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CRACKDOWN

TRUTH AND LIES ABOUT IMMIGRANTS

EDITOR'S NOTE

BLUEPRINT

A magazine of research, policy, Los Angeles and California

LOS ANGELES WITHOUT IMMIGRANTS? THE NOTION IS OXYMORONIC — akin to New York without tall buildings or Chicago without wind.

This is a city of immigrants inside a state of the same. Roughly one of every three people living in this city today began his or her life in another country; for California, that percentage is slightly lower, but the state is still one of the nation's most attractive to immigrants. More than one in four of its residents have arrived from elsewhere. Immigration has been central to California's history since the era of the Gold Rush, and it is vital to the culture, politics and life of Los Angeles and California today.

The results are to be celebrated. Los Angeles is safer and more prosperous because of its immigrant population. Those immigrants who came to this city, state and country did not bring crime with them; they did not arrive in search of welfare or government benefits; they aren't here in order to sneak into voting booths and cast ballots.

Overwhelmingly, immigrants come to America for one of two reasons: to flee oppression or to work. Once here, they pay taxes, generate economic growth and obey the law more conscientiously than Americans born in this country.

Those may strike some as controversial assertions. They are not. As the work detailed in this issue of Blueprint makes clear, they are facts. They help explain why California's economy is as strong as it is, and why Los Angeles has seen crime decrease to generationally low levels at the same time that it has attracted immigrants from around the world.

It is against that backdrop that the immigration raids of the past year have unfolded. And it is with appreciation of those facts that the raids have drawn such deep ire from so many residents and leaders of Los Angeles.

ICE's presence in the city began with a bang last June, and it has since roiled immigrant communities, the city's economy and local politics. It has affected school attendance and healthcare, increased the cost of many services and raised the ire of many neighborhoods. The state and city have fought the federal government in court and wrestled with authorities at all levels. It has been, to say the least, a trying moment in the city's history.

All of which might be worth it if this exercise were securing some other benefit — making the city safer, say, or more affordable. But, as the research featured in this issue makes clear, that is precisely not the case. About the only good thing to have come from ICE's presence has been a mild drop in traffic as migrants, afraid to venture out, have stayed hidden at home.

Immigrants — whether students here to study or executives here to manage; whether in this country on a work visa or having overstayed a lawful entry or having entered without documents at all — are so integrated into the heart of Los Angeles that there is no way to remove them without tearing deeply into the fabric of who we are. Even if that were desirable, and it is not, it would be impossible.

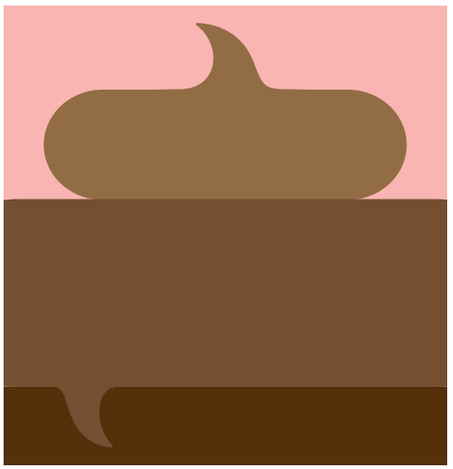
There is no Los Angeles without immigrants because Los Angeles is immigrants.

JIM NEWTON
Editor-in-chief, *Blueprint*

INSIDE BLUEPRINT

ISSUE 23 / SPRING 2026

LANDSCAPE



NOMA BAR

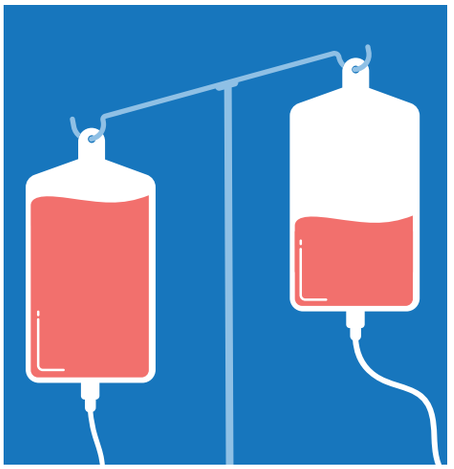
PROFILE

IRIS SCHNEIDER

VISUALLY SPEAKING

FEATURED RESEARCH

MAPPING DEPORTATIONS



NOMA BAR

Special Report: A CLOSER LOOK

AP PHOTO/NOAH BERGER

TABLE TALK

IRIS SCHNEIDER

CLOSING NOTE

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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY NOMA BAR

LANDSCAPE

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

Activists rally to sound ICE alarms

EARLY ON WINTER MORNINGS OUTSIDE HOME Depot near MacArthur Park, the streetlights still shine while the rising sun brushes the clouds with vivid pink and orange.

