIFA) was passed in 1998 (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

The Legal Immigration Family Equity Act (LIFE), which was passed in 2000, was the most recent amnesty. The LIFE Act served as a sort of mini-amnesty for illegal immigrants who

wanted to obtain green cards through marriage, work, or other means but were still far from being approved because of the long waitlist. Also, it was marketed as a solution to the expanding backlogs in processing caused by earlier amnesties. Between 1994 and 2000, when this law was in effect, millions of optimistic legal immigrants waited in the line abroad (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

1.2.7 Post 9/11 and Reform Attempts

The public's perception of immigration was significantly impacted by the September 11, 2001 assault. Nineteen of the twenty foreign-born terrorists were involved in the attack that killed 2,974 civilians. Tourist or student visas were used by the terrorists to enter the nation. However, four of them were illegal foreigners because they had broken the conditions of their visas. The attack revealed long-standing flaws in our immigration system, including shortcomings information sharing, internal enforcement, and visa processing (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.; USCIS, n.d.).

Moreover, Congress revisited the topic of immigration reform in 2006, and both the Senate and the House of Representatives produced opposing legislation. The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, sponsored by Representative James Sensenbrenner (R-WI), was enacted by the House in December 2005. The measure targeted both the interior and the border were only applicable to enforcement. In May 2006, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-PA) proposed the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 (CIRA), which was approved by the Senate. In addition to significantly increasing legal immigration, CIRA would have granted amnesty to the majority of illegal immigrants who are currently living in the country. Despite passing their respective chambers, no compromise bill was produced. The Senate made another attempt in 2007 to enact amnesty legislation. By granting citizenship to the vast majority

of illegal immigrants in the nation, the CIRA greatly expanded legal immigration and strengthened enforcement. Despite having bipartisan support in the Senate, the act was not well received by the American public (Center for Immigration Studies, n.d.).

President Obama's first significant immigration move was in August 2012, despite his commitment to enact a substantial immigration bill in his first year in office. About 700,000 illegal aliens who entered the nation as children were granted renewable two-year grants of protection from deportation, together with work permits and identity qualifications, according to an executive order the president released called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). A significant piece of amnesty legislation known as the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013 were drafted by the "Gang of Eight", a bipartisan group of eight senators, in 2013. However, this legislation would have given the approximately 11 million illegal aliens in the nation—including DACA recipients—a route to citizenship. In addition to raising the annual ceiling for high-skilled H-1B visas from 65,000 to as much as 180,000 depending on demand, the bill aimed to significantly expand the scope of visa programs by establishing a new W-visa for an extra 200,000 low-skilled workers. Increased border security and obligatory E-Verify for all companies were promised in exchange under the bill. However, the bill faced strong grassroots opposition, was not brought up by the House, and died in the 113th Congress even though it passed the Senate 68-32 (Nagi, 2004).

Thus, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) was the name of another executive order that President Obama released in November 2014. It would have protected illegal immigrants with children who are citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States from deportation and gave them three-year, renewable work permits. It would have applied to almost 3.6 million foreigners. However, other states opposed the federal government, and in February 2015,

a temporary injunction prevented DAPA from taking effect while the lawsuits were pending (Wasem, 2011).

Immigration was a key component of Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric, which helped him win the 2016 presidential election. Trump promised a lot of things on immigration throughout his campaign. Among these commitments are the following: deport all illegal aliens, defund sanctuary communities, prohibit Muslims from entering the country, restrict legal immigration, triple the number of ICE agents, and build a border wall and make Mexico pay for it. The conservative base preferred Trump's hardline immigration policies, which helped him defeat the other 16 major Republican competitors in the primary race, including Jeb Bush, who granted more than \$100 million from donors but was severely criticized by the public for his alleged softer stance on illegal immigration. In the general election, Trump maintained his stance on immigration and defeated Hillary Clinton. Trump's plan for these policies saw varied degrees of success. He issued several executive directives in 2017. Over 135 million potential immigrants and non-immigrant visitors were prohibited from entering the country after he signed a travel ban that limited entry for citizens of what were eventually seven countries: Libya, Iran, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, North Korea, and Venezuela (Chad was included in the final executive order but removed from the list the following year). In June, Trump also revoked the DAPA laws. Finally, he declared in September that DACA would be phased out, allowing the prospective participants to be deported (Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

Congress made multiple attempts in 2018 to enact amnesty laws that would have kept DACA in place. With 41 Republicans and all 190 Democrats voting against it, a bill sponsored by Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) that would have given DACA recipients a route to citizenship in exchange for a border wall and substantial cuts to family-based chain migration failed in the House

after receiving 193 votes. Paul Ryan and party leadership supported an even larger amnesty bill a week later, but it was a failure, receiving only 121 votes in the House. Over two million illegal immigrants would have been granted amnesty under the biggest chain migration categories in place. It is still unclear what will happen to DACA. Earlier this year, a federal judge said that the program must start accepting new candidates again. Later this year, the Supreme Court is anticipated to make a decision that will determine the program's final destiny (USCIS, n.d.; Daniels, 2002).

1.3 The Evolution of the American Dream

Although the definition of the American dream varies among people around the world, everyone calls for achieving merit and the idea of success. The American Dream is an idea, a theory, an old concept that was promoted by James Truslow Adams during the Great Depression in 1931. It has changed over time from what it was before, from power struggles to purchasing power. Thus, in the 19th century: The idea was linked to immigration to America in search of a better life. The new American residents wanted to build a new life in the land of opportunities, far from poverty and sought to achieve success through hard work and diligence. Then, in the Late 19th and early 20th centuries with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the American dream became more focused and linked to economic opportunities as the American economy developed significantly and many new industries emerged (Cullen, 2003).

