Preface:

The Hodgkinson Lecture was established in 2017 in honor of Harold “Bud” Hodgkinson, renowned lecturer, writer, and analyst of demographics and education. “Bud was ahead of his time in anticipating the resegregation of schools, which is now recognized as a major problem,” Kettering Foundation President David Mathews wrote shortly after Hodgkinson’s death in 2016. “And he saw what few did at the time: the relationship between race and economic status. In other works on higher education, Bud contributed what I consider the most provocative talk at the 1976 Health, Education and Welfare conference on the changing agenda for higher education. . . . To recognize his contributions to Kettering, we have created the Hodgkinson Lecture. This lecture is given to our most distinguished guests to make presentations to our meetings and conferences. It is our way of paying tribute to one of our country’s most insightful, witty, and perceptive scholars.”

The third Hodgkinson Lecture was delivered by Julia Gelatt, senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute, whose work focuses on the legal immigration system, demographic trends, and the implications of local, state, and federal US immigration policy. Appearing here is a lightly edited version of the speaker’s remarks, as well as highlights of the ensuing discussion. A brief biography of the speaker appears at the end of this document.
Introduction:

As a research organization concerned with making our democracy work as it should, the Kettering Foundation has long been concerned with the ability of our political system to reach sound collective decisions, particularly under circumstances of polarization and divisive public discourse. Many of our divisions reflect long-term demographic trends, such as our aging and diversifying population. We invited noted demographer and policy analyst Julia Gelatt to discuss these trends and their implications for our research, particularly as they concern our experimentation with constructive public discourse on these issues.

Julia Gelatt: Thanks to all of you for having me here. It’s wonderful to be on your beautiful campus.

I wanted to start by saying a few words about the place where I work. The Migration Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, DC. We do research and policy analysis on a wide range of immigration topics. It’s all with an eye to informing and elevating the conversation around immigration policy in the United States and around the world and providing a lot of evidence and facts to guide immigration policymaking.

As part of our US team, we focus on what’s happening in the United States with demographic trends and policy. We also have a team focused on immigrant integration. It focuses on things like education, workforce development, and English language acquisition.

Then we have a team that’s focused on Europe and the rest of the world. They’re split between our DC office and a small office in Brussels. So, here, there is a small group of about 35 people focused solely on immigration, both in the US and worldwide.

Today, I want to talk a little bit about some of the demographic facts and figures that drive immigration debates in the United States and explain what these numbers mean. And then second, I’d like to talk just a little bit about immigration federalism: how immigration trends are playing out differently in different parts of the country and how that is shaping differences in immigration policymaking across the country.

I want to start with just five numbers and facts that I think are driving immigration debates:

1. There are 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the US;
2. Most immigrants in the United States are from Latin America, primarily from Mexico;
3. The United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world;
4. By 2050, the majority of Americans will be nonwhite; and
5. All future growth in the US labor market will come from immigrants and their children.

I’m not here to tell you that any of these are wrong, but I do want to provide context around each of them.

So, first is the 11 million. It’s been estimated that there are around 11 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States, and they make up just one-quarter of the total foreign-born population. The pie chart below shows the foreign-born population divided up by legal status.

![Pie chart showing the distribution of foreign-born population by legal status.]

The largest group of immigrants in the United States is composed of naturalized citizens. These are people who came here with a green card and eventually earned their citizenship. The next largest share is made up of people with green cards, which authorize permanent residency. Then there’s that one-quarter of unauthorized immigrants. And
finally, there are about two million temporary immigrants, which include temporary
workers, students, and exchange visitors.

People tend to think about the unauthorized immigrant population as a single
group. People may have a stereotype in their minds of “a Mexican immigrant who snuck
across the border and is living here and working in a low-wage job.” But it’s actually a
much more diverse population than that.

By our best estimates today, about 40 percent of the unauthorized immigrant
population actually came on a temporary visa, usually a tourist visa, and then overstayed.
Most of the people who are newly joining the unauthorized immigrant population are
overstaying their visas. So this is more of a visa-overstay phenomenon than about people
crossing the border every day.

Here’s something else that really surprised me: Last week, the Pew Research
Center came out with a new study saying, “Mexican immigrants no longer make up the
majority of unauthorized immigrants.” That would be the first time in our country’s
history, I think, that that would be true. This has been the trend since the Great
Recession—that more unauthorized Mexican immigrants have been leaving the United
States either voluntarily or through immigration enforcement than have been coming into
the country. Instead, the groups that are growing as a percentage of the population are
Asian and Central American groups.