Two dozen day laborers, or *jornaleros,* have already gathered at 7 a.m. on this Wednesday. Most are in their 20s and 30s. They lean against a low fence surrounding the parking lot, hands stuffed into jean pockets to keep warm, hoping for work.

Food vendors rim the corner of Union Avenue and West Sixth Street. Ranchera music plays. The aromas of steaming tamales, beans and coffee rise from pots. Meat sizzles on small griddles near rows of bottled soda. It is impossible to squeeze past the long tables without hearing a chorus of "¡Buenos dias!"

Joel Freeman has already arrived. He had walked from his Rampart apartment, as he has most Wednesdays since last October. Freeman, 32, is one of the volunteers organized by the L.A. Tenants Union and CARECEN, an immigrant rights group.

On patrols lasting two to three hours, the volunteers watch for vehicles driven by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and warn the laborers and area residents that they are here.

The ICE patrols are among many convened daily in Los Angeles and thousands nationwide. These volunteers also video arrests. This attention can dampen violence or spark it. The videos have provided information for news reports and evidence for court cases.

Seven volunteers assemble this January morning at the MacArthur Park Home Depot. Some have long experience with nonprofits, organized labor or political activism.

"I'm not a morning person," Freeman says, an admission he follows with a hearty laugh at the apparent contradiction.

He stations himself on Wilshire Boulevard near an entrance to the Home Depot parking lot. Wilshire is one of three lookout posts. Some of the volunteers set up a folding table and a pop-up canopy. They have a bullhorn, whistles, a stack of "know-your-rights" cards and water bottles. They communicate through walkie-talkies and on a dedicated Signal chat that will disappear when the ICE patrol ends.

"THESE FOLKS ARE MY NEIGHBORS," HE SAYS, HIS EYES STILL WATCHING WILSHIRE. "THIS IS WHAT YOU DO IN A NEIGHBORHOOD."

For the next two hours, Freeman scans the street for shiny unmarked vans and SUVs with drivers kitted out in military gear. Buses and trucks rumble by. An older unhoused man shuffles past, dragging a large, gray blanket. A young panhandler, with headphones and in red shorts, stops and asks for money. Freeman gives him some. Parents hustle children along to school.

At 7:30 a.m., walkie-talkies crackle with reports that ICE agents are in Filipinotown, a mile away. News accounts later indicate the agents had surrounded a vehicle. Video shows a resident holding a peace sign. The agents leave without detaining anyone.

NOMA BAR

The sun is up now, and patrol volunteers unzip their jackets and pull out sunglasses.

At 8:15 a.m., Alex walks by, accompanying his son to middle school. Alex and Freeman chat. They recently had discovered that they live near one another. Alex emigrated from Mexico 30 years ago. He has five American-born children, one of whom serves in the U.S. Marine Corps. ICE raids have made Alex consider returning to Mexico, but he doesn't want to leave his children.

AN ARTIST AND GIG WORKER IN WHAT HE calls L.A.'s "art industry," Joel Freeman came to California in 2012 to attend Pomona College, where he majored in studio art. Some of his professors involved in the L.A. art scene brought him along on trips into the city.

"I realized I actually want to live here," he says. He moved to L.A. from Arkansas after graduating. He credits his parents for motivating his involvement with the ICE patrols.

Freeman grew up in a "Christ-centered" household. While he no longer considers himself religious, "That framework of ethics and justice is important to me."

His father directed international student affairs at the University of Arkansas, and his family hosted foreign scholars who exposed him to different cultures. Freeman was 10 when a Gazan student lived with them for a while. Watching TV news with his houseguest and seeing Palestinian homes being bulldozed "shifted my understanding of what went on there," Freeman says. It also challenged his parents' long support for Israel.

