F1-Visa Issuances as an Instrument of Immigration: An Investigation on Economic Discrimination

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1 Introduction

There exists a prevalent misconception that migrating to economically affluent nations offers a prominent avenue for upward socioeconomic mobility. This misconception is supported by the widely acknowledged neoclassical labor market theory, which has garnered extensive support in past literature. This theory posits that individuals opt to migrate to more economically developed countries to optimize their income potential, considering disparities in wages and employment conditions between their home country and the destination (Massey et al., 1993).

However, the existing literature on neoclassical theories overlooks crucial factors, such as the distinct labor market experiences of immigrants compared to native populations, and the pivotal role of destination countries as gatekeepers of migration (Algan et al., 2010; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2002; Dancygier & Laitin, 2014; Riach & Rich, 2002). The latter is particularly significant since international migration hinges on host countries' willingness to admit said migrants in the first place, regardless of considerations of push and pull factors such as the differences in labor markets as posited by the studies on the neoclassical theories.

This thesis focuses on the United States as a prime destination for migrants seeking enhanced job prospects and quality of life, emphasizing the country's border control measures and immigration policies, notably visa issuance protocols. Furthermore, it delves into the contentious landscape of immigration debates within the U.S., where concerns about economic repercussions on local economies, native employment opportunities, wages, and tax burdens fuel anti-immigration sentiments (Dancygier & Donnelly 2013; Hanson et al. 2007; Malhotra et al., 2013; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001).

Amidst these debates, apprehensions surrounding undocumented or illegal immigration loom large, prompting calls for stringent immigration controls in the U.S., a nation often viewed as a leading global democracy. This push extends to leveraging visa issuances as a mechanism for regulating immigration flows, including categories like the F1 student visa.

Hence, this thesis hypothesizes that the U.S. potentially practices economic discrimina-

tion against F1 visa applicants from less affluent origins, driven by concerns over unauthorized migration and as a form of utilizing immigration tools to control the entry of migration to have the current demographic of immigrants suit the preferences of the American public.

To test this hypothesis rigorously, an exploration of literature on the economics of migration will precede an examination of potential economic discrimination through F1 visa allocations. Subsequent quantitative and qualitative analyses will then explore the impact of GDP per capita on F1 visa issuance rates, culminating in an evaluation of findings determining the validity of the proposed hypothesis.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Why Migration Happens: the Neoclassical Labor Market Perspective

There has been a variety of literature available on the convergence between migration and economics, as economic factors have long since played a major role in bolstering or hindering migration (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014; Massey et al, 1993; Taylor, 1987). In this chapter, I will go over the oldest and best known theory of international migration, the neoclassical labor market theory, which has created this misconception that in order to gain socioeconomic mobility, people are able to simply migrate to more economically developed countries with higher wages and greater labor productivity. Moreover, I will also explain how this misconception largely precludes the often overlooked role of the destination country or state in selecting which migrants to admit in the first place, as well as other factors such as the state of the labor market in said countries of destination. I will also include findings and results from past literature describing the different preferences that Americans have regarding which immigrants they want entering the United States. These preferences via issuances demonstrate the power the country of destination has as immigration gatekeepers, and how visas can function as an observable indicator of these preferences.

Looking at previous literature, a big pillar of the economics of migration is the neoclassical labor market theory. It has been called one of the oldest and best known theories of international migration, and was one of the original theories used to explain labor migration in the process of economic development. Throughout the years, while there have been discussions of other theories of economic migration, the neoclassical labor market theory continues to retain popularity throughout the years due to the fact that it is a simple and compelling explanation of migration. This theory has in turn strongly shaped public thinking and provided the intellectual foundation for a lot of future immigration policies (Massey et al., 1993).

In general, the basic neoclassical theory determines that the main driving mechanism for the flow of international migration are the calculations and choices individuals make based on which country would best maximize their income in regards to the differences in wages and unemployment conditions between the potential countries of destination and their own country, while also taking into account migration costs (Massey, et al., 1993). This means that if a person were to live in X country, they would want to migrate to Y country instead of staying in X simply because there is a positive wage differential in moving to country Y.

This general theory is a broader, more general, macroeconomic perspective to migration. In reality, a more microeconomics approach is what occurs instead. This version factors in the expected earnings gap and not the real wage differentials between the potential country of destination and the country of origin. Potential migrants, being rational actors, would make calculations to move where they can be most productive given their skills, resulting in their expected discounted net returns to be the greatest in comparison than it would be in any other country, over some time horizon. However, before these migrants can obtain the higher wages associated with greater labor productivity they have earned by migrating to a different country they first have to invest in the material costs of traveling, maintenance while moving and looking for work, effort learning the new culture, as well as account for potential social and psychological costs.

This updated cost-benefit calculation and whether or not potential migrants would expect a positive or a negative net return from movement ultimately decides whether they end up migrating (Massey et al., 1993).

Massey, et al. has simplified the micro-theory's individual decision making process into this equation included in Figure 1 below:

$$\mathrm{ER}(0) = \int_0^n [P_1(t)P_2(t)Y_d(t) - P_3(t)Y_o(t)]e^{-rt}dt - C(0) \tag{1}$$

Figure 1: Individual decision making process (Massey, et al., 1993)

ER(0) would be the expected net return to migration calculated just before the time of potential departure at time (0); t would be for time; P1(t) would be the probability of avoiding deportation from the area of destination (with the value being 1.0 for legal migrants and, 1.0 for undocumented migrants); P2(t) would be the probability of employment at the destination; Yd(t) would be the earnings of any potential employment acquired at the place of destination; P3(t) would be the probability of employment in the community of origin; Yo(t) would be the earnings of any potential employment in the community of origin; r would be discount factor; and C(0) is the sum total of the costs of movement (including any psychological and social costs) (Massey, et al., 1993).

For individuals looking to migrate, the ER(0), or the expected net return, as the result of this equation would determine whether or not they should migrate. Theoretically, if the value is positive for a potential destination, all rational actors would choose to migrate. If it is negative, then the rational choice would be to stay, and if it is zero, then the potential migrant would be indifferent towards both staying or moving (Massey, et al., 1993).

According to this equation, international migration would also be caused by geographic differences in supply and demand for labor, as that will affect the wages offered in each country. Countries that have a larger supply of labor relative to capital would have a low market wage, and countries with a limited supply of labor relative to capital would have a

high market wage. The resulting difference in wages would incentivize workers to move from low-wage countries to high-wage countries (Massey et al., 1993). Low-wage countries tend to be a term synonymous with the Global South or lesser-economically developed countries. This has led to a misunderstood consensus in the academia and the public consciousness that socioeconomic mobility can be easily achieved via migrating to a comparatively higher income country, usually in the Global North (Royal Geographical Society, 2023).

The prevalence of this belief is supported by the fact that the largest increase in trends of migration are from migrants residing in Global South countries to countries in the Global North. Figure 2 shows this as the global migrant stock that's emigrating from the South to the North has had the biggest increase (by almost 100 million migrants) compared to any other pattern of migration in the past 60 years. (Leblang & Peters, 2022).

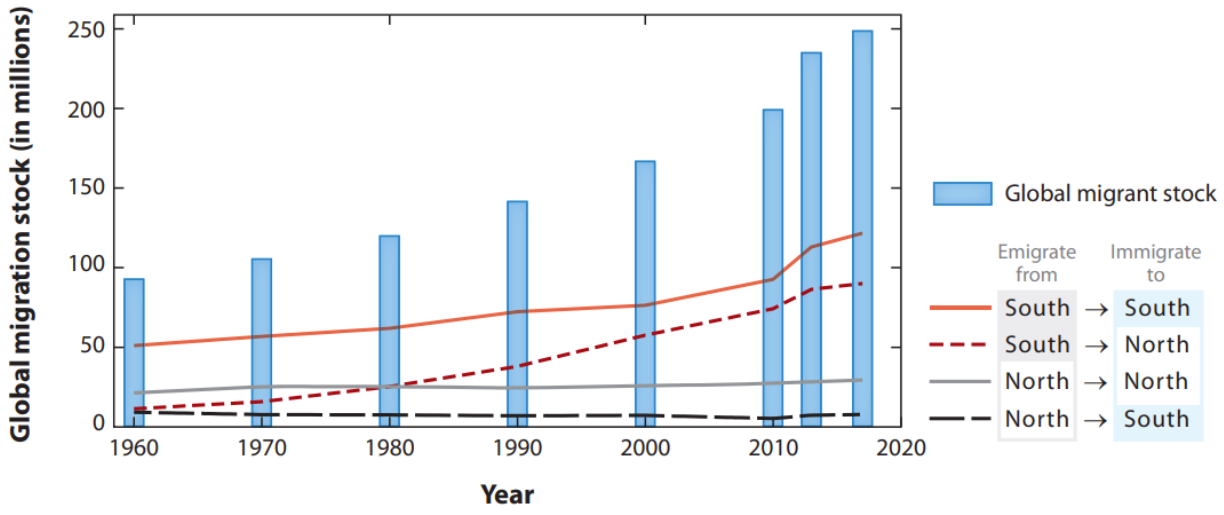

Figure 2: Migration across global corridors, 1960–2017 (Leblang & Peters, 2022)

2.2 Gaps in the Neoclassical Labor Market Perspective

However, recent literature disproves the neoclassical labor market equation as a working method in determining the occurrence and flow of migration (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). The next sections will discuss in detail the issues with the previous literature on neoclassical

labor market theory, including misrepresentation of certain concepts as well as significant missing factors that are not accounted for in the theory's migration equation.

2.2.1 Issues with methods false assumptions overgeneralizing migrants

Other literature discussing the aforementioned neoclassical labor market theory (the microeconomics perspective in specific) concluded that empirical work on immigration's labor market impacts in Europe and the United States has produced ambiguous findings with many studies concluding that such wage effects are small or nonexistent (Hainmueller et al., 2011; Hainmueller & Hiscox 2010). The models used in previous studies did not differentiate between low and high skilled migration, and when that was accounted for using data from both the 2003 European Social Survey data and from a nationwide U.S. survey both concluded that in contrast to predictions where low and high skilled workers were against similarly skilled migrants, both surveys show that higher skilled natives are actually more supportive of all types of immigration. They have also added that any consensus about immigration's negative economic impacts among natives is not a notion shared by economists nor is it a view grounded in economic reality (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014).

2.2.2 Labor market discrimination in the destination countries

An important part of the neoclassical labor market's equation on determining migration is the earnings of any potential employment acquired at the place of destination. One overlooked factor in this theory is that it implicitly assumes that migrants would receive the average or expected wage in the country of destination, which is rarely the case. Upon migrating, immigrants will not be able to enter or experience the labor market in this new country of destination with the same ease natives will.

In Western European countries foreign born workers are, on average, twice as likely to be jobless as are natives For many groups, this disadvantage persists or even grows over generations (Algan et al., 2010). This is true for many European countries, which being in

the Global North, and often having comparatively higher wages, are often countries that are accepting rather than sending migrants. Figure 3 will show that countries like Norway and Germany all have ratios of foreign-born unemployment to native born unemployment that are bigger than 1.5.