In addition, in the 20th Century: The American Dream faced great challenges during the period between World Wars I and II, as the concept of success was affected by the Great Depression during the 1930s. After the end of World War II, the idea of the American Dream returned in the form of a prosperous and comfortable life as a result of the emergence of the American economy as one of the strongest economies in the world. Moreover, during the period

from 1960-1970s, the idea was linked to justice and equality (Hochschild, 1995). Hence, achieving social justice and equality before the law is a right for all residents of America, regardless of race or gender. However, in the late 1980s-1990s, the American dream began to focus on technology, especially with the emergence of the idea of globalization. The idea of achieving success has been driven by technological innovation and entrepreneurship. In the 21st Century, with the onset of the financial crisis in 2008, America was significantly affected and the American Dream was damaged for many people. However, over time, the country's economy recovered and the idea of the American Dream shifted. It became focused on the flexibility and ability of Americans to adapt to economic challenges (Bernanke, Geithner, & Paulson, 2019).

Consequently, in recent years, the American Dream has evolved as today's young Americans seek success, personal development, and a focus on work-life balance and social issues. Broadly speaking, the concept of the American Dream has been and continues to be a concept that changes and evolves according to economic and social changes. From the idea of dreaming of freedom and opportunities for success during the 19th and 20th centuries to striving to achieve justice, equality, and technological innovation. Nevertheless, it remains a symbol of hope and ambition for many people around the world (Cullen, 2003).

1.4 The Relationship Between Immigration and the American Dream

The American Dream is a bright concept that continues to attract immigrants to America, even though many citizens wonder if it is still alive for themselves and their children.

Some politicians and public figures exploit immigrants' concern about the future, portraying them as scapegoats for various political and social issues. However, the facts show that immigrants have not depressed wages, sent jobs abroad, thrown millions of Americans out of work or even torn apart the country's social fabric. Over time, the United States has been influenced by

the contributions of new citizens, continuing to welcome legal immigrants and providing refuge to refugees fleeing terror and oppression. At the same time, Americans in particular have the right to establish orderly ways in which immigrants are welcomed. However, such laws and policies must be set in the context of accurate information and democratic principles, not the false statistics and political hypocrisy that have fueled anti-immigration initiatives like California's Proposition 187 and the national effort to strip legal immigrants of government benefits (Clark, 2003).

Government and academic studies have shown that immigrants who enter the United States with or without documents want to work, not to collect welfare benefits or to take advantage of the American healthcare system. It is unfair to deprive illegal immigrants of basic rights such as emergency medical care or to throw school children into the streets and deprive them of vaccinations against infectious diseases, as this is an insult to them and a serious and merciless matter. Although illegal immigration is a real problem, especially in coastal and border states, the federal government has sought to find a solution to the problem with fairness and compassion and in the spirit of our nation's heritage as a land of peace, freedom, and opportunity for all. The federal government has a responsibility to help affected states by deterring unauthorized entries and helping governments deal with the impact and costs of increased immigration. It has also prohibited employers from harassing immigrant workers in America because of their skin color, name, or accent (Arnade, 2020).

These policies take too long to address the difficult issues of legal and illegal immigration. The country will be taken in the wrong direction by the quick fixes and harsh rhetoric of anti-immigration demagogues. As a result, the federal government opposes its efforts and pledges to work for immigration policies that reflect America's traditions of fairness, dignity, and equality (Arnade, 2020).

1.5 Previous Empirical Studies

This section reviews the empirical evidence and studies relevant to the topic, thus through investigating them, there appear a few themes related to our study which are:

1.5.1 Immigration Myths and Policy Shaping

In examining the role of myths in immigration debates, Filisko (2012) presents a detailed analysis of how myths about immigration affect legal discourse and policy formation (pp. 46–53). In order to provide a deeper comprehension of the complexity involved, the ABA Journal analyzes the underlying immigration difficulties and attempts to integrate those issues with factual perspectives by drawing on recorded sources as well as those with practical and professional expertise (Filisko, 2012, pp. 46-53).

1.5.2 Historical Shifts and Cultural Impact

White and Francis (2016) examined the historical evolution of U.S. immigration by analyzing legislative changes and data on immigrant inflows from 1820 to 2013. Their findings indicate that immigration patterns have significantly shaped American culture. Historically, U.S. culture closely aligned with Northern and Western European cultures due to a predominant influx of immigrants from these regions. However, the Hart-Celler Act of 1968 marked a turning point, with the primary sources of immigrants shifting to Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa. Evidence suggests that this shift influenced U.S. culture, making it more reflective of the source countries of recent immigrants. Their econometric analysis highlights structural changes in immigrant inflow levels and shares, correlating with key immigration policies (White & Francis, 2016). This econometric analysis confirms that shifts in immigrant inflows and their sources align with significant legislative changes, illustrating how U.S. immigration policy has directly influenced its societal culture over time.

1.5.3 Border Policies and Immigrants

Bartnik (2023) explores key adjustments to U.S.-Mexican border policies, analyzing their rationale and outcomes. The study focuses on contentious issues such as the unaccompanied minor migration crisis, the Trump administration's proposed border wall, and the "Remain in Mexico" policy. These policies are contextualized within the broader historical significance of the U.S.-Mexican border in shaping American immigration policy. Given the dynamic nature of events at the border, thus the author emphasizes that this region remains a critical area of concern, both domestically and internationally, highlighting the global and national implications of these contentious border-related challenges. These statistics support the assumption that border concerns specifically, those involving the US-Mexican border have a significant role in American politics.

1.5.4 Generational Experiences and Integration

According to Alba (2006), the experiences of Mexican Americans cannot be easily compared across generations due to various immigration and settlement eras, as well as institutional prejudice that persisted throughout the pre-civil rights era. By the third generation, monolingualism and English dominance remained prevalent despite the presence of bilingualism in subsequent generations. The author notes that there is no evidence suggesting Mexican Americans are moving away from the mainstream of the United States or creating distinct institutional systems. Instead, their social status, language assimilation, racial appearance, and legal conditions characterize them as a highly heterogeneous group. While many strive to achieve the American Dream, significant barriers, such as racial prejudice, lack of legal documentation, and limited economic or educational opportunities, continue to hinder progress for a sizable portion of this population.

While existing studies have explored various aspects of American immigration policy or the concept of the American Dream, there appears to be a gap, which is the lack of a

critical analysis that considers the intersection between American immigration policy and the erosion of the American Dream. Thus, it lies under the type of classical literature gap.

Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has presented a conceptual framework for understanding the relevance of U.S. immigration policy and the American Dream to the study, particularly on how they shape access to opportunities for immigrants. Additionally, it outlined the historical development of U.S. immigration policies from the 1800s to the 2010s and traced the evolution of the American Dream through the 19th and 20th centuries, highlighting their interconnection. Moreover, the chapter reviewed relevant empirical studies to provide context for the research. Building on this literature review's theoretical insights as well as the scope of this dissertation, the next chapter provides a critical overview of the research methods, followed by an analysis and discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO

Critical Analysis of U.S. Immigration Policy and the American Dream

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Critical Analysis of U.S. Immigration Policy and the American Dream

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Introduction

Building upon the conceptual and empirical foundations laid in the previous chapter, this chapter transitions into the empirical evidence of the study. It aims to apply the insights by outlining the practical steps taken to investigate the research question. This includes a detailed discussion of the methods used, data collection procedures, analytical strategies employed and the results. It begins by discussing the selected methodology then describing how the data was collected and analyzed and concludes with the presentation of the results and their discussion. This chapter plays a crucial role in answering the research question and provides the foundation for meaningful conclusions.

2.1 Methodology and Methods

2.1.1 Research Design

This study was guided by a mixed methods approach, specifically an exploratory sequential design, with the methodology and methods explained in depth.

The primary aim of this dissertation is to critically analyze how U.S. immigration policies impacted the American Dream. The decision to adopt a mixed methods approach was essential because it combined the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. Therefore, its application allowed a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the issue. The exploratory sequential design, in particular, begins with qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. This approach was particularly useful given the complexity of immigration policies and their intersection with the American Dream. Firstly, it was examined with qualitative insights into policy changes and their impacts, which were then examined through quantitative analysis using numerical data.

On one hand, a qualitative method was used to explore and understand people's experiences, behaviors, emotions or social phenomena. This method focused on gathering data through interviews, observations and case studies to gain deeper insights into how individuals or groups perceived and interpreted the world around them. The qualitative research in *A Critical Analysis of the American Immigration Policy and the Erosion of the American Dream* was used to understand the gap in the research. Also, it was particularly useful for exploring this topic, understanding the experiences of immigrants, gaining rich detailed information about immigration policies as well as the American Dream and analyzing data.

On the other hand, a quantitative method was used to quantify and analyze variables statistically. This approach focuses on collecting and analyzing numerical data to measure and predict outcomes by using mathematical, statistical or computational techniques, making it particularly suitable for this study. The quantitative research in *A Critical Analysis of the Immigration Policy and the Erosion of the American Dream* was used to predict the results by using statistical data about immigration trends, social mobility and economic impacts.

2.1.2 Data Collection Tools

To begin with, the study employs qualitative data collection through document analysis, which involves examining policy documents, government reports and articles. Hence, this method was chosen because it provides historical and policy-based context, allowing for an in-depth understanding of legislative changes and their effects. Document analysis allows access to official and historical documents, minimizing subjective bias and making it the most suitable approach for critically analyzing policies. In addition, the selection process involved searching academic databases and policy research institutes. Therefore, documents were chosen based on their relevance to the U.S. immigration policy changes from 2000 to 2022, credibility of the source and some peer-reviewed articles. Finally, to ensure reliability, only official documents, scholarly research and reports about

immigration were included. The collected data were then examined to identify themes, policy shifts and their implications on immigrants.

This study uses quantitative data collection in addition to qualitative data to offer measurable insights into the impacts of immigration policies. Quantitative data was obtained from official statistical reports, government databases and surveys conducted by organizations. From 2000 to 2022, these sources provide quantitative information on immigration trends, rates and socioeconomic factors. The data was selected based on its relevance and reliability to ensure alignment with the study's timeframe and focus. Therefore, it was primarily gathered from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Pew Research Center and articles. This approach significantly allows for identifying trends and correlations that support or challenge qualitative findings.

2.1.3 Data Analysis

Subsequently, these data were analyzed using a mixed methods approach to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the study's problem. For the qualitative aspect of the study, data were collected and analyzed using thematic analysis which identifies and interprets constant patterns or themes within the data. Content analysis was employed which involves interpreting words or concepts to understand underlying messages. Additionally, discourse analysis was conducted to examine how language is used to shape meaning, particularly in political or policy texts. Finally, the data were analyzed through coding and categorizing to find important patterns and themes for qualitative information interpretation.

For the quantitative aspect of the study, data were analyzed through statistical approaches such as descriptive analysis, which summarizes data using percentages and distributions. Also, analyzing them through regression analysis which assesses the relationship between variables

such as immigration policies and socioeconomic outcomes. These techniques made it possible to convert unprocessed data into visual representations such as graphs and tables, which made them easier to analyze. Hence, the qualitative results helped contextualize the quantitative results, while the quantitative analysis provided a measurable framework for understanding the patterns. Overall, this in-depth investigation approach led to well supported and well-grounded conclusion.

2.2 Results

The results are presented beginning with a qualitative exploration of policy patterns, followed by quantitative outcomes that provide a more comprehensive analysis.

2.2.1 The Qualitative Results

2.2.1.1 Immigration Reform Under S.744

The Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013 (S.744) introduced a mixed approach to immigration reform. It combined legal pathways for certain immigrant groups with restrictive policies that limited access for others (Sumption & Bergeron, 2013). Thus, the bill proposed employment-based immigration policies, it expanded high-skilled workers' visas, making it harder for low-skilled employees to qualify and narrowing legal entryways.

Similarly, family-based immigration faced new restrictions, including the elimination of the sibling visa category which reduced family reunification opportunities, particularly for minor children of LPRs. In addition, the elimination of diversity visa programs further narrow legal pathways affecting immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean and other underrepresented regions. While there is an alternative way through a merit-based system it makes competition and fewer chances for people from diverse backgrounds to qualify. Despite being framed as a reform, S.744 policy-hardened immigration policies emphasize economic selectivity over inclusivity.