Both I and most other organizations count people who are in asylum backlogs as
part of the unauthorized immigrant population. This population is no longer increasing.
It’s a steady or even decreasing population, depending on the estimate, as can be seen on
the next graph here.
And again, this is a trend that’s been happening since before the Great Recession. Since its onset, we haven’t seen any growth in our unauthorized immigrant population. So even though you may hear in the news about lots of people breaking our laws, there has not actually been any increase in this population. And I’ll be happy to explain during the Q&A, if people are interested, how we know approximately how many unauthorized immigrants are here because, of course, we can’t know exactly.

Our unauthorized immigrant population is also a long-settled population. Over 60 percent have been in the United States for 10 years or more, and 1 in 5 has been here for 20 years or more. Related to that, we estimate that almost a third have a US-born child; slightly over a third own their own homes. So these are, increasingly, people who have deep ties in the United States.

I think a lot of Americans actually hold one of two different stereotypes in their heads when they think about unauthorized immigrants. And politicians use one or the other of them strategically to argue for different policies.
One such stereotype is of “these Mexican immigrants who just snuck across the border. They are probably willing to break other laws now that they’ve broken our immigration laws. They’re here to do no good, they’re taking jobs from needy Americans, and they’re undermining wage scales and working conditions.”

The other view is of “these hard-working family-oriented adults who are working to support their US-born kids at tough jobs most Americans don’t want. They’re part of the fabric of their communities, perhaps involved in the church or in other community organizations.”

Politicians conjure up one or the other of these images to argue for legalization programs for the unauthorized or to call for strict immigration enforcement policies.

Another common misconception is that most US immigrants are from Latin America, primarily Mexico. When many Americans think in general about immigrants in the United States, not just those who are unauthorized, they think about Latin American immigrants working in low-wage jobs.

The reality is that our immigrant population is increasingly diverse and increasingly well educated. Yes, over half of our total foreign-born residents are from the Americas. But 31 percent are from Asian countries. Eleven percent are from Europe, and 5 percent from African countries.

Mexicans are the largest single group. They account for about one-quarter of our foreign-born population. The next two largest national-origin groups are Indians and Chinese, each making up about six percent, followed by Filipinos at about five percent. So once you get past the 25 percent Mexican group, it’s a pretty diverse national-origin mix.

But the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States is actually falling. That’s shown in the graph below. You can see that red line. Its downward slant shows the decline in the number of Mexican-born people in this country. There are actually now more people coming here each year from India and China than from Mexico.
Furthermore, our foreign-born population is increasingly college educated. Thirty-one percent of all foreign-born people in the United States who are age 25 and older and have had time to finish their education do have a college degree, which is about on a par with the US population overall.

But among recent immigrants, those who entered in the last five years, almost half (47 percent) have bachelors or higher degrees. So that’s an increasing share of our foreign-born residents with college degrees. This varies a lot by national origin, of course. For example, 16 percent of recent immigrants from Mexico have bachelors or higher degrees while 86 percent of recent immigrants from India have bachelors or higher degrees.

So there’s a lot of diversity in the group, but increasingly, there are a lot of foreign-born people here who have a college education and are bringing their skills to our country.

Just as with unauthorized immigrants, people can conjure up different images of the immigrant population as whole. One could think about a foreign-trained doctor or
engineer or programmer in Silicon Valley or, alternatively, a Mexican or Central American-born farm worker harvesting strawberries. All these things are true about our foreign-born population, but people call up different images to make different points.

One of the debates we’ll have to have in our country in the coming years is: What kind of immigrants are in our national interest to have? Do we need more workers who can fill the jobs that Americans increasingly don’t want to do—farm work, poultry processing, construction, landscaping?

Or do we need more people who can create jobs, contribute to our tax base, and bring lots of high education and specialized skills to our country? Or do we need some kind of mix? This is something that we’ll be talking about in the coming years.

With 44 million foreign-born residents, the United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world. Each year the United States gives out about one million green cards for lawful permanent residents and about 1.8 million temporary visas for foreign workers, students, diplomats, and others.

