

# Nativism in Higher Education

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## 1 Background

Nativism has plagued the cultural values and oftentimes reflected in policymaking in the United States. Current policies have extreme ramifications on underrepresented student groups in American higher education. It continues to promote white supremacy and racial uniformity that are distorting the perceptions toward the non-native. This divisive approach is targeting undocumented immigrants, marginalized populations, and racial microaggressions towards people of color. These groups are confronted with several predicaments such as college access and retention, funding, and psychological trauma. Three specific policy initiatives from the Trump administration will be explored further: 1.) reduction of financial aid; 2.) abolishing the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program; and 3.) termination of affirmative action in higher education institutions (HEIs) (Williams & Grande, 2021). Thus, such legislations are central to the ideologies of Nativism and causing a trickle-down effect on campus climate and significant decline on the numerical representation of diverse groups.

## 2 Definition and History

To understand Nativism further, it is uprooted from a nationalistic and racial construct. Huber et al. (2008, as cited in Higham, 1955) stated that the concept of Nativism is the “intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (i.e. ‘un-American’) connections” (p. 4). In addition, Nativism practices the right to dominance and oppress the non-native that justifies privilege and benefit (Lorde, 1992). This ideology stimulates fear or perceived threat from a foreigner with a strong advocacy for nationalism (Huber et al., 2008). In the context of Nativism in America, it is congruent to white supremacy that opposes any type of cultural and racial differences. Therefore, it retains the white values that are injected in politics and legislations resulting in exclusion of many marginalized groups (Huber et al., 2008).

According to Young (2020), 13.2% of the population were comprised of immigrants who came from Europe, China, and Mexico during the 1920s. The rising number of immigrants in the U.S. were strongly resented by the American working class because of labor competition and a risk to their quality of life (Young, 2020). Racial tensions and xenophobia also exacerbated among these groups. Nativists pushed more strict policies on immigration and were eventually passed. Efforts on immigration restrictions led to a steep decline of immigrants for four decades since the Great Depression (Balderrama & Rodríguez, 2006). As a result, there was a dire need of laborers during the economic downturn in the U.S. To solve this, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 signed by former president Lyndon B. Johnson became a pivotal moment for immigrants (Kammer, 2015). It abolished race and ethnicity restrictions in the U.S. and by the 1980s, the percentage of immigrants grew exponentially and continues to increase up to the present day (Kammer, 2015). However, this legislation caused an issue of a ballooning number of undocumented population in the country (Kammer, 2015). More laws were passed on border enforcement and criminal sanctions, but also creating opportunities of legalization for these immigrants (Young, 2020). Despite these measures, undocumented immigration remains as an inherent problem in the political and social spectrum in the U.S. (Bjorklund Jr., 2018).

## 3 Policy Issues

Donald Trump’s significant budget cut proposal to higher education on 2018 will impact its affordability and create barriers to the low-income, undocumented, and underrepresented students (Williams & Grande, 2021). The budget was later rejected by congress and unwilling to restructure the student aid programs under his proposal (Flores, 2017). According to the report, financial aid programs will experience huge shortfalls such as Pell Grant, Federal Work-Study, and Opportunity Grants (Kreighbaum, 2017). Low-income undocumented students are also relying on In-State Residence Tuition (ISRT) that reduces the cost of their tuition (Ngo & Hinojosa, 2021). The proposal stated that the following HEIs will not receive funding remaining 0% for the upcoming years: Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and Asian-American and Native Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) (Kreighbaum, 2017). Instead, the federal funding will be invested in erecting the Mexico-U.S. wall and military construction (American Council on Education, 2019). Stemmed from this Nativist sentiment, the policy will worsen the issue of student debt and inequality, widen the racial wealth gap, and make higher education less affordable (Kreighbaum, 2017). By restricting such resources for these groups, it is a visible manifestation to the core component of Nativism.