Historically, U.S. immigration policy attempted to balance economic interests with social considerations. However, this reform prioritized workforce demand over immigrants' integration. Additionally, rather than broadening opportunities, the reform redefined the required criteria based on economic goals limiting access to legal immigration for those who most of the time relied on the other legal pathways, such as family-based immigration.

2.2.1.2 The Trump Administration and Immigration Enforcement

In 2017 U.S. immigration policy marked significant shifts compared to prior administrations. One of the key trends under the Trump administration was the increased immigration enforcement which widened deportation priorities apart from criminals, resulting in a rise in arrests of undocumented immigrants which led to greater fear and instability within immigrants' communities. Additionally, the implementation of 287(g) agreements allowed local law enforcement agencies to collaborate with federal immigration authorities, effectively transforming state and local police into immigration enforcement agents- a move that raised concerns regarding fairness and civil rights (Pierce & Selee, 2017).

From a critical perspective, this issue blurred the lines between local law enforcement and the federal government that control immigration. Thus, it raised concerns about civil rights violations. Also, the Trump's administration eliminated deportation directly targeting all undocumented immigrants as criminals. This change contradicted the claim that immigration enforcement focused primarily on "dangerous criminals" (Pierce & Selee, 2017). Hence, it exposed a wide political strategy rather than a purely security-driven policy. Furthermore, by aggressively criminalizing undocumented immigrants, these policies created an unfriendly environment making it harder for immigrants to have a stable life and pursue economic security.

2.2.1.3 Barriers to Legal Immigration

According to Pierce & Slee (2017) legal immigration became increasingly difficult due to increased barriers and stricter visa policies, such as the repeal of the Visa Interview Waiver Program, forcing more applicants into lengthy, bureaucratic in-person interviews. Another critical shift was ending work authorization for spouses of H-1B visa applicants which created systematic obstacles to gaining legal status (Pierce & Selee, 2017). As a result, these barriers not only delayed visa processing but also discouraged other people from applying.

Gelatt (2017) argued about the policy shift that limited legal immigration to the U.S. which banned travel, increased difficulties in obtaining visas and extreme vetting, and presented refugee admission through executive orders under Trump's administration. These policies marked a shift from the past and strengthened the idea that immigration was a threat to national security rather than a social or economic necessity.

2.2.1.4 Economic and Labor Market Impact

Trump implemented travel restrictions from several Muslim-majority countries through executive orders, claiming security concerns even though there was no proof that these restrictions increased national security. However, this resulted in ethical and legal concerns around constitutional violations and discrimination. Another point in the article is the pressure programs for temporary workers as they are entitled to another executive order "Buy American, Hire American" including the high-skilled H-1B program (Cowger, Bolter, & Pierce, 2017).

The security-based justifications also lacked empirical evidence. Moreover, the emphasis on high-skilled immigration while restricting other pathways created a selective system that excluded many hardworking immigrants who historically contributed to U.S. economic growth. While Trump officials framed these policies as necessary for national security and economic protection,

research suggests that refugees and high-skilled immigrants contribute positively to the U.S. economy and workforce (Holzer, 2019).

These policies not only restricted access to legal immigration but also reinforced exclusionary. In addition, it reduced possible chances of immigrants to pursue upper social mobility or gain status, making it harder for immigrants to build stable futures in the U.S.

Holzer (2019) critically examined the relationship between immigration and the U.S. labor market, emphasizing the challenges faced by low-skilled immigrants. Even though immigrants are crucial to maintain economic growth, legislative restrictions have made participation more difficult, increasing labor market inequality and exposing many immigrants to exploitation, wage theft, and poor working conditions. One important point of Holzer's analysis is the rising preference for high-skilled immigrants, despite the continuous need for low- and middle-skilled workers in important industries like construction, healthcare, and agriculture.

Hence, policies restricting visas and work permits for those groups contradict the economic realities. This highlights a policy disconnect, where restrictive immigration policies do not align with actual workforce needs. Another critical aspect discussed by Holzer is the effect of automation. Although concerns about technology-driven unemployment are often over-exaggerated, worker displacement remains a significant issue, particularly for low-skilled immigrants who lack access to upskilling programs (Holzer, 2019).

From a critical perspective, these laws force many immigrants into undocumented labor markets where they are exploited and lack legal rights, disproportionately affecting them in low-wage industries. Research demonstrates that immigrants have a significant role in job creation, creativity and economic prosperity, despite officials' claims that immigration limitations safeguard

American jobs (Holzer, 2019). In addition to limiting immigrants' ability to proceed up the economic mobility, this imbalance leads to persistent labor shortages that harm the US economy overall.

2.2.1.5 The “Zero-Tolerance” Policy and Family Separation

Chishti and Bolter (2018) critically examined the Trump administration’s enforcement systems that aimed at discouraging unauthorized immigrants. Hence, they discussed the “Zero-Tolerance” policy which commands the criminal prosecution of all individuals apprehended illegally crossing the U.S. border. However, this policy imposed stricter consequences on unauthorized immigrants’ entry. A direct consequence of the “Zero-Tolerance” policy was the separation of immigrant children from their parents because they cannot legally be accused in criminal detention facilities. Hence, they were placed in the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) as “unaccompanied minors”.

Due to its humanitarian consequences, the family separation policy in particular caused debate around the world. According to Stanford University report (2018), family separation caused long-term psychological harmful effects to children including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These early-life stressors disrupt normal child development and have long-term negative consequences on both psychological and physical health. Notably, the Society for Research in Child Development further emphasized that family separations result in affecting children's emotional attachment, self-esteem and overall well-being.

By criminalizing border crossers and imposing extreme penalties on families, the Zero-Tolerance Policy was framed as a strategy, aimed at discouraging future illegal migration. In addition, from a critical perspective, the assumption that harsher and stricter penalties reduce migration entry lacks empirical support. Undermining America’s longstanding image as a nation of refuge and economic opportunity.