But as a percentage of our population, we’re nowhere near the top compared to the rest of the world. Currently, 13.7 percent of the US population is foreign-born. In some Gulf States, such as the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, over three-quarters of their populations were born outside their countries. Of course, this is a very different kind of immigration. These immigrants are mostly temporary workers with very limited rights, but they represent a very high share of the population.

If you look at our peers in immigrant-receiving countries—Australia, New Zealand, and Canada—in all of them, over 20 percent of their populations were born outside the country. We’re not anywhere near that level yet. We’re also beat out by Switzerland, Sweden, and Austria in terms of the percentage of foreign-born residents.

During our country’s last big wave of immigration, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, we hit a high of 14.8 percent foreign-born. As can be seen on the graph below, we’re getting close to that again.
Some people use that point to argue that we should again put a pause on immigration. In 1924, we very severely restricted immigration. Some people argue that that allowed immigrants to be assimilated to US society, and some think we should go back to that policy.

Other people say, “No, we need immigrants for our growth and for our vitality. So we should continue to encourage high immigration.” This is another national conversation we need to have. What level of immigration would best serve our national interests? And how do we determine that?

By 2050, only a minority of Americans will be white. This is a projection that the Census Bureau put out several years ago, and it hit really hard in our national debates. Some people feel that their communities are changing around them—that they don’t recognize their communities anymore.

This has to do with a lot of factors, not just immigration, but immigration is one of them. According to one survey, almost half of white Americans say that if the majority of the US population becomes non-white it would “weaken American customs and
values.” For people who hold this view, this impending demographic change feels like a threat. Other Americans, of course, celebrate this increasing diversity as a real strength of our country.

Politicians draw on this in different ways. Many Republicans see this as a threat to their share of the electorate, whereas many Democrats see it as a boon to their share. People have strong reactions to this projection. Psychologists have found that people who read about it are more likely to support restrictions on immigration or immigration-enforcement policies.

It’s important to contextualize this. The Census Bureau actually projects that the United States will be majority-white far into the future, but a growing share of those white people also identify as Hispanic or Latino. So is that the right way to categorize people?

How people should be categorized by race is definitely open for debate. The Census Bureau relies on how people report their own racial identities and then also whether they identify as Hispanic or Latino. But how to classify what it would mean to be minority-white in the future is an open question.

We also don’t know whether people will retain their different identities or how they will identify themselves into the future, particularly Hispanic/Latino people whose grandparents, for example, came from a Latin American country. They may even drop that identity if their parents came to this country when they themselves were small children. We really don’t know whether we’ll even be measuring race and ethnicity in 2050 in the same way we do now.

The following bar chart shows that all future growth in the US labor market will come from immigrants and their children. By some measures, US birth rates are falling. We’re at the lowest rate we’ve ever seen. By other measures, birth rates are low but not historically low. But we’re clearly either at replacement or below replacement at this point.
What that means is that as baby boomers are retiring and leaving the US workforce, there aren’t enough US-born workers to take their places. And this, of course, isn’t good for economic growth. It’s also not good to have fewer workers who are supporting retirees. We need a strong tax base to support health care and other government services.

Because of immigration, we are actually sustaining the size of our workforce. We tend to bring in people in their prime working years. Foreign-born people also have more children on average than US-born people, so our immigration is actually sustaining our birth rates. Even though they are low, without immigration they would be lower.

So what all of this means is that into the future, all the growth in our prime working-age population will come from foreign-born people and those born in the United States to foreign-born parents. People like me—US-born people with US-born parents—we’re going to be a shrinking part of the workforce. And immigrants and their children will be a growing part of the workforce.
All of these trends, of course, play out really differently in different parts of the United States. Some places have very large immigrant populations and have had for a while. Others have far fewer immigrants.

As shown in the first map below, over 70 percent of the foreign-born population is concentrated in nine US states, primarily Texas, California, Florida, and New York. Other parts of the United States have smaller but quickly growing foreign-born populations, as can be seen in the second map. Those are primarily southeastern states and some western states.

States with over 1 Million Immigrants in 2015:

1. California
2. Texas
3. New York
4. Florida
5. New Jersey
6. Illinois
7. Massachusetts
8. Georgia
9. Virginia

71% of all US immigrants, 2015
76% of all US immigrants, 1990

Immigrants from different national origins also cluster in different parts of the country. As a percentage of its population, San Francisco has the most Chinese-born people of any metropolitan area in the United States. In Washington, DC, we have the highest concentration of Ethiopian immigrants. Fort Wayne, Indiana, has the highest concentration of Burmese refugees. And Bellingham, Washington, on the US/Canada border, has the highest concentration of those very foreign Canadian immigrants.