When they visited L.A. in October, he invited his father and mother to join him at an ICE patrol. "Here's what I normally do on a Wednesday morning," he told them. "Y'all want to come?"

They did.

Tall, lanky, with a dark baseball cap, Freeman juggles several jobs. He teaches printmaking at Los Angeles High School of the Arts; he works in a book bindery, and he helps build scenery for the Bob Baker Marionettes. Before COVID, he was a puppeteer there.

He also transports and hangs art for gallerists and art dealers whose clients are often private collectors.

Freeman tracks this complicated schedule with neat handwriting in a Japanese-made pocket calendar.

He has not witnessed any ICE raids at this Home Depot, but immigration officers did appear multiple times in recent months and detained day laborers.

Freeman views his participation in ICE patrols as part of his commitment to Los Angeles and his community.

"These folks are my neighbors," he says, his eyes still watching Wilshire. "This is what you do in a neighborhood."

— Molly Selvin

→ Councilmember Hugo Soto-Martinez presents a resolution to UCLA Labor Center (UCLA Labor Center)

THE CHANGING CITY

Mayor's race tests L.A.'s leanings

HOW LIBERAL IS LOS ANGELES? THAT QUES- tion is very much on the minds of political insiders and observers these days as the city turns to its upcoming election and makes important decisions about its future: how much to invest in public safety, how much to tax its wealthiest residents, how to treat those who live here but without formal immigration documents.

One trend is clear: The city leans ever further to the left. Once the bulwark of conversative politics under the protection of a Republican business leadership and a Republican newspaper, the city has moved steadily leftward in recent decades. The days when Richard Riordan, a moderate Republican, could win the support of the electorate are far behind today's Los Angeles.

Some of that is evident in voter registration. When Riordan was elected in 1993, more than 30% of the city's voters were registered Republican. Today, the number is somewhere around half that. As measured by voter registration, Los Angeles is significantly more Democratic — and less Republican — than New York City, which recently elected Democratic Socialist Zohran Mamdani as its mayor.

"STAYING SILENT OR MINIMIZING WHAT IS HAPPENING IS NOT AN OPTION."

— LOS ANGELES MAYOR KAREN BASS

But voter registration is just a first cut at the question. Some of the evidence of L.A.'s shifting political center is more localized and impressionistic.

Always a city of neighborhoods, Los Angeles in recent years has seen the rise of more liberal activism in many of those communities, some of it owing to vastly improved outreach and voter contact work by the region's Democratic Socialists.

The result has been a surge in liberal representation on the City Council, where Eunisses Hernandez, Hugo Soto-Martinez and Nithya Raman anchor a group that is well to the left of many mainstream Democrats. Those members and a growing number of their colleagues are skeptical of spending for police, eager to find new sources of taxation that tap the wealthy, committed to higher wages for working people and fiercely protective of residents, regardless of immigration status.

That program, backed by grassroots organizing and sophisticated political leadership, has touched voters, and has made the left far more viable in local elections.

The political muscle of Los Angeles' rising liberal faction is demonstrated not just in the number of candidates who identify with the Democratic Socialists but more broadly in the way it helps shape the policies and priorities of the city generally.

It was not long ago that support for increased LAPD spending was a unifying city objective. Conservatives favored the idea of stricter enforcement of the law, while liberals saw it as a way to pay for police reform and empowering its oversight. No more.

Although "defund the police" is a bygone slogan, the LAPD's critics are plentiful and unwilling to acquiesce to once-routine budget requests to maintain or expand its ranks. The department today employs about 8,500 officers, well below its peak staffing levels and far below the long-sought goal of 10,000.

There are many reasons for the leftward shift, and not all of them are specific to Los Angeles. The nation's economic inequality continues to expand, and the plight of those left out of economic growth grows increasingly dire and visible in big cities, where opulence and poverty live side by side.

That's inescapable in modern Los Angeles, with its grand homes, flashy boutiques and grinding homelessness.

The left also has clearly thrived in the era of President Trump. The president, who is fond of denigrating Los Angeles and California, is reviled in Los Angeles, and his influence has radicalized liberals, making them willing to vote for new congressional maps and rise to the defense of undocumented migrants.