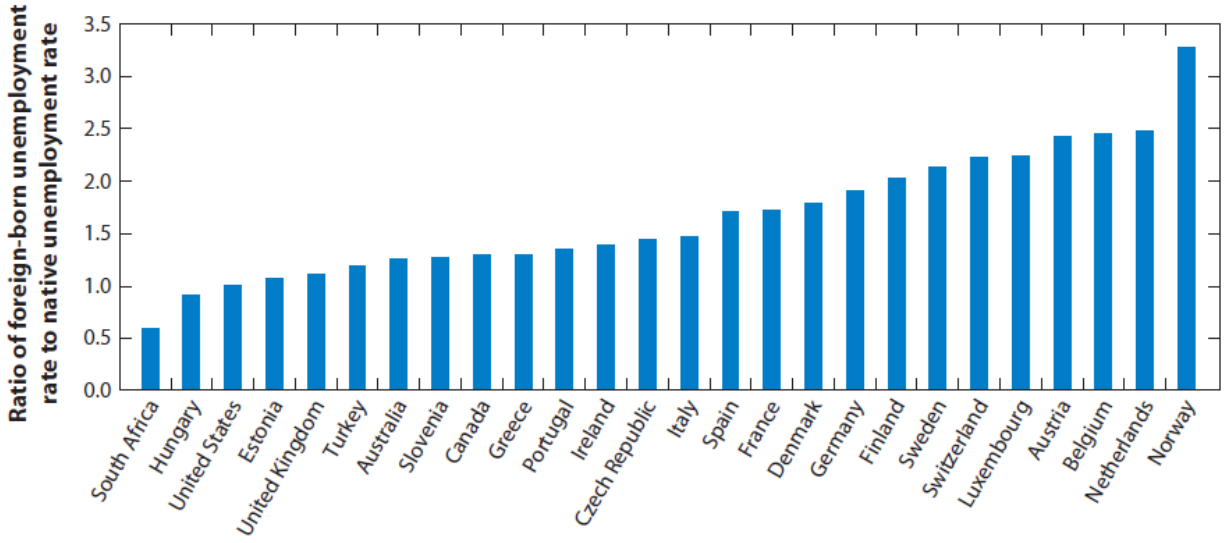

Figure 3: Foreign-born unemployment rate relative to native-born unemployment rate (2009 or latest available year) (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014)

While this is not the case for the U.S., as current OECD shows around the same results, with 3.9% of the native-born population being unemployed and 3.5% of the foreign born population being unemployed (OECD, n.d.), this does not mean that employment discrimination no longer exists in the U.S. When tests that control for skill level but vary ascriptive traits including immigration, the results found that substantial discrimination still persists (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2002; Dancygier & Laitin, 2014; Riach & Rich, 2002). Bertrand and Mullainathan conducted correspondence tests that had employers in the U.S. compare sets of C.V.s (with the employee characteristic that was thought to be the source of discrimination varying between applicants), as well as subsequent correspondence tests, have shown that similar levels of significant discrimination can be based on immigrant status, religion (with a greater sensitivity towards hypothetical applicants being Muslim than any other religion, and/or region of origin (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014).

Moreover, labor market discrimination is part of a bigger problem, as returns to a free market in labor are actually reduced in efficiency given that these existing labor market discriminations prevent the optimal allocation of jobs which are oftentimes to the detriment of immigrants. A migrant's immigrant status as well as lack of employment options and social network means that they are more likely to be pushed into low-skilled positions and experience occupational mismatch compared to their native-born counterparts, regardless of their actual level of human capital (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014; Heath & Cheung, 2007).

2.2.3 Role of countries of destination in controlling migration

For both the micro and macroeconomics theory of the neoclassical labor market theory, Massey, et al. concludes that a government's main powers in controlling immigration was through either regulating the labor markets in sending and/or receiving countries, or through creating policies that affect earnings in both countries or policies that aim to increase the costs of migration (Massey, et al., 1993).

What neoclassicists tend to overlook are the other significant roles the country of destination plays in determining the flows of international migration. Since, the neoclassical theory only considers the labor market as the primary mechanism with which international flows of labor are induced, other kinds of markets or policies according to this theory would not have any important effect on international migration. Whereas, policies that directly dictate the number and types of migrants entering the country, deeply influencing the flow of migration, are not considered as a measure of migration control within his theory. These policies would render the neoclassical labor market calculations like the probability of employment at the country of destination and the potential earnings they'd make there useless if the migrant cannot be able to enter the country in the first place.

Hence, while theoretically with the neoclassical economic framework, the returns to the free movement of labor should ideally be strongly positive, in reality these advantages are generally insufficiently realized given that receiving countries would intentionally increase

the transaction costs of migration (often selectively) via constraints such as border control measures and issuances of official documentation to stay in said receiving country (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014).

2.3 Country of Destination's Native Born Public Opinion Towards Immigration

While a population's attitudes may not directly result in the creation of policies and legislature, said attitudes can still influence and be reflected in national politics. Past literature has shown that what has become especially politically salient in the last 20 years, is the negative attitude and response to immigration. Said literature typically discusses the adverse effects immigration can have on local economies, native wages, jobs, or tax burdens, which are all detriments that native-borns directly observe and experience first hand (Dancygier & Donnelly 2013; Hanson et al. 2007; Malhotra et al., 2013; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001).

In reality, the loss of jobs and the closing of many local manufacturing firms in the Global North, are oftentimes due to other phenomena such as globalization at work, and not necessarily immigration itself (Autor et al., 2016). Reviews of literature from political economy opinion articles show that this misconception in blaming immigration has not yet considered factors like trade openness, financial flows, offshoring, increased automation, and use of labor saving technology. These factors have all contributed to the reduced support for immigration among the elite (especially the business community) and from the mass public in general in the Global North (Leblang & Peters, 2022).

Despite discussion on immigration typically focusing on the negative aspects of it, in actuality it generates a lot of positive externalities that help host countries achieve international policy objectives, strengthens international trade and investment networks, and contributes to the general spread of democracy. As aforementioned in the previous section, while in the United States, the support for increasing immigration is at its highest recorded level (Besco, 2021), which can be seen in Figure 4, anti-immigration and antiglobalization have still found

major success in many countries of the Global North, with the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016 being the most prominent example of its prevalent popularity (Leblang & Peters, 2022).

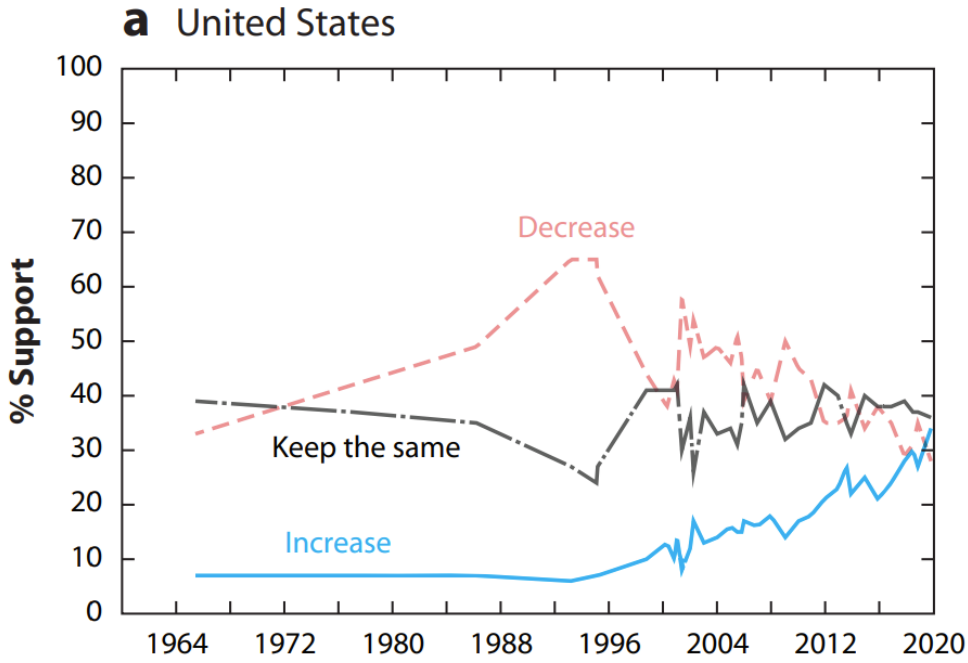

Figure 4: U.S. opinion data are from Gallup (2021); respondents were asked, "In your view, should immigration be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?" (Leblang & Peters, 2022)

In addition to the decline in business support for immigration due to the aforementioned misdirected blame, immigration has increased in opposition to and salience as an issue for the small, but important set of elite (business owners) as well as becoming a contentious topic for a plurality of the population in the Global North. This has unfortunately spurred the support for right and far-right politicians and parties that have recently undergone a resurgence (Barone et al., 2016; Becker & Fetzer, 2016; Billiet & DeWitte, 1995; Dinas et al., 2019; Knigge, 1998; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2002; Mayda et al., 2018; Norris, 2005; Van der Brug et al., 2000).

Part of why this negative perspective on immigration persists, and has even increased in recent years, is because immigrants are a useful scapegoat for anti-globalization political

entrepreneurs. They are globalization made visible (Moore, 1987) and despite the recent uptick in public opinion regarding immigration, actual immigration policy is relatively more restrictive than it was in the past, this is because immigrants are much more visible now than they have been before. While immigrants' share of world population is only approximately 3%, due to declining birth rates in the Global North, their share of population in many countries has been increasing. (Özden et al., 2011). Immigrants may also feel less pressure now to assimilate due to increased acceptance of cultural diversity within mainstream society (Zhou, 1997).

Looking at the COVID-19 pandemic as a recent case study, while businesses are reopening, labor demand is increasing, international travel is now accessible again, and supply chains are restarting, immigration policy still remains frozen as restrictionists now use public health concerns as an argument for more restrictive policies (Dionne & Turkmen, 2020; Leblang & Peters, 2022).

Hainmueller and Hopkins have published two widely influential articles in 2014 and 2015 both having discussed the American population's immigrant attitudes and potential reasons that might have shaped them.

First, Hainmueller and Hopkins' 2014 article was aptly titled "Public Attitudes toward Immigration" and discussed how immigration attitudes show little evidence of being strongly correlated with personal economic circumstances but are instead shaped by sociotropic concerns about its cultural and also economic impact on the nation as a whole. This pattern has held in both North America and in Western Europe as demonstrated in both observational and experimental studies included in the article (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014).

Building upon this theoretical framework, Hainmueller and Hopkins then wrote another paper the following year which focused on analyzing Americans' attitudes toward immigrants. This time they demonstrated that there is a "hidden consensus" among Americans in terms of their preferences, as across the board immigration preferences on who should be admitted into the U.S. seem to vary little even when surveying Americans with different educational

backgrounds, partisanship, labor market position, ethnocentrism, or other attributes.

Based on review on past surveys and experiments, as well as the one Hainmueller and Hopkins conducted in this 2015 paper, the underlying consensus seemed to be that Americans view educated immigrants in high status jobs favorably, whereas they view those who lack plans to work, entered without authorization, are Iraqi, or do not speak English unfavorably. During this current time of political polarization and partisanship, there being an underlying consensus that there is a preferred or "ideal" immigrant in the U.S. makes it all the more significant, as it makes void all theories explaining immigration attitudes that are based on individual level differences (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015). This once again demonstrates how an immigrant's country of origin matters. Examining attitude surveys, scholars have consistently found that native populations are sensitive to the level of ethnic and cultural differences between themselves and the various immigrant populations in the same community (Hainmueller & Hiscox, 2007; Sides & Citrin, 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004).

Cultural aspects of a migrant's country of origin are also considered by Hainmueller and Hopkins in their 2015 experiment, when predicting the success rate of admission for potential migrants. Factors from religions to manners of dress to phenotypic differences such as skin tone, while comparatively statistically less significant, still influence the probability of admission. This can be seen as applicants from four countries (China, Iraq, Sudan, and Somalia) who not only appear differently, but are from different cultures and religions do comparatively worse than the baseline Indian immigrant. Differences between these 4 and Germany (the most desired country of origin for applicants) are especially statistically significant. Respondents penalized Iraqi immigrants by 14 percentage points compared to immigrants from Germany with more ethnocentric respondents having penalized immigrants from several African and Asian countries as well. This negativity is especially observed for immigrants from countries with significant Muslim populations, but it also extends to Mexico, China, and the Philippines.

Ethnocentrism here is being defined as a predisposition toward out-groups (Kinder &

Kam, 2009), and the article does show that there are limits to the effect of ethnocentricity within respondents as when provided information on education, language, and other factors, Mexican immigrants appear to be admitted at the same rate as German immigrants (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015). While there are limits to the impact that an applicant's country of origin may have on the respondent's decision making process, the survey also showed that the shift from having the applicant be from Germany to Iraq has a more negative impact than a shift from having visited the U.S. to coming without authorization. This suggests that responses to immigrants' countries of origin are still comparatively significant, and are still able to vary in meaningful ways even with social desirability at work.

The U.S. in particular may be relatively more responsive to immigrants' region of origin. An experiment conducted in both the United States and Canada in which respondents were asked about immigrants of varying skin tone, skill level, and country of origin (Harell et al., 2012), and while Canadians also preferred high-skilled immigrants, they were indifferent in preference when it came to skin tones, which was not the case with the American respondents.