In some places, many of the foreign-born population came voluntarily, seeking better economic opportunities or educational opportunities. And in other places, it’s primarily a refugee or asylum population—that is, people who may have been placed in that particular community by the government.

All these different factors—the size, the growth, the characteristics of immigrants in different places—have an impact on multiple political issues, so the federal government reserves the right to control immigration policy. The federal government chooses who and how many people come to the United States. It also reserves the right to
enforce our immigration laws, and the courts have upheld that right. But states and localities really want to play a role in shaping immigration in their local communities.

We see, in the political science literature, that living among a lot of foreign-born people tends to make people supportive of pro-immigrant policies. But living in a place with a small but quickly growing immigrant population tends to make people supportive of immigration enforcement policies.

You can actually see this pattern in Great Britain as well in the Brexit vote. The places with high immigrant populations were against Brexit. The places with smaller immigrant populations were for Brexit.

In the United States, in the mid-2000s, a lot of mostly smaller towns and cities tried to pass laws to make life harder for unauthorized immigrants—to make it illegal for them to have a rental contract or a contract with utility companies or to get a business license. These efforts tended to crop up in places with small and quickly growing immigrant populations.

Right now, generally, there’s a tug of war between the federal government and the states on immigration. One group of states, for example, is actively suing the federal government over President Trump’s emergency declaration to reallocate funding to build a wall along the US/Mexico border.

When Obama was president, 26 states, led by Texas, sued him over DAPA, his proposal to offer temporary protections to parents of US citizens or green card holders. The DACA program went forward, but DAPA was held up by the courts and blocked.

Then too, there is the battle over sanctuary cities. There are places in the United States that are eagerly and enthusiastically cooperating with the federal government in enforcing immigration laws mostly through handing people arrested by the local police over to federal enforcement agents. But other places are working hard to break that tie between local law enforcement and federal law enforcement.

Now, there’s a real patchwork of such enforcement levels, based on these local policies. This is, of course, not perfectly correlated with demographics. Yes, places that have more immigrant voters and more immigrants, in general, and more children of immigrants, tend to be supportive of immigrant-friendly policies. But Texas and Florida are bucking that trend. So we can see that it’s not just demographics.

Overall, I would say that demographic trends are playing a big role in shaping our contentious immigration debates right now. But it is also true that politicians are utilizing these demographic trends in really different ways to support their arguments. And there are different frames that politicians are layering over these demographic trends to justify different policy responses.
So now, I’m really looking forward to your questions to continue the conversation.

Discussion:

Katya Lukianova: Thank you so much for this talk. It’s been most informative. As an immigrant, I have a very personal stake in considering all of these matters as well as a research interest in immigration, particularly in how immigration is being discussed and framed in public debate.

I also really enjoyed reading the report that you shared with us on “The Eight Keys to U.S. Immigration Policy Issues.” And I’m interested in your thinking about the audience for your research. Whom are you talking to?

Julia Gelatt: That’s an excellent question. And you hit upon a quirk of that paper, which is that we started writing it right after the elections. We were thinking, “Well, it’s clear that the Democrats in the House are going to play a more active oversight role than we’ve been seeing.” So some of those questions are about subjects we hope somebody will ask the administration to provide the data for because we think it would be important for Congress to know these things.

When we think about our audience, we are trying to reach a really broad range of people. We are sometimes talking to the Washington elite, the people who really influence immigration debates. So it’s stakeholders and experts. We are also trying to talk to the interested public and the broader public.

But our audience is mainly people who have a strong hand in making immigration policy, whether it’s members of Congress or members of the administration. We’re also trying to reach a broader audience and insert a lot of facts and data into the general conversation.

Katja Lukianova: So as you write up your research, do you ever struggle with figuring out what it is you want to put out? Like, what counts, particularly in the current debate about facts or “alternative facts”?

Julia Gelatt: Yes, we feel very strongly that evidence continues to matter. There are things that one can know, and there are facts. But where it gets fuzzier is in what you study. For example, we were proposing to do some research on how local cooperation with federal immigration enforcement was affecting things like what immigration enforcement looked like, what types of arrests were happening, and then also, how it was affecting the local economies.
If unauthorized immigrants and other immigrants are really afraid in a community, is that impacting the local economy? Might immigrants be afraid to seek out better jobs? Or maybe this fear has an impact on their kids who may not be going to school because their parents are avoiding interactions with other institutions.