More purely political changes have contributed as well. Los Angeles in 2015 switched its election schedule from voting in odd-numbered years to coinciding with the gubernatorial and presidential election cycles.

That's been a change with mixed results, but one clear consequence has been to broaden the participants in city elections. An electorate once dominated by homeowners and wealthier interests now increasingly includes lower-income voters and renters, whose interests tend to pull the city toward programs such as rent control and away from priorities such as forceful police protection.

The tug affects the council, where several members are now renters. And it affects the race for citywide offices, including mayor, where incumbent Karen Bass and Raman are the most serious contenders in the upcoming election. Bass would love to see Spencer Pratt edge out Raman, but that's only because he would make a hapless opponent in November.

For Bass, the strongest card she has is her ardent opposition to President Trump, whose ICE raids have united Los Angeles as few other matters have — testament to what now brings together this city's varied political strains.

"Staying silent or minimizing what is happening is not an option," Bass told a group of supporters recently. "This senseless death, lawlessness and violence must end. And so must the presence of ICE in Los Angeles."

Angelenos — moderate, liberal and very liberal — joined to stand in applause for that.

— Jim Newton

A version of this article appeared in CalMatters on Feb. 5. tinyurl.com/4k6t6va4

POLITICAL TALK

Swearing is suddenly OK in politics

JUST SIX SECONDS INTO HIS GUBERNATORIAL launch video, Tom Steyer cursed.

"The richest people in America think that they earned everything themselves. Bullshit, man," the hedge fund billionaire told the camera. "That's so ridiculous."

Jaws would have dropped if Gray Davis swore on camera during his 2002 run for governor of California, or if Jerry Brown did so in 2010, but in Steyer's case the word choice was more curious, as it was clearly intentional, designed to get noticed — and get clicks (because it's important to the context of this article, *Blueprint* is using the full profanities). He's also not the only person seeking the state's highest office ready to pottymouth it up.

> ***"STOP THIS BULLSHIT DIPLOMACY OF NICETIES."***
> ***— CALIFORNIA GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM***

When newly declared candidate Eric Swallwell appeared on CNN's "The Story Is" in November, he said that if elected, he'd prioritize rapid government movement on housing projects. "I want to be a get-shit-done governor," he told host Elex Michaelson.

And when former Congresswoman Katie Porter sent out a fundraising email in February, the subject line read: "Fuck Trump." She must have liked the sound of it, because the email itself used the catchy phrase no fewer than five times, three in a row.

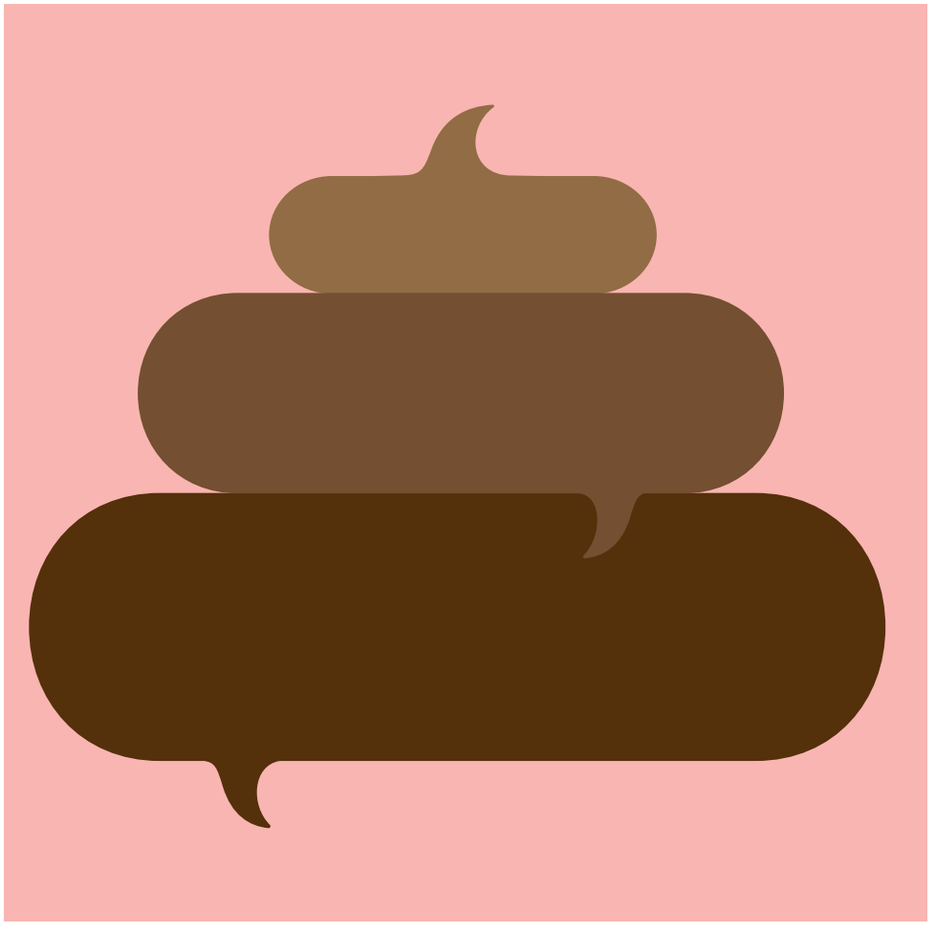
The man they're hoping to succeed also isn't averse to the well-placed curse — when speaking to reporters during the Davos summit in January, Gov. Gavin Newsom chastised European leaders for playing softball with President Trump. "Wake up! Where the hell has everybody been? Stop this bullshit diplomacy of niceties," Newsom stated.