2.2.1.6 Health Under Restrictive Policies

Recent research reveals that foreign policy not only shapes legal status and border control but also significantly impacts immigrants' access to basic services and psychological well-being. According to Wang et al. (2022) the anti-immigrant policies have created a climate of fear, particularly in healthcare settings. Additionally, immigrants still experience anxiety over deportation and interactions when seeking medical care regardless of their legal status. As a result, essential health services are wasted, placing immigrant populations at greater risk. Through a critical lens, this paradox illustrates how federal policy intended to maintain national security erodes public health and extends systematic inequality.

Gándara, P., and Ee, J. (2018) further expose the psychological effect of immigration enforcement, especially among children of undocumented parents. Hence, fear of family separation, particularly for parents who have criminal records or illegal border crossing, leads to long-term issues such as poor academic performance and emotional instability. Although these children are U.S. citizens, their daily lives are shaped by policies that treat their parents as threats.

2.2.1.7 Global and Racial Dimensions

Czaika and de Haas (n.d.) provide a global perspective by addressing how restrictive immigration policies interact with economic realities. Immigrants are important to industries like construction and agriculture, yet they are frequently underprivileged and denied opportunities for economic growth. In addition, immigration laws reinforce social inequalities in reality, despite their claims to balance fairness and the national interest. The persistent focus on enforcement and legal barriers significantly affects low-skilled workers, making them a necessary but accessible labor force. Thus, a fundamental contradiction in U.S. immigration policy is brought to light by this inequality between economic dependency and legal exclusion.

Raymond-Flesh (2018) underscores the racialized dimensions of foreign policy. Children from Muslim-majority countries have faced trauma due to policies such as travel bans and religious profiling. While they were framed as national security efforts, they lacked evidence and brought severe psychological consequences for young immigrants. From a critical perspective, these types of policies reveal a deeper issue such as racial discrimination under the form of policy enforcement. The subsequent trauma affects immigrant communities' perceptions of their position in American culture for a long time, in addition to the children's mental health.

2.2.1.8 Historical and Political Shifts

Kirschner (2021) offers a comprehensive historical view of U.S. immigration policy shift since 1986. The author furthermore highlights how political leadership and external events have profoundly shaped immigration discourse and legislation. After George W. Bush's 2000 election win, he initially aimed at reforming foreign policies and repairing U.S.-Mexico relations. However, the 9/11 attacks drastically shifted the national agenda, conflicting immigration with national security concerns. This shift led to restrictive limits like the Patriot Act, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, which redefined aliens not just as outsiders but as potential threats, and the Secure Communities program. These laws expanded detention, often at the expense of civil liberties. They disproportionately impacted immigrants' communities, many of whom had no criminal history despite being designed to target risks. Kirschner criticizes this change, arguing that the combination of counterterrorism and immigration enforcement has normalized restrictive limitations that do not result in significant change.

During the Obama administration (2009-2017) the focus was initially on comprehensive immigration reform. However, due to the economic recession and conflict with the republican party, Obama was forced to resort to executive orders, such as the DACA program in 2012 to defer the deportation of young immigrants. This reliance weakened the long-term impact of reforms

making them vulnerable to legal and political reversal. Controversially, the Trump administration (2017-2020) embraced a more exclusionary stance through policies like a travel ban and building a border wall as well as strengthening deportation laws and other procedures. These policies had immediate and severe human consequences, including increased immigrants' deaths and family separation despite legal challenges. A recurring conflict in U.S. immigration policy can be seen when comparing these administrations' party opposition and security-driven narratives frequently hinder reform initiatives, creating a disjointed system that puts enforcement above human consideration (Kirschner, 2021).

2.2.2 The Quantitative Results

Figure 2.1 Trends in education access, employment access and low-income levels over the years 2000-2022(adopted from Migration Policy Institute, n.d.)

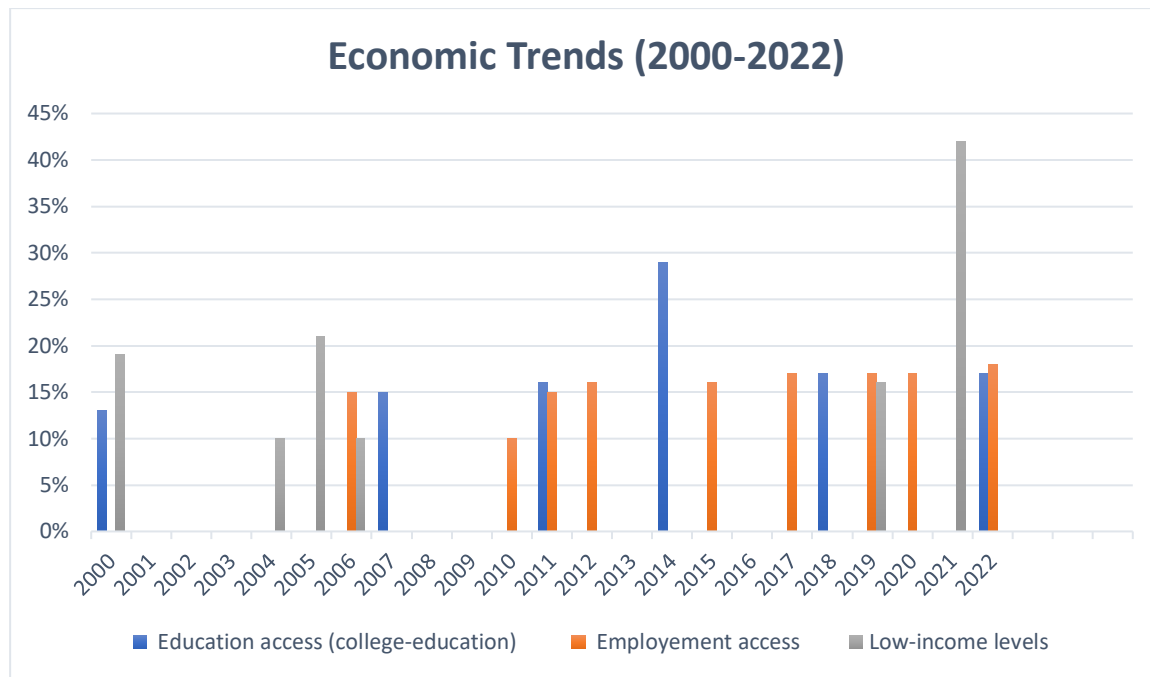


Figure 2.1 presents changes in education access (specifically college education), employment access and low-income levels between 2000 and 2022. The data shows; college education access, represented by the blue bars peaked around 2014 to reach 29% followed by a decline and stabilization of around 20% in other years. In addition, employment access represented by the orange bars, remained steady between 15% and 20% indicating slight progress over the two decades. In contrast, low-income levels represented by the gray bars, show an increase, rising sharply to 42% in 2021 (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.) likely reflecting the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As these three aspects are crucial components of the American Dream, which traditionally promises upward mobility through hard work. The chart statistics support the argument that while access to education and employment has seen improvement, they have not secured the economic side

enough for immigrants especially the ethnically marginalized groups. As well as the sharp rise in low-income levels suggests barriers, including restrictive immigration policies.

Table 2.1 Immigrants Homeownership Rates over time (adopted from Census Bureau, 2013; Mengistu, 2014)

Year	Homeownership Rate
2000	49.8%
2010	52.4%
2011	52.0%

Table 2.1 presents homeownership rates among immigrants in the U.S. in the years 2000, 2010, and 2011. The data shows a slight increase from 49.8% in 2000 to 52.4% in 2010, followed by a slight decrease to 52.0% in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013; Mengistu, 2014). While it suggests growth in immigrant homeownership, the progress is minimal rising only 2.2% over a decade. The slow increase shows that there are barriers and challenges that immigrants face in achieving the American Dream because homeownership is a symbol of financial security. Therefore, table 2.1 supports that immigration policies continue to hinder immigrants' pursuit of the American Dream.

Figure 2.2 Perceived Discrimination among Latino Adults and Puerto Rican Respondents in 2016 (adopted from Almeida et al., 2016)

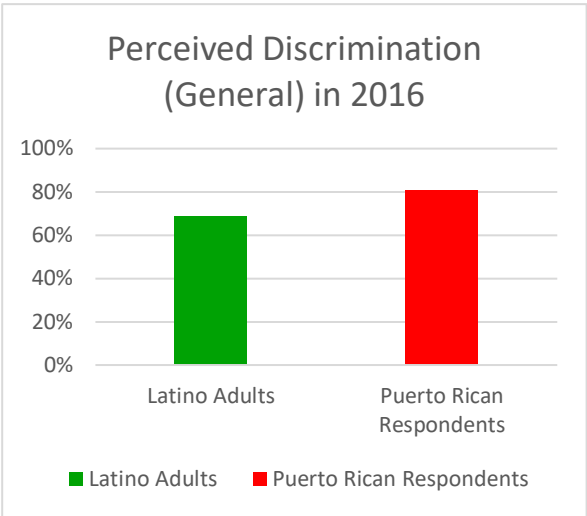


Figure 2.3 Workplace Discrimination Trends in 2023 (adopted from Kaiser Family Foundation, 2023)

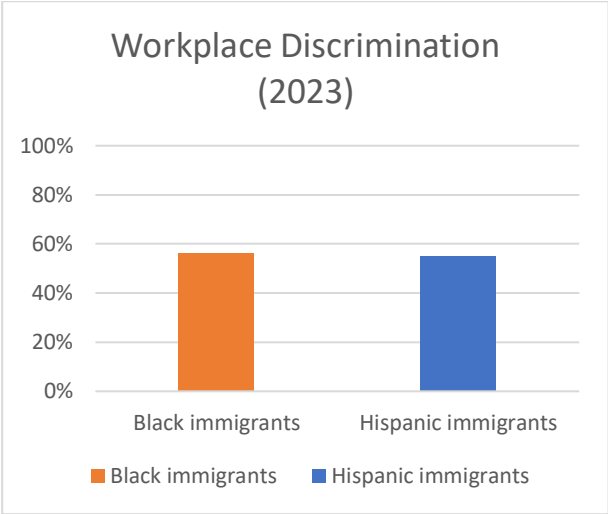


Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 highlight significant trends in general perceived and workplace discrimination among Latino, Puerto Rican respondents, Black, and Hispanic immigrant groups.

Figure 2.2 shows that in 2016, over 60% of Latino adults and 80% of Puerto Rican respondents reported experiencing general discrimination (Almeida et al., 2016). This overwhelming sense of unfair treatment is a reflection of deep biases in society that keep minority communities away. These kinds of situations undermine belief in social structures and limit possibilities for career advancement, two essential components of the American Dream.

Figure 2.3 further emphasizes this issue by presenting workplace discrimination in 2023, where about 56% of Black immigrants and 55% of Hispanic immigrants reported these experiences at work (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2023). These statistics highlight systematic employment inequality, which is an important component of both social growth and economic stability. Because of their race or history, immigrants are less likely to succeed professionally and are prevented from fully engaging in American civic and economic life since they do not receive equal treatment. The American Dream promises equality, opportunity, and fairness, yet these statistics reveal a reality where immigrants are exposed to exclusion, inequality, and limited access to that ideal.

Figure 2.4 Health insurance coverage percentages (both private and public) among immigrants and U.S. born citizens from 2010 to 2019 (adopted from Migration Policy Institute, n.d.)