We were proposing that study in conversation with folks at the Department of Homeland Security. They said, “Well, what we’re really interested in is how local cooperation with federal enforcement affects ICE officers’ safety.” That was a frame that we hadn’t been thinking about. That’s also a valid question.

So what we choose to study is subjective. We are aware of that and thinking hard about it. As a nonpartisan research organization, we’re trying to think about what we’re studying and how we’re asking the questions.

And then it’s also about how you frame things. As I said earlier, I could emphasize that a growing share of the foreign-born population has college degrees or I could tell you that some people who have a college degree come to the United States and work in jobs that have nothing to do with their degrees—what we call brain waste. One presents a rosier picture, and one presents a less optimistic one.

It’s impossible to be neutral in your presentation of facts and data. But we try our best to show all sides of the picture and be as transparent as we can about what’s happening.

**Jean Johnson:** You may know that the National Issues Forums has just done a round of immigration discussions around the country. I was surprised at the degree to which so much of that concern centered on language and whether people spoke English or were trying to speak English. Is that something you’ve looked at and could shed some light on? And you mentioned earlier that you had a group of reports on assimilation. I just wondered how you measure that. What do you look at in thinking about assimilation?

**Julia Gelatt:** With regard to English language proficiency, I don’t have those figures in my head, but it’s certainly something that we’ve looked at. First generation immigrants often struggle with English proficiency but tend to get better over time. But their kids will certainly be English-proficient and English-fluent and increasingly bilingual, which is really a benefit for our country.

With regard to immigrant integration (that’s the word we use), I don’t think we really have a working definition of what that entails. We kind of skirt that issue and just get into the question of what services families need. It’s about making sure early education and K-12 systems are responsive to the needs of immigrant families and their children and thinking a lot about our workforce development systems. Some immigrants bring their skills to the US but need help getting US-recognized credentials. Other
immigrants don’t come with strong skills and need a lot of help in boosting their skill base so that they can contribute economically and support their families.

**Laura Carlson:** I had two questions. One is: Is there a point or points you wished the general public understood that they don’t or don’t appear to? And I have the same question about lawmakers. Is there something that both sides are missing that you wished they understood better?

**Julia Gelatt:** The one thing I think is hard for people to understand is that 11 million people who are here unauthorized don’t have a way to fix their status and that they would if they could.

But the truth is there’s really no way for people to do that. Even if most unauthorized immigrants found employers who wanted to sponsor them for a visa, they would have to apply for that from abroad. Once they leave the United States, they face a 3- or 10-year bar to coming back because they’ve spent time here without legal status.

The same problem exists for an unauthorized immigrant who snuck across the border and married a US citizen, who now offers to sponsor him or her for a green card. Such immigrants must also leave the country and spend 3, or usually 10, years abroad. Most people aren’t willing to do that, given that they have roots here. They have kids, and they don’t want to spend that time outside the United States.

So we’ve made it impossible for most people to legalize their status. I think that’s something that a lot of Americans don’t understand.

For politicians, the debate in DC right now is focused on the Central Americans flowing across our border. You hear members of Congress ask, “Well, why don’t these people just apply abroad? Why do they come to our border and ask for asylum?” Unless you are from a country where there is a refugee resettlement program, which we don’t have in Central America right now, there’s no way to ask for protection in the United States from abroad.

The only way to do that is to come to our border or to get inside the United States and then ask for asylum. The government could create a process for people to ask for asylum from outside of the country. But then again, if a country isn’t safe for them and that’s why they’re fleeing it, it’s not safe for them to stay there while they go to the US consulate in a very visible way and try to get protection from abroad.

So, I think too few of our politicians really understand how asylum works, which complicates those conversations among lawmakers.

**John Doble:** When we talk to the public, immigrants become a shorthand for unauthorized immigrants. So, in carrying the discussion forward, it’s imperative from the
public’s point of view to differentiate between those two groups and not to confuse those terms.

**Julia Gelatt:** Yes, we’ve had a lot of conversations about that. And at the Migration Policy Institute, we’ve done a lot of research on the unauthorized immigrant population. But we’ve been talking about why we aren’t doing more research on legal immigrants. We’re part of the problem.