Why are elected officials increasingly cursing in public, when for so long it was politically forbidden? There's no scientific answer, but like so much else these days, it can be traced to Trump himself, who never cared for any sort of political precedent, and in whose mouth an expletive sounds somehow authentic — a feeling others may be trying to emulate.

In 2018, Trump infamously referred to Haiti and some African nations as "shithole countries" during a meeting with U.S. senators — Trump denied that for years but now brags about it. He's never stopped. Last October, when asked during a White House press conference about what then-Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro had offered to maintain positive relations, Trump said, "He's offered everything ... You know why? He doesn't want to fuck around with the United States."

Should anyone be surprised at this coarsening of the language, and that politicians are increasingly willing to say that? Probably not. We've all heard far worse, whether it's "Glengarry Glen Ross," a batch of eighth graders or... probably you if you miss a turn while driving or just can't find the TV remote.

It's not like elected officials are known for or were ever expected to speak chastely. Long after Lyndon Johnson died in 1973, the public learned how he really talked — consider his aphorism about controlling people, "I never trust a man until I've got his pecker in my pocket." Similarly, the recordings Richard Nixon made in the Oval Office, many of which were released decades later,



NOMA BAR

revealed not just ample use of "son of a bitch" but some downright antisemitic comments. Editors were so shocked by those that they famously replaced them with the phrase "expletive deleted."

For a long time, political profanity would only surface during hot-mic moments. At a Labor Day rally in 2000, President George W. Bush spied a face in the crowd and leaned over to tell Vice President Dick Cheney, "There's Adam Clymer, major-league asshole from the New York Times." Clymer seemed to take it as a point of pride, writing in 2018, "Not many folks get to be cussed out, by name, on national television by the President of the United States."

A difference now is that, at heightened moments, politicians no longer seek to censor themselves, and certain expletives function as emphasis. After an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent shot and killed Renee Nicole Good in Minneapolis in January, Mayor Jacob Frey held a news conference where he seethed, "To ICE, get the fuck out of Minneapolis." His fury was palpable, and the vulgarity helped drive it home.

Newsom adopted the same tone in February after Louisiana officials sought to sue California over abortion pill cases. On X, he tagged Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill and wrote, "Go fuck yourself. California will never help you criminalize healthcare."

Los Angeles has seen a variety of political expletives. The most notable was the vitriolic, racist and homophobic 2021 meeting where a trio of City Council members and a labor leader ripped, well, just about everyone. In a secretly made recording, "shit" was uttered 50 times, and one of the scores of "fuck" variations involved then-Council President Nury Martinez declaring, "It's the white members on this council that will motherfuck you in a heartbeat."