According to a study by Bjorklund Jr. (2018), 12% of Americans believe that immigration is one of the biggest problems in the country. In addition, 98,000 undocumented students graduate from high school (Ngo & Hinojosa, 2021); however only 10% are able to finish postsecondary education (Gonzales, 2007). Without an established legal immigration status, undocumented students are not qualified for federal aid and lack of access to campus resources (Valdivia et al., 2021). DACA is an executive order signed by former president Barack Obama in 2012, that legally protects undocumented immigrants from deportation, obtain social security numbers and work authorization (Bjorklund Jr., 2018). Moreover, DACA created a sense of belonging and expanded higher education opportunities (Muñoz et al., 2018). The Trump administration rescinded the DACA program in 2017, but the federal courts ordered an injunction the following year that leaves the policy in limbo (Bjorklund Jr., 2018). In 2021, president Joe Biden had issued an executive order reinstating DACA (The White House, 2021). Repeated efforts of overturning this policy expresses an anti-immigrant rhetoric that traces back to the hegemonic principles of Nativism (Davidson, 2017). Thus, Nativism is germane to race and citizenship status within our social and political climate (Muñoz et al., 2018).

Dupper and Sankaran (2014) stated that while affirmative action presents dangers of stereotyping and undermining underrepresented groups, they both confirmed that it is still “a necessary tool for integrating disadvantaged groups into a democratic society, thereby breaking what would otherwise be an endlessly continuing cycle of poverty, subservience and social inequality” (p. 28). Racial integration has almost become an idealistic thought due to the odd dynamics that exist in the contemporary academic world. Trump’s agenda of putting an end to affirmative action is an example of perturbing the American people on the issues of race (Williams & Grande, 2021). The Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a lawsuit against two Ivy League schools, particularly Harvard and Yale University, for racial discrimination against white students

(Jaschik, 2020). The verdict was released two years later and proved that both universities have discriminated against white applicants during their admissions process (Williams & Grande, 2021). Through this example, adopting exclusionary policies in race-conscious admissions are grounded in Nativism and white supremacy (Huber et al., 2008). The search for racial sensitivity has created risky environments for students and faculty resulting in stigmatization and operating in race-based inequalities.

## 4 Analysis and Limitations

Trump's presidential victory in 2016 attributed a series of campaign promises and agenda that tapped into the fears of many Americans (Young, 2020). Trump's famous slogan, *Make America Great Again* was a call to action that echoed a Nativist rhetoric (Duch et al., 2022). As higher education becomes a specific victim for this, the looming impact of government policies still lies on the exclusion of race. According to a study by Amuedo-Dorantes and Sparber (2014), granting financial aid opportunities for undocumented students are effective in increasing access in postsecondary education and achieving educational attainment by 4%. Financial aid programs are integral to student success and social mobility. In addition, skilled immigrants have contributed significantly to the U.S. economy by increasing tax revenue and bolstering the workforce needs (Duch et al., 2022). Research has found that immigration is directly proportional to innovation; with a 10% increase of skilled immigrant workers, there is a growth of invention by 4% (Duch et al., 2022). With a clear implementation of Nativist policies through financial cutbacks, college enrollment will decrease and deter potential migrants (Duch et al., 2022). Providing subsidies for underrepresented and undocumented students still have its limitations due to the rising cost of tuition (Amuedo-Dorantes & Sparber, 2014). Financial aid policies help minimize these issues, but with the systemic barriers and lack of resources driven by Nativism, these students are more susceptible to college withdrawal and debt (Ngo & Hinojosa, 2021).

The elimination of the DACA program has negative impacts toward undocumented students. They experience constant fear of deportation and racial microaggressions on campus due to their immigration status (Muñoz & Vigil, 2018). Nativism comes in a form of verbal insults that is derogatory towards the marginalized groups. An example of this is the constant usage of the word "illegals", which is dehumanizing and creates a hostile environment (Muñoz et al., 2018). Undocumented students internalize these emotions that lead to self-harm, post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD), and loss of identity (Muñoz & Vigil, 2018). While the DACA program has improved the livelihood of the undocumented immigrants, it continues to trigger Nativism that becomes further accepted and normalized (Pope, 2016). The funding initiatives for the DACA program remains a priority for many HEIs; however, the limitations continue to persist due to unhealthy campus climates (Muñoz & Vigil 2018). According to Ramirez (2021), Nativism is prevalent within the hidden corners of HEIs based on the following student experiences: 1.) lack of knowledge and training on immigration policies from higher education professionals (HEPs); 2.) limited college access; and 3.) discriminatory policies on campus. While the DACA program has supported undocumented students efficiently, it is still not a viable solution and continues to be scrutinized from a Nativist stance. Race and background are common factors for discrimination especially in admitting underrepresented students (Alon, 2015).

While affirmative action is another way of achieving campus diversity in the U.S., it remains to be controversial for decades (Moore, 2018). Trump's policies on ending affirmative action

have shifted to white protectionism and upheld color-blindness in race-conscious admissions through these following actions: 1.) challenged the admissions policies on HEIs for discriminating against white students; 2.) reversed Obama's affirmative action guidelines on race-based admissions that are utilized to diversify campuses; and 3.) questioned the constitutionality of the HBCU Capital Investment Fund before increasing the funding for HBCUs, and eventually reduced the funding for low-income students (Smith & King, 2020). Overall, the Trump administration's policies still have an unwavering resistance to racial integration that is powerfully situated in Nativism and white alliance (Smith & King, 2020). Affirmative action in the U.S. is salient in achieving a diverse student body and improves cultural competency (Nguyen, 2019). However, financial struggles continue to rise and income can still be an indicator in college admissions that only benefits wealthy families (Nguyen, 2019). Systemic racism has contributed to this wealth gap and until both of these issues are eradicated, affirmative action will not be enough to promote diversity on campus.

## 5 Recommendations

According to Torres et al. (1998), HEIs need more work on executing policies that have a tremendous impact on campus diversity. More often, this is a painstaking task and laborious to do operationally. However, HEIs play a key role in mitigating the barriers of racial discrimination and unhealthy campus climate (Torres et al., 1998). To combat Nativism, HEPs must be better equipped when formulating strategies through the following recommendations: 1.) improve knowledge on financial aid and immigration policies; 2.) proper diversity training to increase awareness; and 3.) enhance student access (Delgado, 2022).

The systemic lack of knowledge on financial aid and immigration policies among HEPs remain as a concern (Torres et al., 1998). Students need support in obtaining the accurate information about their opportunities, but they are confronted with Nativist biases and discriminatory practices due to their race or immigration status (Delgado, 2022). HEIs cannot reverse the legislation on the federal level, but HEIs can serve as a source of information to help underrepresented students overcome these barriers (Delgado, 2022). Another practice that needs attention is providing more diversity training programs and assessing campus climate across various departments within HEIs (Torres et al., 1998). Learning about the outcomes of affirmative action is crucial when it comes to hiring staff and implementing admissions criteria (Torres et al., 1998). HEIs must also reinforce their mission statements and be familiar with the national issues about diversity to advocate the rights of underrepresented groups (Torres et al., 1998). Lastly, HEIs need to increase access and proactive outreach to ensure that students of all backgrounds regardless of race get a better education. An ineffective framework leads to ethical concerns and conflict that fails to meet the students' needs (Delgado, 2022).

## 6 Conclusion

Today's Nativism are aimed towards the marginalized groups, perceiving them as a threat to the country through crime, terrorism, economic drain, and abuse of government resources (Young, 2020). The ideology of Nativism is premised on 'us vs. them' perspective, and therefore considering non-white communities as 'other' (Newth, 2021). Trump's vision of America stressed a more aggressive approach on immigration reform, greatly affecting the low-income and marginalized groups. The administration's policy initiatives were consequential to higher education focusing on: 1.) reduction of financial aid; 2.) rescinding the DACA program; and 3.) eradicating affirmative action in admissions (Williams &

Grande, 2021). Furthermore, these policies were meant to safeguard the American national identity and thus, protecting the interests of the native-born population (Gopal & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2020). Recommendations for HEPs are: 1.) knowledge on financial aid and immigration policies; 2.) diversity training to assess campus climate issues for positive student experience; and 3.) improve access and retention for marginalized students (Torres et al., 1998). In conclusion, the role of HEPs is fundamental in addressing the diversity issues embedded in Nativism. HEPs have an important responsibility to stay abreast of policies and remain cognizant of their actions to foster an inclusive environment for all students.

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