The legal immigrant population comes up when folks start to talk about what our legal immigration system should look like. President Trump, several weeks ago, talked about moving toward a merit-based system or a points-based system. When those debates come up, we start to talk more about the legal immigrant population: how people are doing who are sponsored by family members or employers, how naturalized citizens are doing.

I think if we have the chance in a future Congress to really seriously talk about reforming our legal immigration policies, that will be a moment when we have more of those conversations. But we should be doing that now.

**David Holwerk:** People opposing further immigration have this sense that they are being taken over. I think it’s worth trying to get inside of what that perception is about. And I wondered if you had any insights.

**Julia Gelatt:** I guess one of our strong understandings about how the public feels about immigration in the United States and around the world is that a sense of control is really, really important. The large number of Central Americans now coming to our border feels out of control. We can exert control in adjudicating their claims, but we don’t have control on whether or not they’re coming. And that tends to make people feel really uneasy. So, I think it’s less about the numbers and it’s more about the sense that our policies aren’t maintaining a regular and orderly migration.

**Paula Ellis:** Thanks for this great report. I really appreciate your highlighting the difference in the context between federal perceptions and local perceptions. I worked for a charitable foundation when we focused on the nation’s 12.5 million green card holders in eight states. And what we found was that the community perspective was more welcoming than the national debate reflects.

**Julia Gelatt:** I think that’s completely right. If it’s your neighbor, if it’s the owner of the restaurant that you love, if it’s the person who cuts your hair, then that’s not scary. But as a mass phenomenon, immigration can seem frightening to people. At the local level, people are also much more pragmatic. But at the national level, there’s much more politics involved and increasingly polarized politics, which really is a problem.
One proposal that’s been put on the table, which is really interesting, is to give states a bigger role in immigration policymaking. Giving localities a stronger role could bring some common sense back into immigration conversations. At the very local level, you also see that things are just much more pragmatic: “Here’s who is in our community. Here are their needs. Let’s think about how to meet the needs of all of the people in our community.”

**Ray Minor:** There’s no doubt immigration is one of the most important policy problems facing America. But do you get the sense that the US immigration laws are broken and need to be amended? Or is it a matter of enforcing or how we choose to enforce immigration laws on certain populations?

**Julia Gelatt:** Yes, I think they are broken, and everyone agrees although they clearly disagree on how they’re broken. But they’re not really broken so much as misaligned. Our immigration system was essentially created in 1965 with some updates in 1990. Our selection of whom we let into the country has become quite misaligned with our economic and demographic realities and with the push-and-pull factors around the world.

I think we need to update our immigration laws. We need to think about the balance between family and employment-based immigration, to think about the skill mix that our immigration system accommodates, and to create a more flexible system.

And because credibility is so important for having public support for immigration policy, we need to enforce our immigration laws. And in this current climate, it’s really difficult. You’re seeing broad opposition to any kind of immigration enforcement.

**Derrick Hammond:** We seem to be really living in a culture where people are less concerned about facts. But yet, you produce information, factual information, that’s used to drive conversations. Is there a specific policy or a tangible change that the institute looks at and says, “This policy came about because we were able to introduce facts into the conversation and produce that policy?”

**Julia Gelatt:** It’s hard to know how much. But there are lots of places we can point to as having had some influence on policy. The most recent example—this isn’t something that has changed but which potentially can—we put out a proposal for ways to basically speed up the processing of asylum claims. This proposal has gained a lot of attention from both sides of the aisle in Congress and members of the administration.

**Ruby Quantson:** I do support the need for facts, but a sense of identity and belongingness, for example, are not things that facts can go to. There is fear in society, and we need to say, “What kinds of conversations do we have around our dinner tables? How are you and your children talking about that migrant person in the school?”
are you describing that person of a different orientation?” I think those little things are fueling this conversation. And sometimes statistics just don’t capture that.

Julia Gelatt: Migration has always been happening in different forms, and it is just going to speed up. More and more people are going to be spending parts of their lives in countries other than the country they were born in.

But this does really raise the question of, “Should we—can we—maintain our national boundaries? What does that mean in an increasingly globalized world?” I think that we’ll continue to raise questions about how strongly to create those boundaries, how strongly to enforce those boundaries, how to regulate migration. But it is also a matter of expanding the notion of the “us” and the “them” in local communities.