But those profanities weren't strategic. They were made in what the members thought was private, and their exposure didn't demonstrate resolve or fortitude, just terrible judgment and offensive taste. Martinez resigned days after the recording became public.

More recently, during her 2024 run for City Council, Ysabel Jurado answered a question about police abolition by saying, "What's the rap verse? Fuck the police, that's how I see 'em." She didn't know she was being recorded. She still won the race.

It was a different situation in 2014, when Mayor Eric Garcetti attended a Staples Center rally to celebrate the L.A. Kings winning the Stanley Cup. Garcetti held a beer aloft as he told hockey fans, "There are two rules in politics. They say never, ever be pictured with a drink in your hand, and never swear, but this is a big fucking day." The crowd roared.

In political terms, consider that a kinder, gentler F-bomb.

— Jon Regardie

UNSPLASH/ADOLFO FELIX

"A LIGHTER LOOK" — NAMES

Rick Meyer's regularly appearing column takes a lighter look at politics and other issues around the world. This month: "NEW NAMES."

YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE GULF OF America.

It is that large body of seawater north of Mexico and south of the United States. Most of the world calls it the Gulf of Mexico. But Donald Trump renamed it.

In MAGA world, it's the Gulf of America.

"What's in a name?" asks the *New York Times*.

"Trump loves to rename things," writes Jodi Rudoren, who oversees Times newsletters. It is "part of his Great Unwokening quest. But it's also a way he asserts power."

At one point he demanded that the Washington Commanders restore their racist name — the Washington Redskins. "It was both an attempt to change the conversation (which at the time was about his ties to Jeffrey Epstein)," Rudoren writes, "and a rallying cry to the right."

"The power to rename things is the power to define reality." Rudoren quotes Jennifer Mercieca, a Texas A&M communication professor, who has written a book about Trump's rhetorical style. "It goes hand in hand with Trump's assertions that are not backed by evidence, or fly in the face of it. Remember 'alternative facts?' Redefinitions of reality have been central to his success."

Mr. President, you have fallen behind in renaming things.

Here are some suggestions:

- Vast waterfalls straddle the U.S.-Canadian border. The Canadian side is the most dramatic side. From Canada, one can see all three of the falls, including famous Horseshoe Falls. The real world calls all of this cascading water Niagara Falls.

  American Falls has a ring to it.
- In the Black Hills of South Dakota stands a majestic mountain carved with the faces of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln. The real world calls it Mount Rushmore.

  You could summon sculptors, and when they are finished rename it Mount Trump.
- Across Arizona, from the eastern end of the Grand Canyon to the Petrified Forest, stretch 150 miles of pink, purple and orange mineral deposits called the Painted Desert.

  Touch up the landscape with your favorite black marker and you have the Sharpie Wasteland.
- At the top of the United States are the Great Lakes. Why hold back? How about the Greatest Lakes?

  As the greatest of those, Lake Superior cries out to be Lake Donald J. Trump, the Favorite President.
- Then there's the Mississippi River. Rename it the MAGAsippi.

Or you could go for something extremely big. Take a suggestion, with a dash of sarcasm, from California Democratic Congressman Jared Huffman.

Stop calling this planet Earth. Rename it Planet Trump.

Rudoren writes that Professor Mercieca considers renaming "frame warfare."

"What you call a thing determines the contours of the debate around it," Rudoren says. "Or precludes debate altogether. 'Did you borrow a car without permission, or did you steal it?'

"'Was the crush of migrants at the Mexican border an invasion or a humanitarian crisis?'

"All politicians try to play the frame game," Rudoren says. "Trump is a master at it."

— Richard E. Meyer

Raul Ruiz

Palm Desert Representative on Congress in the Trump era

WRITTEN BY
MOLLY SELVIN
PHOTOS BY
IRIS SCHNEIDER

"I'M VERY ANGRY RIGHT NOW," REP. RAUL Ruiz posted on January 24 after watching the first videos of ICE agents fatally shooting Minnesota nurse Alex Pretti hours before.