Respondents also demonstrated that an immigrant's cultural and ideological proximity to the U.S. would also play a role in their admissions. Many Americans identify strongly with their nationality and immigration concerns that have the potential to dilute national identity are amongst the most impactful kinds. Hence, attitudes toward an immigrant's admission might depend on whether or not the respondent deems them as successful in upholding American norms and values. This includes expecting immigrants to demonstrate an interest in the U.S. and its culture, and since more than ninety percent of respondents believe that English proficiency is an important element of American identity, this includes being able to fluently speak English. Immigrants who spoke fluent English had a 16.2% point difference than immigrants who had to communicate via using an interpreter.

An immigrant's education also matters, as the results of the survey showed that the more educated the immigrant presented to them, the greater the support for their admission was. Immigrant profiles with a Bachelor's degree are 19.5% more likely to gain support for

admission than immigrants without formal education. Similarly, (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015).

These results from the respondents' preferences 2015 survey further supports the conclusion Hainmueller and Hopkins reached in their earlier work, which is that native respondents prefer migrants who are able to assimilate well into American culture (i.e. preference for English fluency as it's an indicator of American ideals). This is especially true given that concerns about the nation's composition of its population are roughly 2-5 times more important than economic concerns in shaping natives' attitudes on immigration (Card et al., 2012). Moreover, despite economic concerns being less prioritized, a preference for high status jobs and higher education shows that Americans still have a preference for immigrants who, upon migrating, would contribute the most to the national economy as a productive and active member of the workforce.

Additionally, all these specific factors aside, an immigrant group can garner political salience when their size becomes high enough. Negative attitudes, especially threats and discriminatory behavior, are thought to be worsened the more the size, and subsequent salience, of the immigrant group grows (Dancygier & Laitin, 2014).

2.4 Immigration Practices that Control the Flow of Migration

2.4.1 Policies

Throughout history, despite being touted as a country whose population is described as a melting pot of diverse cultures and ethnicities, the U.S. has passed their fair share of major restrictionist policies which target specific groups of migrants from immigrating into the country.

Legislation placing broad restrictions on types of immigrants based on ethnicity and national origins first started with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, also known as the Angell Treaty, that suspended the immigration of all Chinese laborers for 10 years, and required every Chinese person traveling in or out of the country to carry a certificate which

contained their type of employment (U.S. Department of State, n.d.a).

Congress also enacted its first widely restrictive immigration law with the 1917 Immigration Act, which was borne from post World War worry about national security. This Act created an "Asiatic Barred Zone" that prevented any migrant (besides Japanese and Filipino migrants) from this geographic region from entering into the U.S. (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

As the literacy test from the 1917 Act was not as effective at deterring and decreasing the migrant flow as previously expected, Congress introduced a measure that would only allow entry to the number of immigrants that would maintain the previous proportions of their demographics within the U.S. population. This measure resulted in the Immigration Act of 1921 that created an immigration quota set at 3% of the total population of the foreign born of each nationality in the U.S. as recorded in the 1910 census, limiting the available visas to new migrants to be capped at 350,000 (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

Asian immigrants continued to be excluded in the next piece of immigration legislation. In the Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson Reed act) the legislation further lessened the national origins quota to just 2% of the total number of people of each nationality according to the 1890 national census which has less proportion of migrants compared to natives within the U.S. population (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

These national origins quota systems remained in place until 1965 with the Immigration and Nationality act, but even then remnants of the quota systems remained with visa issuances being limited to only 20 thousand per country (Chishti et al., 2015).

Outside of the U.S., other popular countries of destination, such as European countries like Denmark or Australia, have also enacted restrictive immigration laws aiming at specific demographics of immigrants up till as recent as 2021.

Australia passed their White Australia policies in 1901, and they were a series of immigration laws that restricted non-white immigrants from entering Australia till as late as 1973. Among these policies was a dictation test that enabled immigration officers to require

any non-European migrant to pass a 50 word dictation test, initially given in any European language (National Archives of Australia, n.d.; National Museum Australia, n.d.). These policies were also meant to preserve the racial homogeneity of Australia, and they were largely successful. Records in the National Archives of Australia show that, from the time of its enactment in 1901 to 1909, only 52 people out of the 1,359 who were given the dictation test passed, with nobody after 1909 being able to pass said dictation test (National Museum Australia, n.d.).

Denmark on the other hand, passed an immigration law in 2021 that enables the government to deport asylum seekers from outside Europe. Denmark currently has one of the most restrictive immigration policies in Europe, and with this 2021 legislation, it enables Denmark to only accept refugees under the United Nation's quota system as well as enabling Denmark to move and redelegate refugees arriving on Danish soil to partner countries, by having their cases reviewed and possibly obtain protection in that country instead of in Denmark. Rasmus Stoklund, the Danish government party's immigration speaker, has even mentioned how, "If you apply for asylum in Denmark, you know that you will be sent back to a country outside Europe, and therefore we hope that people will stop seeking asylum in Denmark." (Skydsgaard, 2021)

2.4.2 Visas

Moreover, besides directly passing legislation in the form of policies, the country of destination is also able to use the issuances of immigration documentation, such as visas as a powerful tool in controlling the influx of migration.

Besides in association with country quotas as aforementioned above, or as a metric for the results of certain policies, the significance of selective visa issuances as a mechanism for immigration control are rarely discussed, leaving a gap in the literature and research when it comes to this particular area of the economics or politics of immigration. This is unfortunate, given that the issuance of visas is a good and valid indicator of a reflection

of migrant preferences in official immigration policies and practices, as it is a process that the U.S. government has historically readily implemented on oncoming migrants in order to control the eventual composition of the demographic of immigrants within the U.S. to better fit said preferences.

In the aforementioned Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, while it did end the national origins quota system, there was still the aforementioned visa cap of 20 thousand visas issued per country which initially was only applicable to countries from the Eastern Hemisphere, making it easier to migrate into the U.S. for migrants from countries in the Western Hemisphere. Then, countries in the Western Hemisphere did not have a specific country visa cap according to the Immigration Nationality Act of 1965, as they just had a general 120 thousand total limit (Chishti et al., 2015).

Even one of the latest passed immigration legislation, the Immigration Act of 1990s had sections mainly centered on visa allocations for oncoming migrants. It adjusted the visa limit for certain visa classes, specifically in regards to family based visas as it redefined the visa class to only apply to immediate relatives of American citizens. It also introduced a preference category which further narrowed the number of actually issued family based visas (101st Congress, 1990).

3 Theory and Hypothesis

As the previous sections have sufficiently established that a main power that the U.S. has as a country of destination is the ability to issue visas to control the influx of immigration, this next section will proceed to further narrow the scope of focus to observations regarding visa issuances of the F1 visa class in specific. This section will also discuss in detail why it is a suitable metric to observe any patterns indicating biases that the U.S. might have in regards to the types of migrants entering the country.

3.1 What is the F1 Visa Class, and What Does the Application Process Entail?

The F1 visa is a visa class that allows international students to be able to study in the U.S. via a Student and Exchange Visitors Program (SEVP). Out of all the visa classes that enable students from other countries to study abroad in the U.S., such as the J and M classes, the F1 visa remains consistently the most common visa for an international student to hold (Department of State "Non-Immigrant Visa Statistics", n.d.).

While not particularly extensive the application process may take a long time due to the amount of moving parts involved all throughout the process. The first step as a prospective applicant would be to be admitted into an SEVP accepted institution and enrolled as a full time student. Then various kinds of documents would have to be procured, filled out, as well as paid for to prepare for the next step of the process. Such documents include, but are not limited to, the DS-160 form and fee; the SEVIS 1-901 fee to obtain the personal SEVIS ID; IELTS/TOEFL/Duolingo certification showing English Proficiency; as well as a Form I-134 and an affidavit of support should the applicant have sponsors supporting them throughout their SEVP. Arguably one of the most important documents to procure and have ready would be documents extensively proving the applicant's financial capability (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. 2023; U.S. Department of State, n.d.b, VisaGuide, 2024,)

The next step as an applicant would then be to pass the F1 visa interview, which depending on the embassy's workload and staffing could take months to schedule (Department of State (travel state. gov), n.d.; VisaGuide.World, n.d.). The applicant will be able to learn whether or not they have succeeded or failed in acquiring their visas from the consular agent as quickly as immediately after concluding the interview. In some cases more administrative processing may be required. Should the applicant be approved for the visa, however, the last step would be to pay a visa issuance fee and to make arrangements for the return of the applicant's passport with the visa included inside of it (U.S. Department of State, n.d.c).

In the case where the applicant fails to obtain approval, while the embassy typically does

not disclose the reason for rejection, generally, applicants face the bulk of complications, and are deemed unfit for the F1 visa during the interview and background check portion of the process.

During the interview, the applicant would need to convince the consular officers at the U.S. Embassy of several things. The first is that they would have strong ties to their home country throughout the duration of the SEVP and fully intend to go home after the educational program. The second is that the applicant has sufficient proof of financial capability, which includes having to bring and potentially explain the aforementioned documents in order to show that the applicant is able to fully pay all expenses of studying and living in the U.S. throughout the whole SEVP. Lastly, the applicant needs to prove that they actually are proficient in English, as the consular agent would assess whether or not the applicant's language skills match the results in their English proficiency test (VisaGuide.World, n.d).

As aforementioned, while it cannot be ascertained for sure the reason for an applicant's rejection, most people have attributed to their rejection due to insufficient finances, discrepancies in the documentation provided or inability to prove strong ties to the home country or English proficiency (Whites & Associates, 2024). Inability to provide sufficient evidence of financial capability to cover all expenses during the SEVP is among the most common basis for rejection in applying for the F1 visa. The consular agents are very stringent with their inspection of the applicant (and potential sponsors') financial records. Besides checking the applicant's bank statements, tax records, and previous pay stubs of previous employment for the last three years, other documents such as proof of previous scholarship is also examined. If the applicant is sponsored or supported by someone else that person would also have their bank statements and documents inspected. The applicant's sponsor would also need to submit a Form I-134 and an Affidavit of support stating that they do have sufficient funds to support the applicant throughout the entirety of their SEVP for the consular agents to review.

The applicant would also need to disclose that they have some form of employment or

career plans lined up after their study program as the embassy would not want the student utilizing their F1 visa to stay past their visa expiration date in the United States.

In summary, it is important to note that given how significant financial capability is in determining an F1 visa applicant's chance of success, their economic and financial background is of great importance and consideration in the period during, and leading up to the application process.

3.2 F1 Visa Issuances as a Mechanism and Metric for Immigration Control

Refocusing our discussion back to F1 visas as an instrument of migration control, similar to literature on visas in general, academic and scholarly discussion on F1 visas are subsequently also relatively sparse. Despite that, there are well-founded theories supporting the idea that F1 visas would be especially well suited as an indicator of how the U.S. uses visas as a mechanism to control for migration.

As established in the previous sections, at different moments in time, immigrants from various countries like China and Iraq were specifically targeted as an undesirable group of immigrants. Even countries such as Germany, Ireland, and Poland have all been the targets of negative nativist attitudes despite also sharing the religion, language, and/or European heritage of the native-born majority here in the U.S. (Tichenor, 2002). Much like the total number of issued visas, the number of F1 visa issuances each country gets would also provide insight to the U.S.' social preference for migrants from said countries, as an actual implemented immigration mechanism. Thus, the U.S. would theoretically subsequently allow more international students to enter from comparatively more desirable countries, and vice versa with less international students admitted from less desirable countries.

Moreover, in addition to having the same functionality as a form of quantitative metric as the number of total visas issued, the F1 visa is one of the only visa classes with a financial capability requirement, hence allowing for an interesting added dimension in the observation

and comparison of the varying totals of F1 visas issued from country to country. Said observations and comparisons would be able to provide further clarity and context in regards to potential U.S. biases to the economic development of a migrant's country of origin, in a way that just the total number of visas issued to a country, or other visa classes, would not be able to do.

Furthermore, despite the main reason of the financial capability requirement being to show to the consular agents and the U.S. government that the applicant is able to support themselves for the entire duration of their study and exchange program, it inadvertently also ensures that the U.S. government handpicks only highly skilled and highly educated individuals who would be a good fit for the labor force to be allowed entry into the U.S

Hence, if the migrant decides to stay past their visa expiration date and eventually commits to joining the U.S. workforce by applying for an employment visa, or even if they decide to stay in the U.S. permanently for other reasons (through both legal means by applying for citizenship or even illegally by staying in the U.S. after their F1 visa expires), this process ensures that the U.S. benefits from the integration of these migrants into the country regardless. Additionally, given that it is well-educated natives who are the most easily replaced by immigrants (Octaviano & Peri 2012), it would be important for the U.S. to select only similarly well-educated, if not more educated, and highly skilled immigrants to be granted admission into the U.S., should they end up replacing a native worker's place in the workforce. Past literature would also support this hypothesis as other hypotheses emphasizing immigrants' adherence to national norms and their expected economic contributions have received strong support from the general populace of the country of destination (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015).

Therefore this leads to this paper's hypothesis:

H_1: A country that has a higher GDP per capita would have a higher number of F1 visa issuances.

The U.S. already incentivized to pick the most financially able and skilled applicants, will

choose to issue more visas with relatively higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capitas.

As countries become more economically developed, the country's GDP, and subsequently its GDP per capita, would increase. While not a perfect quantitative measure of a country's standard of living given that there is no one single mechanism to encapsulate all factors that make up a country's standard of living, GDP per capita is still a widely accepted measure as it provides a broad general insight into how materially better or worse off a country is doing in terms of jobs and incomes (Shapiro, et al., 2022).

GDP per capita is calculated through getting the quantity of goods and services produced in that country, divided by its population. As a unit of measurement, it provides a general idea of the average quantity of goods and services that people in a country can afford to consume, hence it is expected that an increase in a country's GDP per capita would mean more spending and improvements in different sectors that make up a citizen's everyday life such as education, health, and environmental protection. Such improvements would then generally be expected to increase the average citizen's quality of life (Shapiro, et al., 2022).

To some extent the desired characteristics of an ideal applicant in Hainmueller and Hopkins' aforementioned 2015 experiment are also salient here in discussions regarding the GDP per capita of the applicant's country of origin affecting visa issuances. Most citizens of a country with a higher GDP per capita would theoretically also have access to better schooling, are provided health care and housing assistance by the government as well as grants to further support their education. Said citizens would then be given a better probability of being higher skilled and financially capable, thus fitting the ideal standard of an applicant for an F1 visa as they are the "ideal immigrant" to the U.S.

Therefore, I hypothesize that while individual choices and circumstances undeniably play a major role in an individual's financial capability and skill level, their country of origin's level of economic development would also be a factor affecting an applicant's financial capability. Thus, subsequently affecting the applicant's chances in receiving an F1 visa.

3.3 Freedom House as a Controlling Variable

In relation to potentially providing insight into an applicant's individual finances, similarly, the level of economic development that the applicant's country of origin possesses is also able to dictate how economically free its general populace are.

Previous studies have paired economic freedom with political freedom, and the results of such studies have concluded that both do have a significant effect on international migration. Said studies observed the relationship between economic and political freedom on migration into member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) from 2001-2006 and have concluded that economic freedom is significant even when controlling for income and political freedom in a cross sectional analysis of the Ordinary Least Squares regression and a Tobit estimation that the researcher created (Ashby, 2020).

Subsequently, economic and political freedom would be an important controlling variable for this thesis as well, as the OECD countries account for 60% of the world GDP, as well as 75% of world trade (Department of State, n.d.). The U.S. is a member of the OECD, and if it's been shown that economic freedom when accounting for political freedom would yield a positive impact on migration into OECD countries then both should also be taken into consideration for this thesis (Ashby, 2020).

Since both types of freedom are preceded by having civil freedom in their country of origin to begin with, hence, it is also a significant variable to control for when discussing causes of migration. This is especially the case in migration flows to the U.S., as studies have found that greater civil freedom in an immigrant's country of origin has been a significant determinant of migration to North America (Karemara, et al., 2000).

The Freedom House accounts for all these variables. It provides data to a population of a country's access to political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries and territories (Freedom House, n.d.), hence utilizing the data from its annual Freedom in the World report, would prove to be useful in discussing this thesis topic.

Therefore, each country's Freedom House score will serve as the main control for con-

founds in my analysis of GDP per capita's impact on F1 visa issuances. The main theory behind that being that a country's Freedom House score would also impact F1 visa issuances, as a country with a higher Freedom House score would theoretically have the U.S. issue them a higher number of F1 visas.

4 Research Design

Now that the theory and hypothesis are solidified, this chapter will detail my research design on how this paper plans to prove or disprove the two hypotheses. Mainly, this paper will employ a mixed-method design, of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, as it combines large-N with interviews.

The primary method of analysis that will form the crux of this paper's results in addressing the thesis question would be the quantitative analysis. This aspect mainly utilizes Stata, a statistical software, to create 2 regression models. The first regresses the dataset of the dependent variable, F1 visas per 1,000,000 population, on the primary independent variable GDP per capita; the second regression model keeps the regression of the two variables from the previous model, but also controls for the Freedom House score of each country. The results from these regressions, whether or not the results are statistically significant or not, would ultimately determine if the theory that the U.S. discriminates on F1 visa applicants based on the two independent variables, mainly country of origin's economic status via GDP per capita, is correct.

The findings from the regression models will be further supplemented by the qualitative analysis portion of this paper. This segment consists of conducting small scale interviews focused on either current F1 visa holders that have undergone the F1 visa application process, or people that have considered applying for the F1 visa, but ultimately decided against applying for it. The answers from the participants can help clarify any discrepancies in the data, or to help bolster weak statistical relationships between the variables through anecdotal

evidence.

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

4.1.1 Scope

First, I would like to preface that despite being able to acquire available data from the sources of my datasets, namely the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs and the World Bank, ranging from at least fiscal years 1997 to 2022, for this thesis I have decided to narrow down the data analysis to only the 2019 data.

This thesis focuses on the data points for 2019 in specific as it is the most current data that could be isolated, and thus unaffected, by large confounds such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking into account any major confounds, the analysis of the results of the regression on the datasets from 2019 should effectively be taken as representative of all other years.

Furthermore, despite how broad the range of countries with data available present within the original chosen datasets, I have limited the sample size to only include countries or territories with populations over 1 million. This is so as to not clutter the working dataset. Limiting the scope this way removed 31 countries (e.g. Tuvalu, Seychelles, etc) from the working dataset which left 157 countries to be used in the regression, which is the main form of data analysis done in this paper.

4.1.2 Dependent Variable

For the main dependent variable, I have taken the number of F1 visas issued per nationality in 2019 from the 2019 Report of Non-immigrant Visas issued by Classification and Nationality provided in the Department of State - Bureau of Consular Affairs website and have divided it per 1,000,000 people in the population of each country, using the data provided by the World Bank's World Development Indicators website.

4.1.3 Independent Variables

For the main independent variable of GDP per capita, I am also using data provided by the World Bank's World Development Indicators website.

The primary confounding variable controlled for this regression analysis is how democratic or "free" a country is. Theoretically, if a country or territory allows its citizens to have more access to aspects of their lives such as political rights and civil liberties, their citizens would be more likely to be able to make decisions such as choosing to study abroad and apply for an F1 visa. The U.S. would theoretically also have better international relations with more democratic countries, leading to more democratic countries to have more visa issuances in general than their less free counterparts.

To control for this confound, I have chosen to utilize the total aggregate score provided by the Freedom House, which measures how "free" a country is based on both political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House rates how much political rights a country or territory has by scoring how well the country does in categories such as how well their electoral process and overall government functions, and the level of political pluralism and participation. The civil liberties ranking, on the other hand, is based on how much the country allows for its citizens to have freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights.

Other confounding variables that are accounted for are, education attainment and level of political violence of each country. While important variables to consider, as both would in theory also affect the number of F1 visas that the U.S. would issue to each country, due to certain limitations in the datasets, the results of the regression models accounting for these variables, while still included, will not be part of this paper's main analysis.

For education attainment the dataset utilized will be the total percentage of a country's population that has attained a lower secondary education that are ages 25 and above also taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators website. Education attainment is used as a proxy control for the demand of F1 visas as the Bureau of Consular Affairs

only publishes data for F1 visa issuances and not the initial applications that each embassy receives. Moreover, the education attainment being a lower secondary education was chosen specifically due to the fact that roughly 92% of all F1 (as well as M1) students are pursuing higher education (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2021). Higher education in this sense includes students who are completing associates, bachelor's master's, or doctoral programs. Since students as young as 16 years-old are able to pursue an associates degree provided they have also taken internationally recognized programs such as Cambridge's IGCSE or O Level programs (UG Overseas Education, 2023) this would put these students as having lower-secondary/high school as the education level that they've completed last.

As for level of political violence, this variable was mostly to further bolster the Freedom House data for the main confounding variable. The dataset chosen for this variable was the number of political violence events happening in every country for the year 2019, as provided by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).

4.1.4 Regression Model

The first step in my data analysis was utilizing Stata to run a regression regressing my dependent variable of F1 visas per 1,000,000 population by my primary independent variable, GDP per capita.

4.1.5 Limitations

Given that there is no one perfect year that can accurately represent all other years even when controlled for big confounding phenomena like a global pandemic, having only analyzed one year's data may not create results that are also representative of other years.

Unfortunately the main constraints that this study faces are due to the aforementioned data limitations. The other confounding variables that I wanted to better account for was the level of education attainment and political violence, but due to significant missing data for certain countries or for the respective 2019 datasets, I have decided not to incorporate

them in the main analysis.

For education attainment, while the World Bank is deemed the most reliable and complete source of information for this variable given that it's a branch of the United Nations (UN) and most recognized countries are member nations, there is a significant number of countries remaining that had declined, or are unable to provide the data for the percentage of their population that has attended lower secondary school or higher. With the exception of mostly European countries, Australia, and certain Latin American countries, the World Bank is unable to provide access to each country's education attainment.

Being unable to use the education attainment as a sufficient proxy for F1 visa demand as a control variable is perhaps the biggest limitation of this study's quantitative analysis. This is a big confound as all other political or economic variables aside, a country could be sending in less applications during a certain year. This would subsequently lead to a lower number of F1 visas being issued to the people of that country, purely because there were less applications sent in by that country in the first place.

On the other hand, the ACLED's dataset on the number of political violence events that each country has, seems relatively complete. However, since most of the missing data were from advanced industrialized democracies, incorporating it as a main confounding variable would lead to left-censoring of the data.

In order to run the regression model with these two variables included, just to see what the results of a model incorporating all the confounds would look like, several methods were employed in an effort to bridge the missing data discrepancies.

Missing data imputations were done using data from 2015-2019 for the education attainment dataset. This method was chosen due to the fact that the data year to year does not tend to vary by a lot in countries that have data available for multiple years. For example: the total percentage of Brazil's population that has attained a lower secondary education from 2015-2019 was 57.49%, 60.09%, 60.64%, 61.81%, and 62.99% respectively; the total percentage of Costa Rica's population that has attained a lower secondary education also

shows a similar range in values with the percentages from 2015-2019 being 44.5%, 44.47%, 45.68%, 46.06%, 47.43% respectively. In both cases, the data had a range of no less than 6%. By getting the average of all the available data within that time period, it's possible to obtain a result that is close to what the percentage might have actually been in 2019.

For the level of political violence dataset, since it was only advanced industrialized democracies that had no data available for them, the only action taken was to input the value as 0 for said countries.

Unfortunately, while these are not perfect measures, a regression model including these two added variables is still used. Running a multivariate regression model with all these variables would still provide a more complete idea of the impact of GDP per capita on F1 visa issuances.

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

4.2.1 Sample Description

The sample size for the interviews is limited to 20 participants. They include participants of all genders, ages 18-30, and are either international students holding an F1 visa, or people who have considered applying for an F1 visa and have ultimately chosen not to instead.

4.2.2 Recruitment Methods

The recruitment process for acquiring participants to interview was mostly via snowball sampling method, by asking the participants of the study to let others know that they can share their study with others, and/or through word of mouth. Given that I am an international student myself, I reached out to other people who I know are part of the community of international students.

The steps for recruiting the interview participants was as follows:

1. Participants will initially be contacted either using the interviewer's own personal

network or through the emails provided on UCSD's list of student organizations: https://studentorg.ucsd.edu/

2. The researcher then went through the entire list of student organizations on the website mentioned above and took note of all the potential clubs (typically ones with a nationality listed in the club title (e.g. "Thai Student Union") that might have eligible members, and sent out a recruitment email to all the principal members listed on the club's page.

3. When a potential participant contacts the researcher expressing their interest in being interviewed, the researcher will contact them explaining the project. Should they agree to be interviewed, they will be sent a consent information form to review and asked to schedule an interview. A meeting will be set up in person or zoom depending on the participants preference and their location. Prior to starting the interview, the Exempt Informed Consent sheet will be reviewed, and address any concerns regarding it before moving forward with the interview. Once the consent process is complete, they will be screened for eligibility, with eligible participants being international students who have applied for an F1 student visa or have considered applying for an F1 visa.

4.2.3 Interview Process

The interview process did not last longer than 15 minutes, and was conducted fully in English. Questions regarding the participant's visa status and experience during the application process, their country of origin, future plans post-graduation, and financial aid programs available in their country of origin were all asked, with a complete list of all the questions asked during the interview provided.

Once the participant answered, their responses were typed up and recorded all of the information. The interviewee was also briefed that if at any point throughout the process, they would like to omit something that they have said during the interview, any records of

that information will be deleted instantly. If they change their mind entirely, their transcripts and any mention of the information given during said interview will be deleted.

4.2.4 Interview Questions

Depending on whether the participant is an F1 visa holder or not, they will be asked a different set of questions.

The questions for the F1 visa holders are as follows:

1. Have you applied for or have considered applying for an F1 visa? Do you currently hold an F1 visa?
2. What is your country of origin?
3. What made you decide to apply for an F1 Visa to study abroad in the United States?
4. Can you describe to me the study program that you chose to pursue?
5. What are your plans after graduation?
6. Were there any challenges that you faced during the F1 Visa application process?
7. Did you face any particular difficulties regarding the documentation and form filling part of the application process?
8. What was the interview process like?
9. Were there any questions that the consular agent asked regarding aspects of your life back in your home country, including ones regarding your financial background?
10. Were you eligible for any form of financial aid or assistance provided by your home country to help you in furthering your education?

The questions for non-F1 visa holders, though similar, are a little shorter than the questions asked to F1 visa holders, with the only difference being that this set of questions focuses

on why they did not end up applying for an F1 visa and if given the economic incentive, would they have applied for the visa.

The questions for non-F1 visa holders are as follows:

1. Have you thought about applying for an F1 visa or studying abroad in the U.S. before?
2. What is your country of origin?
3. What made you decide to NOT apply for an F1 Visa to study abroad in the United States?
4. Can you describe to me the study program that you chose to pursue instead?
5. Was studying abroad away from your home country something you considered?
6. Were you eligible for any form of financial aid or assistance provided by your home country to help you in furthering your education, in the U.S. and/or elsewhere?
7. If NO for number 6, in the scenario that there WAS financial aid or assistance provided to you by your home country to study in the U.S., would you have pursued applying for an F1 visa then?

4.2.5 Limitations

Due to time constraints, the study is limited in its sample size. Ideally, more people would have to be interviewed for the anecdotal evidence to have more merit. This study is also limited in that the people I interviewed were mostly from Asia, and I lacked interviewees from Oceania and Eastern Europe. Moreover, only Indonesians were interviewed for the category of people that have considered applying for an F1 visa but ultimately decided against applying for one.

5 Data Analysis

This section will display the results of the research designs detailed in the previous chapter, and will further delve into the analysis of the results of both research models. Both the qualitative and quantitative studies conducted in pursuance of answering the thesis question will be thoroughly discussed in this next chapter.

5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Certain regional trends can already be observed with which countries are present at the top and bottom 10 countries of F1 visas issued per 1,000,000 population.

Country	Region	F1 Visas per 1,000,000 Population	GDP per Capita	Freedom House Score
Korea, Dem. People's Rep.	Asia	0	Not Available	3
Central African Republic	Africa	0.9598174	426.409	9
Somalia	Africa	1.376609	405.787	7
Djibouti	Africa	1.862208	2,876.04	26
Guinea	Africa	1.941365	1,043.9	43
Syrian Arab Republic	Asia	2.438023	1,124.52	0
Mozambique	Africa	3.268881	508.163	51
Algeria	Africa	3.395358	4,021.98	34
Iraq	Asia	3.488636	5,621.18	32
Guinea-Bissau	Africa	3.552475	730.611	42

Table 1: Lowest F1 Visas per 1 million population

Table 1 shows the bottom 10 countries, with the lowest F1 visa issued per million population, alongside the two independent variables. Of the bottom 10 countries, 7 of them are from Africa, and the rest are from Asia. Besides the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), which is a special exception, the bottom 5 countries are African countries.

Alternatively, in Table 2, when looking at the 10 countries with the most F1 visas issued per million population, it is mostly Asian countries followed closely by countries from North America then Europe. The top 5 countries are all Asian countries with Trinidad and Tobogo being the one North American exception at number 5.

An interesting observation is that together the two Korean countries are the countries with the most and the least F1 visa issuances per million respectively. However, as afore-

Country	Region	F1 Visas per 1,000,000 Population	GDP per Capita	Freedom House Score
Korea, Rep.	Asia	407.0525	31,902.4	83
Kuwait	Asia	390.4438	30,666.2	36
Hong Kong SAR, China	Asia	368.4119	48,359	59
Saudi Arabia	Asia	330.1945	23,405.7	7
Trinidad and Tobago	North America	311.8513	15,691	82
Singapore	Asia	309.9814	66,070.5	51
Jamaica	North America	294.2668	5,626.17	78
Panama	North America	260.8368	16,472.8	84
Norway	Europe	251.6878	76,430.6	100
Switzerland	Europe	245.2398	84,121.9	96

Table 2: Highest F1 Visas per 1 million population

mentioned, while North Korea is technically the country with the least visa issuances, it is a special case given that its lack of visa issuances is not attributed to a certain economic phenomenon affecting migration. It is more so due to the fact that North Korea's authoritarian government prevents its citizens from leaving the country in the first place, stopping any form of migration, including ones facilitated by the F1 visa, from taking place.

Despite there being general regional trends with F1 visas issued per million population and the region of the top and bottom most issued countries, looking at the table directly comparing the F1 visa issued per million population with the independent variables of GDP per capita and Freedom House score, there does not appear to be a direct correlation between them.

This points to the trends in regions possibly being attributed to another confounding variable such as the cumulative education attainment of the populations of the countries from each region. If the general populace does not have a high level of education, it could be that the people of those countries might not prioritize higher education attainment, much less by studying abroad in countries like the U.S., despite having a relatively high GDP.

Hence, given that there appears to be no clear correlation between the dependent and independent variables, further analysis needs to be done. This leads to the evidentiary foundation of this paper's claims, as it contains a regression analysis, and the results of such will in the next section will help further discern whether or not there is a relationship between the main three variables and whether or not a country's GDP per capita affects

their F1 visa issuances in a way that is able to be observed as statistically significant, with and without using the Freedom House score as a control variable.

5.1.1 Regression

The first regression, regresses the primary dependent variable of F1 visas per 1,000,000 population by the primary independent variable, GDP per capita. The results are as follows:

	Dependent variable:
	2019 F1 Issuances Per 1 Million
GDP Per Capita	0.002^{***}
	(0.0003)
Constant	31.153^{***}
	(7.034)
Observations	149
R^2	0.281
Adjusted R^2	0.276
Residual Std. Error	68.780 (df = 147)
F Statistic	57.503^{***} (df = 1; 147)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3: F1 Issuances by GDP Per Capita

These results show that GDP per capita does have a significant effect on F1 visas issued per 1,000,000 population at the .01 significance level. A one dollar increase in GDP per capita is associated with a .002 increase in F1 visas per 1 million population, on average, which in a more realistically scale would applicably mean that a $1,000 increase in GDP per capita is associated with an increase by 2 F1 visas issued per million population, on average. Moreover, these results also show that the number of F1 visas per 1,000,000 population is expected to be 31.153 "visas" for a country that has zero GDP per capita.

It is worthwhile to note that while GDP per capita does have a statistically significant effect on F1 visas issued per million in population, the R2 value only explains up to 0.281

of the variance seen in the data of F1 visas per million population.

Next, a second regression is done on F1 visas issued per million population, this time also accounting for the main confounding variable, which are each country's Freedom House scores.

The results of the second regression is as follows:

	Dependent variable:
	2019 F1 Issuances Per 1 Million
GDP Per Capita	0.002^{***}
	(0.0004)
Freedom House	-0.040
	(0.224)
Constant	32.904^{***}
	(12.065)
Observations	149
R^2	0.281
Adjusted R^2	0.271
Residual Std. Error	69.008 (df = 146)
F Statistic	28.578^{***} (df = 2; 146)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: F1 Issuances by GDP Per Capita and Freedom House Score

It is interesting to note that upon analysis, the relationship between GDP per capita and F1 visas issued per million population does not change, and remains at 0.002 even after accounting for the Freedom House score as a control variable. The R2 value also remains the same at 0.28, with no more of the variance in the data of F1 visas per million population, being able to be explained by the addition of the Freedom House score.

The constant value does go up from 31.153 to 32.904, increasing the number of F1 visas issued per million to a hypothetical country with zero GDP per capita. This appears to be the extent of the effect that the Freedom House score has as a control variable.

Additionally, another interesting observation is that the F-statistic in this model is lower

than in the regression model above. This indicates that this model, through including the Freedom House scores, may have lower predictive power than the model with only GDP per capita as the independent variable. In addition to the recommendation provided in the previous Research Design section, another recommendation for further studies may be to expand on this by looking for different covariates to include in future extensions of this project.

Lastly, is the regression model which regresses GDP per capita, Freedom House Score, as well as the additional control variables of education attainment and level of political violence, onto F1 visa issuances per million population. As previously established in the Research Design, due to the original datasets having missing data issues, there are very big limitations with which we can utilize and interpret the results of this next regression mode.

Despite the limitations, this paper still includes this regression model with all considered variables as it gives a more complete picture of the relationship between the main independent and dependent variables, that could hopefully be the framework for future research concerning this topic.

The results of this regression is displayed below:

Looking at the results, again only GDP per capita remains as the only variable with asterisks to indicate a statistically significant score. The other control variables seem to have a relatively small correlation with F1 visas issued per million compared to GDP per capita, with education having the most significant relationship out of the confounding variables.

Accounting for these variables does have some effect though, as the R2 value has increased to 0.3556, meaning that more variation within F1 visa issuances per million are attributed to the independent variables than in the previous models. The constant value has changed too after accounting for the two new confounding variables. The value is now 22.978, which is lower than the previous values of 31.153 and 32.904. This new constant value is also considered to be not statistically significant as opposed to the value in the other two regression models.

	Dependent variable:
	2019 F1 Issuances Per 1 Million
GDP Per Capita	0.002^{***}
	(0.0004)
Freedom House	-0.096
	(0.220)
Education	0.239
	(0.219)
Violence Events	-0.001
	(0.003)
Constant	22.978
	(15.245)
Observations	111
R^2	0.356
Adjusted R^2	0.331
Residual Std. Error	56.475 (df = 106)
F Statistic	14.622^{***} (df = 4; 106)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5: F1 Issuances by GDP Per Capita and Freedom House Score, with additional confounds

To conclude, in implementing regression models, the results suggest that since across the last two models none of the confounding variables turn out to be statistically significant, that the positive relationship between GDP per capita on F1 visas per million population is robust. In all these regressions, regardless of additionally inputted confounds, GDP per capita consistently remains significant at the .01 significance level, with a one dollar increase in GDP per capita associated with a .002 increase in F1 visas per 1 million population. Hence, quantitative analysis of these results show that GDP per capita is positively correlated with F1 visa issuances per million, and subsequently that as a variable GDP per capita does have a statistically significant effect on F1 visa issuances.

5.2 Qualitative Analysis

Ultimately, I was able to interview a total of 25 students who have either applied for an F1 visa and have been approved for and F1 visa, or students who have considered and are eligible for the F1 visa but who in the end, have chosen not to apply for one.

Most students who applied for an F1 visa did so due to wanting to pursue opportunities better suited to their academic journey in the U.S. and were either unaware of any other visa class or pathway to study in the U.S. or preferred it to a J1 visa due to the F1 visa allowing the holder a longer validity period before renewal is required.

The main difficulties that participants reported having during the documentation and form-filling part of the visa application process were that they were unaware that there was a somewhat strict timeline that had to be followed in acquiring the required documents and certifications to be able to satisfactorily present and submit all necessary documents and forms before the interview. While participants from a variety of countries (including Botswana, Malaysia, and Hong Kong) struggled with this aspect of the process, it is interesting to note that all the participants from Global North countries that were interviewed (Canada, France, South Korea, and Singapore) listed this as their main issue and had no other issues in the interview part of the process.

On the other hand, the interview process is considered the pivotal part of the process in determining an applicant's acceptance or rejection, with most embassies notifying the applicant whether or not they have been accepted immediately after the interview process has concluded. However, given that this study has a limited sample size of participants, all participants who had been interviewed and have undergone the F1 visa application process were successful in passing the interview by proxy as they currently hold an F1 visa (except Indonesian participant 2 whose visa expired already). As such, since they have all passed this section of the application process, the interviewed participants generally reported fewer difficulties with the visa interview itself.

However, a common issue that did come up, especially for participants applying without

financial aid, was that the consular agent would more closely scrutinize their financial records, including their sponsor's employment and their plan for managing funds to support their studies. Only participants interviewed from Global South countries faced extensive questioning on their financial capabilities. Said participants were from China, India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Botswana, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Typically, students who had the following advantages tended to have an easier time applying for F1 visas: Received financial aid (e.g., government sponsorship or scholarships from prestigious institutions); Demonstrated fluency in English; Able to afford using an agency to handle the application process; Came from a private and/or international educational background before applying.

The rest of this section will contain a brief summary of all the answers that each interviewee has provided, and will be in a narrative and anecdotal format which will be enumerated below.

5.3 Participants who have applied for, and have held, an F1 visa

Brazilian Participant 1: This participant ultimately chose the F1 visa over the J1 visa as the latter had more restrictions regarding visa renewals. Given that the participant's PhD program is 4 years long, they chose the F1 visa so that they would not have to go back to renew their visa before finishing their degree. The participant is uncertain about what their plans post-graduation are but they are considering pursuing higher academia or Optional Practical Training (OPT) afterwards. The main challenge regarding the F1 visa application process was the costs associated with it. The exchange rate for a Brazillian to get U.S. Dollars is bad and the forms were not intuitive. The participant had to pay an agency to do most of the paperwork for them and had they not had savings, this process would be quite difficult. For the interview process, it was quite easy, they think that going to a top prestigious university helped. The consular agent did not ask too many questions, mostly how long they'd stay in the U.S., who would pay for their studies, and did not question

the documents for financial capability as their university offered them a scholarship and stipend. Brazil, however, did not offer them any financial aid. While it was a 10-11 hour drive to do the interview and take the picture, it was a relatively quick process to schedule an interview, as they only had to wait a week. They recount that their labmates who are also international students from China and Nepal respectively, had to wait 2-3 months later for their interviews.

Brazilian Participant 2: This participant applied for an F1 visa to do their PhD program and received their visa within the same month. They decided to choose an F1 visa as it lasts longer than a J1 visa, and post graduation they plan on using their OPT and work in the industry for a few years. The biggest challenges that they faced during the F1 visa application process was just the financial challenge, as due to the bad exchange rate, having to pay in U.S. Dollars is expensive for a Brazilian, hence the application fee and the SEVIS fee ended up being a considerable amount of money that the participant had to save up money to pay off. The participant did not find the general process all that difficult as they have had previous knowledge and have looked online for guidance and tips as to how to undergo the process. The consular agent asked for their I20, double checked their student ID, asked them about the course, details about the program, and general questions regarding financial capability including checking if the assistantship they were accepted to was in the system. Brazil did not provide financial aid.

Brazilian Participant 3: Participant was originally an F2 visa holder as the participant already had a parent in the U.S. with an F1 visa who was pursuing their Master's degree. The participant eventually filed for a visa change to apply to do the 2+2 program, and obtain an associates before transferring to a university to finish their undergraduate degree. After graduation, the participant plans on applying for OPT and hopefully also apply for a job to stay in the U.S. and work here long term through an H1B. During the application process there were some challenges, mainly the long processing time given that it was a visa change. It took a while to get the letter from the Brazil government, which was the 1-7978 form to

change their status from F2 to F1. The participant also did not have to do an interview and could do the entire process online, which helped since they were in the U.S. already and did not have to go back to Brazil just for the interview. They also had all the documentation they needed and their parents were able to help them in double checking all the forms. In filling out the website for the 1-7978 it was just asking which school they attended and had to provide documents for financial capability for both community college and university still. They were not eligible for financial aid as the Brazilian government only offers a few and they are very competitive.

Chinese Participant 1: This participant is attending a PhD program in the U.S. but has already also pursued their undergraduate studies in the U.S. They plan on continuing their postdoctoral studies in the U.S. The actual visa application process was not an issue for this participant, though they have heard that this is not the case for other applicants from China. The main concern during their interview process was mostly regarding transferring their SEVIS number from the university of their old university to the new one for their current PhD program. Additionally, they had to use a train to do the interview as there was no embassy in their city. No questions were asked about their financial background. They were not eligible for any financial aid offered by China.

Chinese Participant 2: Since they went to an international high school in China, they figured that the only choice was to study abroad. They applied to several other schools in the U.S. and Canada but chose the U.S. because she had more freedom to switch majors in the U.S. Currently the participant is pursuing their undergraduate degree, and is considering OPT post-graduation. Though the participant mentions that they might have had a language advantage by being able to speak English, there were still some challenges that they faced during the application process. They had to travel to a different city to take the interview. Also, due to their mom working for the government, people have advised them to be careful when mentioning their job during the interview and the participant has had to lie that their dad was the sole sponsor of their tuition. They were asked a lot about their financial

background, and mentioned that they are not eligible for any financial aid from China.

Canadian Participant: For this participant, it was a spontaneous decision to study abroad in the U.S., but their current university has a good department for their major so they tried their luck in applying and are now attending a 4 year undergraduate program here. They have no family or friends here in the U.S. prior to coming here and just thought that this would be a fun experience. They are considering going into medicine school after graduating though they are conscious of the expenses associated with this pathway, especially as an international student, hence they are considering post graduate OPT and have applied for student aid. The major issues with their application process are the time delays in regards to transferring their transcript, which caused them to have an academic hold with their current university. They also knew of a lot of their other friends who were also on hold and had to redo the appointment all the way in Mexico as it was the closest border. The whole process was stressful and the I20 and SEVIS form fees were hard financially. There were also issues with submitting the bank statements as they had to be officially submitted and notarized by the bank. The interview questions were not too complicated, as the consular or border patrol agent mostly looked at their I20 form, though the consular agents did question and made sure that the applicant was financially capable and had adequate funds to finish their program. They are currently on student loans to fund their studies and have received grants for up to 5 thousand dollars each year.

French Participant: The participant has an F1 visa but for French students their F1 visas are only valid for 20 months, before they have to reapply. They chose to study in the U.S. because the choice of university in the U.S. was better for their major, and they did not want to stay in their home country after having been in a small high school. The participant is currently pursuing their undergraduate degree and plans to stay in the U.S. post-graduation, potentially doing OPT, as the politics in France is not ideal for them right now with the upcoming elections. Now they are also reapplying for another 20 month visa with the interview slots only being available in May, and they have to go through the whole

application process all over again. They mention multiple issues with the visa application process. First, they feel as though the background check questions are invasive and that they should tailor the questions for the visa process. The appointment times for the interviews were also very crammed and there were many stages during the application process that needed to be done in advance prior to the interview. The bank statements were difficult to obtain because they had to be less than 6 months old and their dad's bank was not giving a complete statement as there was a translation issue given that the statement was originally in French and it took a while to get an English version to show to the embassy. They also had to take the picture themself which the officer scrutinized beforehand. Ultimately, the part that stressed them the most is the scheduling for the interview process. They were initially on a tourist visa vacationing in the U.S., so they had to go back earlier in advance, separate from their family and fly in the day before for their interview. The interview itself went relatively quickly, they were asked where they were going and about their program, as well their dad's U.S. occupation. They knew immediately whether or not they got the visa and when the passport would be returned. The participant also mentioned the fact that they spoke English as well as they did is a big advantage, as they saw another girl who was not as fluent getting grilled more extensively with questions. They are not eligible for any form of financial aid or assistance from France.

Indian Participant 1: The participant, despite getting admitted to a couple of other universities, wanted to take this opportunity of studying in the U.S. better than other countries. They are currently in a 2 year masters program and are also currently looking for jobs and pursuing OPT post-graduation. The visa application process was pretty straightforward to them, and the biggest challenge was getting slots for the interviews as there are a lot of other participants. This made them have to wait 2-3 months for the interview. The embassy for the interview was also far away from where the participant lived and had to travel to Mumbai for 2 days to get their biometrics taken and to get the interview done with. During the actual interview the agents asked what university they got into and how they were

planning to manage their finances to pay for their tuition. They were also not eligible for financial aid or assistance provided by India in furthering their education.

Indian Participant 2: The participant decided to apply for an F1 visa to study abroad in the U.S. for better academic opportunities. Participant did the 2+2 program and is hoping to work in the U.S. and will be doing the OPT process before hopefully transitioning into an H1B visa to be able to pursue employment long term in this country. Throughout the F1 visa application process, they did not really have many issues as the school they were enrolled in in the U.S. helped them throughout the process as well as to transition from the system in India to the one in the States. The interview process was a little more difficult as the participant did have to travel as there were limited regions that had embassies that can do the visa interview and the closest one to them was a 3 hour flight away. The consular agent also asked them for the proof of finances and asked questions on the applicant's finances to determine their eligibility, including asking about proof of documentation of the down payment for tuition. Participant is not eligible for any form of financial aid or assistance from India.

Indian Participant 3: Due to India not having as much flexibility with the major that students can pick, as it's structured around the student's performance in competitive exams, the participant decided to study abroad. They were primarily applying for U.S. universities given that at the time they were not sure what they were interested in and wanted to go somewhere where they would get enough time to figure that aspect of their studies out and the American higher educational system stood out to them in that regard. Currently the participant plans after graduation is to find a job that can further sponsor them to stay in the U.S. as they plan to stay in this country for the long term. Participant faced some challenges during the F1 visa application process. The participant is a first generation student and had to figure out the process by themself, and the closest embassy is a few hour plane ride away, making the travel process rather difficult. Their university was able to help them though, and was able to address any concerns that they had, as well as reviewing their application before

submitting it. They also mentioned that attending a top ranking school almost guarantees that their application is accepted, as they were only asked what their name was and what they wanted to study and before they could even answer those, the interviewer had already put the approval seal upon seeing the admission letter from their school. They mentioned that this was a privilege as students who are not going to schools that are not as prestigious, are questioned more extensively. The participant is not eligible for any form of financial aid or assistance provided by their home country, as while there are scholarships and grants available to students who would like to go abroad, they are extremely competitive and the number of students applying far outnumber the scholarships provided.

Indonesian Participant 1: This participant decided to apply for an F1 visa to study abroad in the U.S. because while they considered going to other countries such as the United Kingdom to further their studies, they were encouraged by family to do the 2+2 route, which was unique to the U.S., as it was more cost effective. After graduation they hope to be able to do OPT for at least 1 year to gain work experience before pursuing a Master's degree. As for the F1 visa application process, the participant had assistance through an education agency which they found through resources provided to them from attending an international school. They mentioned how the process itself wasn't necessarily hard as it was guided and they were always informed beforehand of any requirements through the agency. For the interview aspect of the application process, the questions the interviewer asked ranged from asking them to describe their study plans, to asking them to further explain to the consular agent a breakdown of the total costs of their program, as well as questions asking them who was mainly financially responsible for their study abroad program and what their job was. They did not receive any financial aid from their home country in helping them further their education.

Indonesian Participant 2: Currently while the participant's F1 visa has expired, they have previously applied for an F1 visa as they wanted to study abroad in the U.S. to pursue a Masters of law. The school that they were enrolled in also helped them apply for the

visa. Since they knew that obtaining an H1b visa was difficult, they tried to apply for OPT but none of the jobs they applied for reached out to them afterwards. The visa application process was very easy for them as they had an agent submit all documents for them and just had to tell said agent which days they were available and the agent arranged the interview for them. The interview in general went by very quickly, and lasted less than 5 minutes. The applicant mentioned that going to an international school, speaking fluent English, and applying for an F1 visa to go to a prestigious school probably helped it to go by relatively quickly. The questions were basic and the agent was conversational, there were no questions asked about their finances or even any of the financial capability documents or any other of the supporting documents were reviewed. They also got the visa within 2 weeks of the interview. They thought that everything was easy to understand and to fill out. The visa is fully funded by their family. The participant is eligible for the Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) program, which does help fund Indonesian students' programs abroad, but their parents told them not to apply for it.

Hong Konger Participant: This participant has applied for an F1 visa before to go to high school in the States, and both that application and this one were approved. They chose the U.S. specifically because the U.S. offered more programs regarding research that were high ranking and academically rigorous. The participant was also already in the States for their high school and it was easier to continue their education here. Currently they are pursuing a 4 year undergraduate program in the U.S. Their plans after graduation is to get a job within their major to be able to apply for OPT extension and then the H1B visa. During the application process they had limited guidance, and a main issue was that there were no further instructions on what sequence these stages had to be done or what documents had to be acquired before going to the interview. The second time, COVID was also a factor which made it difficult to obtain a new SEVIS ID and process their second visa. There was also an additional visa processing cost that cannot be paid up front. They also had to drive across the country to have the interview as there were no U.S. embassies near them. Once

there, the interview was relatively simple and lasted about 15 minutes. The consular agents asked about their parents' education levels, jobs, and financial background. They also asked how the participant paid for their high school and how they now plan to pay for their college education. The participant provided a notarized version of the bank statements and had to provide an in depth explanation during the interview on how they were going to pay for everything. The latest interview went faster as they had previously applied. The participant was not eligible for any financial aid provided by Hong Kong and everything was fully paid by their parents.

Malaysian Participant 1: This participant has always wanted to come to the U.S. to study and they wanted to leave home and start somewhere new away from family and where they did not know the people. Since the participant had friends and family in Australia, U.K., and Canada, the U.S. seemed to be a good choice. They pursued the 2+2 program, and are finishing up their bachelors degree. They chose this pathway because it is the most cost and time effective, and they hope to get a sponsorship with a company, and eventually get an H1B employment visa in the future post-graduation. They are also looking into OPT and Curricular Practical Training (CPT). While the participant faced some challenges during the visa application process, she found the interview process to be overall very straightforward and simple. They attribute this to having gone to a private school and having very good English. They were also able to schedule an interview in only a month and a half after submitting the application. The consular agent only asked them basic questions regarding their program and made them clarify that they were only there to study and not to stay in the U.S. to work after graduation. The agent did not question the financial documents and just scanned through them and the participant had to clarify that they did not have any financial aid and relied on financial support from their parents. The participant did have to figure out all the forms themselves and they were already limited in aid as the applicant is ethnically not just Malaysian.

Malaysian Participant 2: The participant is currently pursuing an undergraduate

degree in the U.S., and the main reason why they wanted to study was because they were advised by their college counselor that there were more opportunities here for their major and the F1 visa would allow them to continue working in the U.S. afterwards using OPT which a J1 visa would not have been able to do. The participant is currently sponsored by a Malaysian company so they have to serve their bond for 7 years and work for them after they graduate, though the company has several offices here in the U.S. and they hope to be able to work for one of those offices and stay in the U.S. For the visa application process the participant faced the most difficulty in sorting out the documents (especially in regards to submitting their high school transcript to get the I20) and in getting appointments for the interview. They also had to travel a couple of hours to the embassy for the interview. They were only asked basic questions regarding their study program and the location of it. Since the participant was sponsored through the KWAP Young Talent Program, the consular agents did not question them extensively (especially in regards to finances) as the Malaysian government often sends students like them abroad so all they had to do was show their government issued sponsorship documents. Participant mentioned that while queuing for the interview, other applicants who were not Malaysian and what the participant guessed was from a Middle-Eastern country instead, were really nervous and had to practice through their questions while in line. They also asked to go first to get the "nicer" looking consular agent.

Motswana Participant 1: In total, this participant has applied for 2 F1 visas in Botswana. The first got them through community college and one year of university, hence they had to reapply to finish their last year of university. While the process was very similar both times, the participant was able to get the process expedited in applying for the second F1 visa. They pursued this 2+2 program as they prioritized their finances and wanted to be done with school as quickly as possible. The participant graduated in December of 2022 and worked for a year in higher education administration/management. After their OPT ended they are now in the process of applying for law school outside the U.S. The

challenges that they faced during the visa application process mostly had to do with the documentation and form filling part. The instructions were unclear and required them to download a lot of forms that they had to print. There were also questions that were unclear and the internet in Botswana was unstable so they had to manually save or start the form all over again. Submitting the picture required also had a lot of requirements. The interview process also had a lot of stages. The consular agent mainly asked them about their family's funds and their bank statements, as well as their intended field of study, family background in Botswana, specifically about their parents' permanent residency and business there. Moreover, the applicant could only pay for the application fee in U.S. dollars which was difficult to come by and expensive to obtain in Botswana. As they are not officially a citizen of Botswana they are not eligible for the financial aid that Botswana's government offers.

Motswana Participant 2: The participant is currently attending a 4 year university, and wanted to apply for an F1 visa as the U.S. offers more opportunities that allow them to do more things outside of their major. It was also a bigger country and the participant wanted to explore while they were there. They are not sure what their post-graduation plans are but they are considering OPT to get work experience. This participant was sponsored by the government as there was an international agreement with the U.S. that allowed them to still apply for visas during the pandemic. The Botswana government took care of all documentation and form filling part of the process. The interview took them about 2 weeks to schedule after calling the embassy. There was not any formal interview, the agent just asked about the program and the place where the school was in the U.S. They did not even get asked about the documentation as all they needed to know was that they were sponsored, as this government sponsorship also covers all tuition and living expenses for this participant in the U.S.

Motswana Participant 3: This participant also qualified to receive government sponsorship given that they got really good grades in high school. The participant chose going to

school in the U.S. because the U.S. had better weather and they were accepted to a relatively prestigious U.S. school. They are currently pursuing an undergraduate degree here in the U.S., and their plans after graduation is to work in the U.S. for at least the first two years post graduation, pursue OPT, before moving back to Africa. They had previously applied for an F1 visa before in high school during 2019 but after submitting their application they received no response. For the second time upon submitting the forms again, the participant felt as though the website was not very intuitive and that the questions were very difficult to answer, and oddly specific, and that a lot of the sections were unnecessary. The participant also had some trouble submitting the picture for the visa. When they got to the interview, they felt as though it was pretty intimidating as the security procedures were pretty hectic. The actual interview was okay though, and the consular agent only asked what they planned to do and if they were going to stay in the U.S. after graduating. The participant was not questioned on their finances as they had the government's letter of financial guarantee. They mentioned that the interview process was a lot more extensive for people who are not on the government scholarship. They didn't have to travel but there was a very big lag time for when they could schedule the appointment for the interview, as they had to wait 4 months to be interviewed. It also increased the pressure to get everything on the forms right as they did not have time to file another application should there be issues with the initial application.

Singaporean Participant: The participant is studying in the U.S. for undergraduate, mostly for experience because Singapore is a comparatively smaller country. Post-graduation, they plan to pursue a Master's program, preferably elsewhere. The participant applied for the F1 visa during the pandemic when not many other people were applying, so they were able to schedule their interview relatively quickly within a few weeks. However, the documentation and form filling part of the application process was very confusing as it had a lot of different steps that had to be followed in a certain order that the website did not disclose. During the interview, the consular agent just asked about their major, sponsor for

tuition, and plans after graduation. The participant was also asked how they were going to pay for all the expenses associated with their study program, and were asked for the financial capability documents but were not questioned on them, as they received scholarships from the government.

South Korean Participant: This participant wanted to study abroad to improve their English skills in the U.S. through a 1 year transfer program, and because their qualifications for a visa, the F1 visa fit better than J1 or F2. The participant has since gone back to Korea as they plan on working and did not want to do the lottery system for the H1B visa but they plan to potentially return to the U.S. for graduate school. During the F1 visa process, the participant felt as though there were a lot of documents to prepare and they felt that there were a lot of stages to do especially in regards to getting the I20 from the school. The form filling aspect was also difficult as for the DS160, the website automatically resets the form and requires you to fill it from the beginning after a certain amount of time. The interview process itself went quite smoothly as there were not many people applying when the participant did, as they applied during COVID. Though they did get an interview slot after 2-3 weeks, they did have to wait 2 hours at the embassy before being able to be interviewed. The participant was not questioned on their financial documents and only had to answer questions on their program and what they planned to do afterwards. The participant attended an international school and has received financial aid there but was not able to get financial aid when studying abroad in the U.S.

Thai Participant: Participant is doing all 4 years of their undergraduate degree in the U.S., and pursued this pathway as they have other family members living and studying in the U.S. They are already working through the CPT program and plan on continuing to work as they have already applied for post-graduation OPT, which they paid the premium fee for. For the visa application process, the participant felt that they were lucky. Their embassy is in the same city that they lived in, and waiting time was also relatively short given that they applied during the pandemic. The participant also thought that speaking

fluent English as well as going to a private school in Thailand was a big advantage that they had. The participant was not asked much about their financial situation, as the consular agent just asked to review the financial statements and asked them what their parents did for work. The participant was also not eligible for financial aid or assistance provided by the Thailand government. In the embassy, the participant overheard others who were in line with them and reported that if they did not speak English well, or did not have their financial documents in order, that these participants were immediately rejected.

Vietnamese Participant: While this participant has not always wanted to go to school in the U.S., when it came time to study for their undergraduate degree they considered the U.S. as their only option. The participant is doing the 2+2 program and is currently finishing up their undergraduate degree at a university. They are hoping to find a job in the U.S. ideally through OPT then eventually progress into having an H1B visa. As for the visa application process, though it was not particularly difficult, the participant mentioned that having to pay in U.S. dollars for the visa application process was a little difficult given that the exchange rate between Vietnam and the U.S. was bad. Ultimately, they were more concerned about whether or not their case was strong enough to be accepted. During the interview the participant was asked what their plan was, their study program, what their parents did, and why they did not leave with their aunt. The consular agents also questioned the participant's financial documents, as they were not eligible for financial aid from Vietnam and relied on their family's savings. The participant was told immediately that they were accepted. Since they had to spend extra money for tutoring lessons to study English for the IELTS certification, they said that honestly they were surprised that they were accepted given that their English skills were lacking and they were not sure if they even passed their IELTS test during the interview. While they passed, the consular agent mentioned that they had to work hard if they wanted to work in the U.S.

5.4 Participants who decided against pursuing an F1 visa

Indonesian Participant 3: The participant has occasionally discussed the possibility of applying for an F1 visa to study abroad in the U.S., but has ultimately decided against it due to the U.S. being unsuitable for them because of safety reasons and it being too far from home. Participant mentioned that they do have the means to study in the U.S. if they wanted to as they have family in the U.S. and could make money there, they just did not like the culture and the environment. Currently they are submitting documents to apply for a student visa in Japan after taking multiple gap years and enrolling in culinary school. They prefer this pathway to studying in the U.S. directly after high school as this allows for greater flexibility in pursuing their career and academic goals within the comfort of their hometown. Participant would probably be eligible for financial aid, but have not applied for any. Given the opportunity that aid would be offered to support them in studying in the U.S., they would still choose not to apply.

Indonesian Participant 4: This participant had an interest in applying to the U.S., but due to financial reasons and their family wanting them to stay in Indonesia for work it was not feasible. Participant mentioned that going to a local university was simpler than they thought as in international schools (which the participant attended for most of their life) as well as in university in the U.S., there are not any prerequisites or general electives that they had to take, mostly just classes related to their major. The participant is on a partial scholarship in attending a local university and has mentioned that if given the opportunity and financial ability they would have definitely wanted to study abroad, even though it would have to be a matter further discussed with their family.

Indonesian Participant 5: The participant does not hold an F1 visa but has considered studying abroad in Canada. Before graduating high school, there were discussions on where to go for university, with Australia and the U.S. being top options. The participant thought going abroad for undergraduate would make the most sense as they were taught English in an international school and it'd be an easier transition if they were to study abroad in a

country where the curriculum is similarly in English, as opposed to studying in Indonesia where the curriculum would be in Bahasa Indonesia, which they are not used to. Participant did not know of any financial aid as they decided to stay in Indonesia in the end where the local university they are currently attending is offering them financial aid. They mentioned that had there been financial aid or assistance provided to them for them to study in the U.S., that they would have 100% applied.

6 Discussion & Conclusion

In light of the robust correlation observed between GDP per capita and the issuance of F1 visas per million as revealed by the regression models, coupled with corroborative insights from interview data, it can be deduced that the hypothesis posited in this thesis holds merit.

Now that there is significant evidentiary support for the U.S. discriminating against F1-visa applicants from economically disadvantaged nations compared to those from more affluent counterparts, this chapter revisits the previous discussion on past literature on the economics of migration. It endeavors to explore the most plausible reasons as to why this relationship exists. Furthermore, this chapter will also include a thorough examination of the practical implications of the significant influence that GDP per capita has on F1 visa issuances per million, for both scholars and potential F1 visa applicants.

6.1 Underlying Reasons and Rationale for Relationship

There are a variety of potential reasons for the relationship between GDP per capita and F1 visa issuances. However, taking the results of the regression analysis and interviews into account, there are a few explanations that have more empirical evidence supporting them than others. Based on a holistic review of both the qualitative and quantitative data, this paper asserts that the main rationale behind the statistical significance of GDP per capita on F1 visa issuances is due to the aforementioned theory of the U.S. prioritizing the entry of

economically well-off and highly educated students, specifically proficient English speakers, to be a part of the SEVP in the U.S.

Referring back to the literature review chapter, while the U.S. undoubtedly uses visas as a tool in controlling immigration to reflect the current preferences of its people, in terms of F1 visa issuances it seems that ideological similarity of an applicant's country of origin seems to not be as big of a factor compared to other visa classes or visa issuances in general. This is inferred from the observation that in the regression models, the Freedom House scores and number of political violence events continue to not be statistically significant when regressed on the number of issuances of F1 visa per million population.

However, looking at the interview answers of several of the participants, how well each individual participant can assimilate into the U.S., especially in terms of being able to speak English fluently remains a notable factor in determining how well an applicant does in their interview process for the F1 visa. Of all the interviews, 20% of participants attribute English proficiency as a factor as to why they felt they did well in the interview portion. Said participants were from Thailand, China, France, Indonesia, and Malaysia. These participants all mention how the interview process was easier as they could converse easily with the consular agent and the Thai, French, Malaysian, and second Malaysian participant even mentioned that they were not questioned as extensively as others in line with them at the embassy that seem as though they did not speak English as fluently. It is important to note that of the 5 participants who have attributed English proficiency as part of their success in the interview portion, 4 of these participants are participants from Asian countries, belonging to the Global South.

Hence, proving how an immigrant that has similar ideals and values as the average American remains the preferred category of immigrants to be granted entry to natives. In this case, English proficiency functions as such a metric in showing how much interest and commitment an immigrant has in assimilating with the American populace. This is further supported by past studies such as the aforementioned 2015 study by Hainmueller

and Hopkins that showed how Americans view immigrants who speak English very favorably, with ninety percent of respondents believing that English proficiency is an important element of American identity and immigrants who could speak fluently scoring almost 20% better than those with interpreters (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015).

This study by Hainmueller and Hopkins also greatly supports the theory that native born Americans prefer highly educated migrants. In their study, immigrant profiles with a Bachelor's degree received a higher degree of support for admission, being 19.5% more favored than immigrants without a formal education. Additionally, as mentioned in the theory and hypothesis chapter, having a higher GDP per capita would theoretically allow said country to be able to have more funds to divest in sectors like education. Improved institutional facilities and resources would then lead to a more highly educated population, and increase the probability of a citizen from that country being proficient in English.

However, while the regression model shows that education attainment is not a statistically significant variable, it does affect the issuances of F1 visa per million more than the other confounds. Moreover, while there does not seem to be much quantitative support for the significance of education attainment, the qualitative analysis reports differently.

Another thing observed from the interviews is that participants who do well in their interviews have also mentioned that the school (typically high school) that they have attended prior to the interview, as well as the prestige of the university or college that they were accepted to during the time they were applying for the interview are also important factors attributed to their ease with the interview process.

Participants from countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, China, and South Korea have mentioned that having attended international or private schools, which typically have a higher standard of education and are more academically rigorous, was a major advantage in helping them prepare for the F1 visa application process. Additionally, the Indonesian participants that have considered pursuing an F1 visa but ultimately decided against it, were all from international schools, and Indonesian participants 4 and 5 men-

tioned how studying abroad is the expected pathway after high school. Participant 4 is currently applying to study in Japan and participant 5 has said how the curriculum in high school mostly prepared them for a curriculum like one in U.S. universities. They also mentioned how the U.S. would still be their top choice should the financial opportunity to apply be given to them.

Moreover, applicants who were accepted to more prestigious universities or colleges, have reported admitting that they may have an advantage in the visa interview process. Said participants are from Brazil, Botswana, India, and Indonesia. This is likely due to the perception that such applicants have stronger academic credentials and are more likely to be successful in their intended studies or professional pursuits.

As a result, they may face a lower level of scrutiny and a higher probability of passing the visa interview. In contrast, applicants with less prestigious academic backgrounds may face a higher level of scrutiny and a lower probability of successfully passing the visa interview, as their qualifications and intentions may be viewed with more skepticism by the interviewing officials.

This was observed in the answers of the Indian and Indonesian participants who applied for F1 visas. Despite all 3 Indian participants having roughly the same financial capability and funding their studies through their own personal savings, Indian participant 3 was the only one who attends a top university here in the U.S., and had the easiest time during the interview process. Participant 3 has reported saying that the school's prestige has helped a lot in expediting the interview process, as the consular agent only asked them 2 questions during the interview, which were what their name was and what they wanted to study. The participant further mentioned that before they could even answer those basic questions, the consular agent already gave the stamp of approval on their application. Meanwhile, the other two Indian participants were questioned more on their finances, how they were going to manage them to adequately pay for the entirety of the study program, as well as asking for proof of down payment for tuition in participant 2's case.

A similar case happened with the first two Indonesian participants, with the second Indonesian participant having only a 5-minute interview where finances were never brought up and the consular agent not asking to see their financial documents given that they were attending a prestigious school, while the first participant who was not attending a prestigious university, was extensively questioned on their financial capability.

Lastly, several observations can be made by analyzing the significance of the positive correlation between GDP per capita and F1 visas per million in isolation. The U.S. consistently preferring to issue more F1 visas to countries that have a higher GDP would be explainable through the previously mentioned theory of having the financial capability requirement of the F1 visa be utilized as a failsafe against increased undocumented immigration.

In recent years, despite public support for immigration being at its highest recorded level (Besco, 2021), most discourse around immigration still focuses on the negative aspects of it. As mentioned in the literature review, this can be seen from the major anti-immigration sentiment that bolstered Donald Trump's presidential campaign to success, with reinforcing the U.S. border with Mexico being a consistent topic on the agenda during their administration.

For the F1 visa pathway, the worst-case scenario for the U.S. would be if a student on an F1 visa chooses to stay in the U.S. past their visa expiration date illegally. Having financial capability as a main requirement to obtain an F1 visa to enter the U.S., ensures that even in the worst-case scenario where a migrant overstays illegally, the U.S. would still benefit from the integration of these migrants into the country regardless.

Furthermore, when asked what their plans are after graduation, most respondents mentioned wanting to gain work experience in the U.S. (mostly through the OPT which allows students to work for at least a year in the U.S. using their F1 student visa, provided that the job is within their major), with some interviewees planning to stay and work long term in the U.S. through an H1B visa. It would then also benefit the U.S. to have not only highly educated, English-proficient immigrants but also migrants who have experience living in the U.S. for an extended period of time and are familiar enough with American culture and

values to have assimilated relatively well, be the bulk of migrants joining the workforce.

6.2 Real World Implications

The GDP per capita of an applicant's country of origin directly correlates to the likelihood of the U.S. issuing that participant an F1 visa has many implications.

For scholars, this means that academics are now able to use F1 visas as a viable metric in observing the U.S.' economic status. Should the U.S. be undergoing an economic recession or a period of minimal economic growth, there would also typically be an increase in the demand for jobs as the unemployment rate increases. This would lead the U.S. general public to be more likely in potentially adopting an more restrictionist stance when it comes to immigration. This can be reflected in decreased F1 visa issuances, as consular agents are now told to be more stringent in inspecting an applicant's financial capability and plans post-graduation. In the case of heightened stringency during the application process, researchers would then expect to see an overall decrease in cumulative F1 visas issued, an increase in the number of F1 visas issued to countries with a higher GDP per capita, and a decrease in the number of F1 visas issued to countries with a low GDP per capita.

For potential future applicants, this relationship between GDP per capita and F1 visa issuances holds much more weight given how applicable this information is to this specific demographic.

While migrating to a different country with a higher GDP per capita just to gain an edge in eventually migrating to the U.S. with an F1 visa might be excessive and redundant, there are other ways with which this information can better help potential applicants living in a less economically developed country in increasing their chances of being approved for an F1 visa. The first is to plan on improving English proficiency sooner rather than later, given how integral being fluent in English is in the interview process. While this will already be addressed by having to obtain a certificate of English proficiency through taking tests like the IELTS or TOEFL, more informal gauges of language proficiency, such as being a good

conversationalist would also be good to keep in mind when preparing for the interview at the U.S. consulate.

Next, this entire paper has consistently stated the importance of being able to show financial capability to the U. S. embassy. This can be done by making sure that the applicant's finances are in order starting from 6 months in advance to when they plan to apply. Interviewees have stated that having to pay for the SEVIS ID and the visa application, especially when some embassies only accept U.S. dollars and the exchange rate between the U.S. and the applicant's country of origin is bad for the applicant (which was the case for the Brazilian, Motswana, and Vietnamese participants), as a common financial challenge during the application process. An applicant would do well to save up to buy U.S. dollars when the exchange rate between the applicant's country of origin and the U.S. is relatively low, as well as communicating with the bank of whoever is to be the main financial sponsor to make sure that an official notarized version proving financial capability to provide for the entirety of the study program can be obtained before the interview.

Additionally, most participants have mentioned how the documentation and form-filling part of the process is difficult due to the Department of State website not being intuitive and the questions when applying for the DS-160 or the 1-901 form for the SEVIS ID being confusing. An option that Indonesian participants 1 and 2, as well as Brazilian participant 1 have taken is to pay an agency to handle the paperwork for them, which while expensive could be worthwhile to consider saving up for. This is especially the case if there is only one chance to submit the documents correctly should the embassies in that country have a long wait and processing time for interviews, given that there's a set deadline on when a visa has to be acquired to be enrolled in time for the applicants' study program.

6.3 Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Studies

In conclusion, empirical data from the regression models and anecdotal accounts from the interviews have supported the significance GDP per capita has on F1 visa issuances. Poten-

tial reasons for this relationship could be because the unique financial requirement present in the F1 visa allows the U.S. to selectively admit individuals possessing high levels of skill and financial stability, along with a familiarity with American culture and values, especially regarding proficiency in English. This meticulous selection process aims to ensure that even in unideal scenarios where visa holders illegally remain in the United States after their visa expiration date, that they would have already been cherry-picked to be the most well-equipped to integrate into the U.S. workforce effectively, thereby potentially enhancing the U.S.' own economy.

Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the findings and interpretations presented in this study are circumscribed by the previously enumerated missing data issues. Consequently, this research falls short of definitively stating that there is a relationship between GDP per capita and F1 visa issuances, as additional variables not considered in this analysis could potentially influence outcomes in alternative regression models.

Future studies would do well in better incorporating controlling variables for education attainment and level of political violence by obtaining alternative datasets potentially from other sources or by implementing methods that would yield more accurate results. More confounding variables such as cultural ties and educational opportunities provided in the country of origin could also be controlled for in future research on this matter.

A more complete and efficient set of control variables to be implemented in future iterations of this study would benefit future F1 applicants by providing better insight into the relationship between GDP per capita, and the economic background of an applicant's country of origin in general, on F1 visa issuances, and ensuring that the results of a regression between the two variables are accurately captured without being distorted by external factors.

Moreover, for the qualitative analysis, should a similar study for this topic be done in the future, it would be worth considering implementing an online survey model instead to more effectively widen the scope of potential international interviewees which will subsequently

broaden the range of the participants' country of origin.

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