Brad Rourke: I’m interested in your discussion of what you term “immigration federalism”—how immigration trends are playing out differently in different parts of the country. Sanctuary cities is one that people know about. Are there others that have surprised you as a national researcher looking at what people are doing in places, trying to exert control over this question?

Julia Gelatt: A lot of what’s happening isn’t necessarily surprising. States have been really anxious to try to control things—in essence, saying, “Your federal policies aren’t working for us. Either we think they’re too relaxed or we think they’re too strict. We think immigrants should have more rights or there should be more enforcement.”

Liberal states are extending increasing rights to unauthorized immigrants. New York just passed a bill to offer driver’s licenses to all residents regardless of legal status. California keeps extending eligibility for state-funded Medicaid. All kinds of states across the country either have taken federal options or have used state funding to provide public benefits to different groups of immigrants who aren’t otherwise eligible for them.

In Arizona there was SB 1070, a really harsh enforcement bill. Georgia, Alabama, and some other states had similar policies.

Utah unsuccessfully tried to extend, at a state level, right-to-work laws to unauthorized immigrants and pair that with some enforcement measures. That effort was deemed unconstitutional by the courts since work authorization is determined at the federal level.

Utah was trying to reach a middle ground by enacting comprehensive immigration reform at the state level. That was not possible. But it shows the hunger at the local level to really do something proactive and pragmatic to fix some of the problems that the federal government is struggling to fix.
Concluding Remarks:

David Mathews: Did you notice in the conversation how much “control” was a factor? I was struck by how often those who spoke would refer to “control.” It reminded me of how relevant the emerging field of what I will call paleopolitical psychology is for our work.

The best ideas we have about our most primal instincts are a combination of paleoanthropology linguistics and political psychology. Sometimes these primal vibes control the way we react to issues like immigration and the way we make policy. “I want to be secure from danger and know that that security is collective.” So, our sense of belonging to a collective is very important to us. Identity is very important to us. It’s a measure of security.

We want to be free to forage. Our ancestors knew this long before agriculture. We don’t want anybody to control or oppress us in a way that we cannot be free to associate or to assemble or to do whatever we think we ought to do.

And all of these freedoms have to do with control because control is the way we get them. The opposite of control is fear, which we know is the most powerful of all political motivations. And even the word “hunger,” introduced here in the conversation, is a longing for control. So, we may not be too far removed from our earliest ancestors on these kinds of subjects.

Now, rather than that being too esoteric, this has direct application for our issue books. If we listen to people carefully, there would be an option that has to do with control. It would probably be the leading option, and it will have to do with fear. There will be an option that has to do with equitable treatment—justice. There will be an option that has to do with the freedom to assemble and associate. And there will certainly be an option about security, about identity.

I think it would be interesting to go back through our issue books and see how well they tap into those primal motives. The decision is simply weighing all of those or at least the most relevant motives because what we do to make us secure is going to lessen our freedom. What we do to get control is going to have negative implications.

So these are intentions, and they are, at the same time, universal. And our differences, our disagreements, are essentially over things that we all agree about. We all have to have control and equity. We all have to be free, and we all have to be secure.

That’s what our issue books are all about: pointing out those tensions. If they don’t, we’ve lapsed into a nice well-informed civil discussion on these kinds of issues, particularly where control and fear are factors.
So I thought this was a very helpful discussion as we try to make decisions on how to frame our discussions. Thank you for stimulating this very, very good report.

**About the Speaker**

Julia Gelatt is a senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), working with the US Immigration Policy Program. Her work focuses on the legal immigration system, demographic trends, and the implications of local, state, and federal immigration policy in the United States. Dr. Gelatt previously worked as a research associate at the Urban Institute, where her mixed-methods research focused on state policies toward immigrants; barriers to, and facilitators of, immigrant families’ access to public benefits and public prekindergarten programs; and identifying youth victims of human trafficking. She was a research assistant at MPI before attending graduate school. Dr. Gelatt earned her PhD in sociology, with a specialization in demography, from Princeton University, where her work focused on the relationship between immigration status and children’s health and well-being. She earned her BA in sociology/anthropology from Carleton College.

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The Kettering Foundation is an independent, nonpartisan research organization rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Everything Kettering researches relates to one central question: What does it take for democracy to work as it should? Chartered as an operating corporation, Kettering does not make grants. The foundation’s small staff and extensive network of associates collaborate with community organizations, government agencies, researchers, scholars, and citizens, all of whom share their experiences with us.

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