"Not once did I see Alex behave violently or have a gun in his hands," the California Democrat's post said. "[Kristi] Noem [secretary of Homeland Security at the time of the shooting] needs to be impeached, and she along with all agents involved in this homicide need to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Weeks later, talking in his Palm Desert district office, Ruiz, a former emergency room physician whose district includes rich farmland, vacation resorts and large swaths of cactus and scrub in riverside and imperial counties, was still angry.

"We need to pass comprehensive immigration reform that will secure the borders, will stabilize our workforce and contribute to the economy," he said in an interview, as well as create a more efficient and fairer pathway to citizenship for those who have been here.

But the Trump administration is uninterested in fixing the immigration system, Ruiz declared, his voice rising. "They're fixated on the brutality and the violence of removing [immigrants], of dominating in this space."

President Trump's replacement of Kristi Noem with Markwayne Mullin won't make any difference, Ruiz said. His appointment and confirmation is "not a policy change, it's a change in communication strategy."

The pathway to a fairer, more efficient system, he said, "has to start by removing Donald Trump and Stephen Miller," among others.

Ruiz's bluntness on immigration seems at odds with a lawmaker whom colleagues and constituents know as thoughtful and collegial, even informal — often in khakis and rolled-up shirtsleeves.

"Raul is an all-around good guy and has the heart for public service," said Rep. Gus Bilirakis, a Florida Republican. He and Ruiz have partnered on several bills in recent years and meet for dinner in Washington.

Ruiz's district, CA 25, was once more red than blue. However, his constituents have reelected him six times since he took office in 2012 by defeating long-serving Republican Mary Bono Mack. In 2024, he won reelection by 13%.

The son of Coachella farmworkers, Ruiz's humble beginnings in Coachella Valley and Horatio Alger story have earned him votes from Latino constituents, including many who voted for Trump in 2024. At the same time, his reputation as a longtime community doctor and his focus on healthcare issues in Congress won local white retirees, said Mike Madrid, a political strategist and observer of California politics.

Born in Zacatecas City, Mexico, the 53-year-old lawmaker came to the United States as a baby. After the death of his biological mother, he was adopted by an aunt and American-born uncle who brought him to the U.S. and raised him in Coachella. He and his mom became citizens in the 1980s.

"They are my mom and dad in every aspect of the word, my heart, my soul and my love."

The family lived in a trailer until his father was promoted out of the fields into a packing house job and could afford a larger home in the Coachella barrio. His mother still lives there.

He credits his family and his barrio neighbors for nurturing the service "heart" that Rep. Bilirakis admires.

"I know firsthand the hard work they put in to give their families and their children opportunities that they never had, like my parents did for me," Ruiz said. "I know them," he said. "They fear God. They worship in the same churches. Their children went to school with me."

He is particularly incensed with the way Trump and Miller have branded immigrants as dangerous "others," a characterization, he insists, that has already proven costly to all Americans.

"We know that immigrant labor contributes to the solvency of Medicare and Social Security," Ruiz said. Without the taxes immigrants pay into those critical programs, he said, they will run out of money sooner.

Another example: The nearly $1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid, he said, that Congress passed last year as part of HR 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill, jeopardized the financial stability of hospitals that serve immigrants eligible for medical care — as well as all citizens.

Falling reimbursements will force hospital officials to shutter less profitable departments like pediatrics, labor and delivery, even emergency rooms —or close altogether, as is already happening in poor and rural communities. Hospitals that remain open, Ruiz predicts, will have to make up lost revenue by charging more, forcing private insurers to cover those higher costs and, in turn, pushing insurance premiums higher for everyone.

Andrea Silva, who teaches political science at UC Riverside, agrees. By demonizing immigrants, we underestimate their considerable contributions

"WE NEED TO PASS COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM THAT WILL SECURE THE BORDERS, WILL STABILIZE OUR WORKFORCE AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE ECONOMY."

to the country, financial and otherwise.

"They may be net users [of resources] in the first generation, but by the second generation, they are net providers," she said.

The administration's often violent arrests and deportations don't distinguish between strivers like Ruiz and child traffickers, Silva said.

They pick up people based on administrative, not judicial warrants, she said, and judge them in administrative courts — and have little or no accountability. "It's unfair and unjust."

Meanwhile, "We need agricultural workers," she said, and H-2A visas. