



Dismantling Racial Discrimination Fact Sheet: **RACISM AND IMMIGRATION**

Racism and immigration policy in the U.S. intersect in several significant ways, both historically and in contemporary practice:

Historical Foundations

Immigration laws have long reflected racial hierarchies. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first federal law to ban a specific racial group from immigrating. The Immigration Act of 1924 established national origin quotas that heavily favored Northern and Western Europeans while severely restricting immigration from Asia, Africa, and Southern/Eastern Europe. These laws weren't reformed until 1965, when the Hart-Celler Act eliminated racial quotas.

Contemporary Policy Impacts

Modern immigration policies often have disparate racial effects, even when not explicitly race-based. For example, prioritizing certain types of skilled workers or family reunification can perpetuate existing demographic patterns. Policies affecting undocumented immigrants disproportionately impact Latino communities, while refugee and asylum policies affect different racial and ethnic groups depending on global conflicts and U.S. foreign policy priorities.

Enforcement Disparities

Immigration enforcement frequently shows racial disparities. Border enforcement resources are concentrated along the southern border rather than the northern border, despite undocumented immigrants arriving from various regions. Interior enforcement through workplace raids and traffic stops often occurs in communities with large Latino populations. Studies have found that immigration enforcement can increase during periods of economic stress or political tension, sometimes correlating with anti-immigrant rhetoric that uses racialized language.



Criminal Justice Intersection

The intersection of immigration and criminal justice systems creates additional racial dynamics. Programs like 287(g) and Secure Communities, which facilitate cooperation between local law enforcement and immigration authorities, can lead to increased deportations in communities of color. This can create fear that discourages reporting crimes or cooperating with police.

Public Discourse and Perception

Immigration debates often involve racialized language and assumptions about who belongs in America. Research shows that public support for immigration policies can vary based on the perceived race or ethnicity of immigrants, with more restrictive attitudes often correlating with concerns about cultural change or economic competition.

These intersections demonstrate how immigration policy operates within broader systems of racial inequality, even when policies aren't explicitly race-based. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analyzing both historical patterns and contemporary debates about immigration reform.

Learn more [here](https://www.osfphila.org/justice-and-peace/racism/).