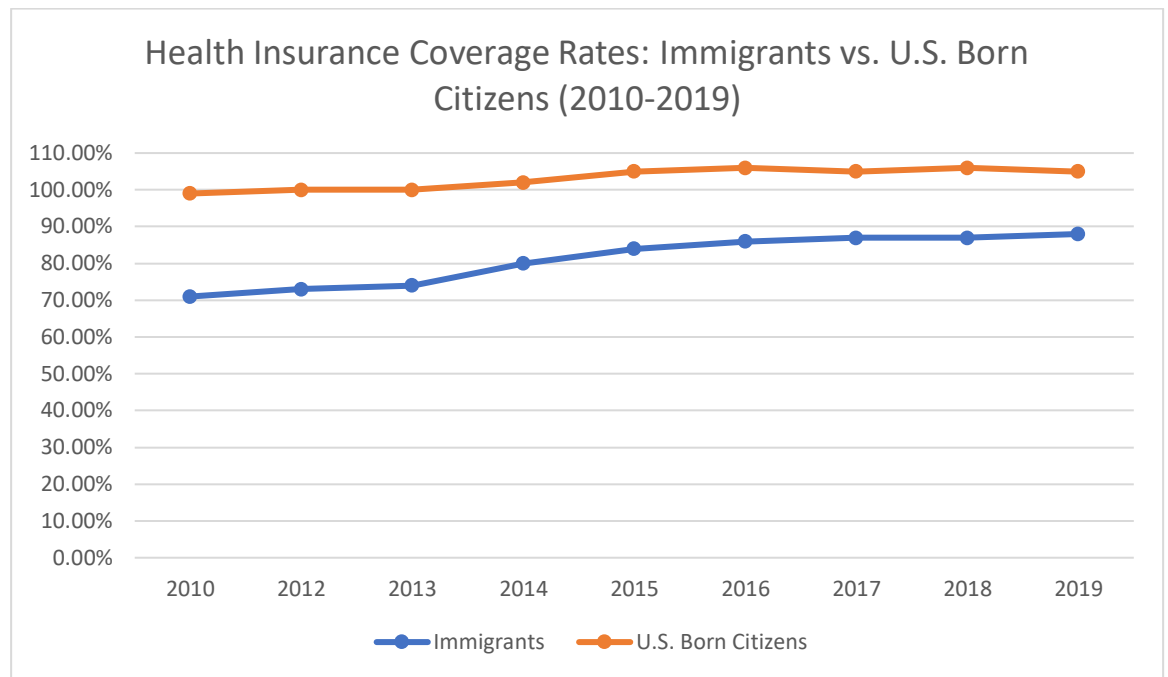


Figure 2.4 shows the health insurance coverage rates (both private and public) of immigrants (blue line) and U.S. -born citizens (orange line) from 2010 to 2019, revealing a clear and ongoing inequality. While the blue line shows a steady rise in health insurance coverage for immigrants- from 71% in 2010 to 88% in 2019- the orange line remains regularly higher, even exceeding 100% in some years, likely due to dual coverage (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.). This visual gap between the two lines underscores structural barriers that immigrants continue to face in accessing healthcare.

2.3 Discussion

Building on the previous results, these findings show that U.S. immigration policies have had measurable impacts on the socioeconomic outcomes of immigrant groups. Both statistical

trends and textual interpretations show a pattern of structural barriers that hinder immigrants' access to opportunities associated with the American Dream.

The qualitative data analysis revealed a repeated theme across these policies which is the prioritization of high-skilled labor while creating barriers for low-skilled immigrants and marginalized groups. As Holzer (2019) argues, these policy goals often conflict with the realities of the labor market, forcing many immigrants into undocumented work conditions while limiting their chances for upward mobility. Moreover, the Trump administration's expansion of deportation implementation and the Zero-Tolerance policy and the 287(g) agreements collectively contributed to instability. Policies like family separation have created long-term effects, including psychological harm to children (Stanford University, 2018). These findings laid the foundation for understanding the challenges that immigrants face despite economic efforts.

Taken together, the reviewed policies collectively illustrate a shift from immigration as an opportunity for a better life to a mechanism rooted in exclusion and control. Historically, the American Dream symbolized the promise of upward mobility, freedom, and prosperity for those willing to hard work regardless of their origins. However, as shown through restrictive reforms such as the Border Security, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013 and the enforcement approach of the Trump administration, the path to achieve that dream become more excluded. In addition to restricting access, giving preference to highly qualified immigrants while limiting legal entrance and family reunion for low- and middle-skilled workers goes against the fundamental principles of equality and inclusivity.

By criminalizing immigrant presence, eliminating support systems like family-based visas, and raising obstacles to legal status and social mobility, these policies further erode the American Dream rather than only reflecting economic preferences. Due to the psychological impact

on society, which includes suffering from family separation, and restricted access to health care, many people are unable to achieve stability and prosperity. Instead of promoting this dream, immigration policy has essentially become a barrier that prevents several individuals from reaching it which increases systematic inequality and damages the country's reputation as a land of opportunity.

The quantitative data, on the other hand, validated and expanded these themes. For instance, while immigrant homeownership rose by 2.2% from 2000 to 2010, this progress is minimal given the decade-long timeframe and emphasizes the economic barriers identified in policy analysis. Similarly, although college access peaked at 29% in 2019, the decline in employment access around 15-20% suggests that they do not translate into economic security and mobility. This is particularly evident when considering the sharp rise in low-income levels to 42% in 2021 highlighting a disconnect between education and economic mobility.

Discrimination emerged as another key barrier that was strongly supported by the quantitative data as well. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show high discrimination percentages both generally and in the workplace with rates between 50-80% for Latino, Puerto Rican, Black, and Hispanic groups. These experiences confirm how racial and ethnic biases hinder social and economic growth and undermine access to opportunities to achieve the American Dream.

Furthermore, the persistent gap in health insurance coverage between immigrants and U.S. born citizens as shown in figure 2.4, despite overall improvements it illustrates a structural inequality that continues to undermine the principle of equal opportunity and access to the American Dream. The data reflects that even as policies like the Affordable Care Act expanded coverage, immigrants, especially those with limited legal status, remained disproportionately uninsured. This not only restricts their access to health care but also limits their full participation in American society. Such structural obstacles stand contrary to the core principles of the American Dream, which believes

that security and prosperity are achievable through effort. These obstacles again hinder immigrants' pursuit of stability and ultimately undermine access to the American Dream.

