

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The Strength of Institutions and Ideas:
Immigrant Access to Public Health Insurance

Thesis for Master's Degree in Public Policy
Under the Supervision of Professor Johnny Gal

Submitted by:
Mara Sheftel
I.D. 328657390

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1. Abstract

As international migration increases worldwide, attention has turned to the link between immigration and social policy and more specifically the level of access to welfare services granted to immigrants. Comparative social policy research indicates that policy outcomes regulating immigrant access between different countries varies widely. This study focuses on immigrant access to public health insurance in order to determine the variables that impact these policy outcomes.

In order to answer this question a qualitative comparative methodology is employed here. The study compares immigrant access to public health insurance in the United States, Canada and Israel. These countries were selected based on a most similar research design because they are all classified as settler nations with liberal welfare states and thus both their immigration policy and health policy can be compared. Following the examination of primary and secondary resources highlighting the historical development of immigration and health policy in each country, as well as current policy in both spheres, an analytical framework is applied in order to systematically compare current policy between the countries.

Variations in immigrant access to public health insurance policy emanate from differences in health insurance institutions coupled with divergent ideas impacting immigration policy. Historical institutionalism and the impact of ideas are critical to explaining the divergent policy outcomes between the United States, Canada and Israel specifically in terms of immigrant access to public health insurance. Moreover, this study reinforces the capacity of these theories to explain variations in social policy outcomes in general.