The findings indicate that stricter immigration policies have contributed to the erosion of the American Dream. Moreover, these experiences show that the American Dream is not simply about material success but also about freedom and the ability to live without fear which are threatened by restrictive policies. By integrating emotional, social, and economic aspects of immigrants' experiences, this study demonstrates that immigration policies have not only materially impacted immigrants but also have changed the American Dream's significance and accessibility.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the empirical part was discussed including methods, data collection, analysis, and results. Using a mixed methods approach within an exploratory sequential design, the study first explored the qualitative aspect, followed by the quantitative aspect. Qualitative data, was gathered through document analysis, while quantitative data was obtained through official statistical reports and government databases. In addition, the analysis results of both methods revealed that immigration policies in the United States are strict, which has contributed to the erosion of the American Dream. As a final step, the chapter concludes with a discussion section that links the results back to the study's thesis.

General Conclusion

This study, titled *A Critical Analysis of the American Immigration Policy and the Erosion of the American Dream*, investigates how the U.S. immigration policies have shaped and, in many cases, undermines immigrants' ability to achieve the American Dream. The research problem addressed a notable gap that focused on understanding the extent to which foreign policies, particularly those in recent decades, have hindered this long-cherished ideal. The research question - How have U.S. immigration policies contributed to the erosion of the American Dream? – guided the investigation, was formulated to explore the impacts of these policies and grounded in a mixed methods approach. The primary aim was to identify patterns, contradictions and consequences within foreign policy that have reshaped the desire, opportunities and experiences of immigrants in the United States. The thesis argued that stricter immigration policies have contributed to the erosion of the American Dream.

Drawing from insights in both chapter one: *Exploring the Conceptual and Empirical Foundations of U.S. Immigration Policy and its Impact on the American Dream* and chapter two: *Critical Analysis of U.S. Immigration Policy and the American Dream*, this research presented varied results that validate the thesis. Quantitative analysis highlighted limited access to many aspects of life like employment, education, healthcare and legal access to citizenship. Whereas some immigrants have experienced limited progress- particularly in areas such as homeownership or high educational levels- these successes are frequently undermined by institutional challenges. Meanwhile, qualitative

analysis revealed how fear of deportation, healthcare and fair employment contributed to emotional and social exclusion. Evidence from both qualitative and quantitative sources shows that these policies have reduced the chances for many immigrants to gain upward mobility, civil integration and personal security which are key elements of the American Dream. Therefore, this study confirmed that the erosion of the American Dream is both structural and empirical.

Additionally, the study met its stated objectives: to critically analyze immigration policies, assess their implications on the American Dream and provide evidence-based insights into immigrant realities. Each of these aims were fulfilled through a structured methodological approach combining historical analysis with empirical analysis. Consequently, the study successfully mapped out the socio-political landscape shaping immigration in America and presented a comprehensive analysis that reflects the experiences of affected individuals. Thereby, meeting its academic and social objectives.

Furthermore, the study underscored that the American Dream is no longer a universal ideal accessible to all, but rather a privileged state influenced by legal status, origin and economic means. While some immigrants do succeed, their success is often limited or undermined by systematic barriers. Thus, this study returns to the original gap, highlighting how policy frameworks have changed the boundaries of the American Dream.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the insights gained, this research faced several limitations. Due to time constraints, the scope of primary data collection was limited. Additionally, while the methods used were appropriate for the scope of this study, future research may expand them to include a comprehensive analysis of immigrant groups through interviews or surveys conducted in the United States. Another limitation is the ongoing immigration policy changes under the current Trump

administration which imposed and shifted many foreign policies. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge these limitations, as they may affect the generalization of the findings.

List of Recommendations

Given to these limitations, future research needs to involve broader data collection efforts. This includes conducting interviews with a more diverse population of immigrants across different legal status, regions and age groups in the United States to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how immigration policies affect different population.

Suggested Future Research Titles

One possible direction is a qualitative study on “The American Dream: A Qualitative Study of Immigrants’ Experiences Under U.S. Immigration Policies” which would explore personal narratives to gain deeper insights into the impact of immigration policies. Another valuable study recommendation is “Shifting Borders: The Impact of U.S. immigration Policy Changes on Diverse Immigrant Communities” emphasizing how different communities have experienced current shifts in immigration policy and enforcement. Furthermore, exploring comparative studies between U.S. immigration policies and those of other nations would offer a better understanding of global patterns.

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة لتحديد العلاقة الكامنة بين تبدد الحلم الأمريكي وسياسات الهجرة في أمريكا، من خلال تحليل التغييرات الحالية في السياسات حول المفاهيم الاقتصادية الكامنة به بناء على ما استجد من سياساتها. كون هذه الأخيرة تسعى لدحض فرص العديد من المهاجرين في تحقيق رقيهم الاقتصادي والاجتماعي بتهميشهم من أسس وقيم هذا الحلم. غير ان هذه السياسات التقييدية ساهمت في نقص فرص العديد من المهاجرين لتحقيقه، لا سيما اجتماعيا واقتصاديا. تعتمد الدراسة منهجا بحثيا مدمجا لتحليل هذه الظاهرة بشكل نقدي، مع التركيز على تطور سياسات الهجرة خلال الفترة الممتدة من عام 2000 الى عام 2022. كما تأخذ الدراسة بعين الاعتبار السياق التاريخي للهجرة الى الولايات المتحدة، بدءا من الهجرات الأوروبية المبكرة وصولا إلى تنوع المجتمعات المهاجرة المعاصرة، بهدف تقديم اعرق لتغير سياسات الهجرة بمرور الزمن. وتظهر النتائج ان السياسات الصارمة قد أثرت بشكل كبير على قدرة المهاجرين في الوصول الى فرص العمل والاستقرار الاقتصادي وتحقيق الحلم الأمريكي، حيث كشفت النتائج النوعية عن صراعات نفسية واجتماعية يعاني منها المهاجرون، بينما أظهرت النتائج الكمية تراجعا ملحوظا في فرص التوظيف والترقي الاجتماعي. وبشكل عام، تسهم هذه الدراسة في تقديم

فهم شامل لتأثير هذه السياسات على تقليص قدرة المهاجرين على تحقيق الحلم الأمريكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحلم الأمريكي، تآكل، الهجرة، السياسات.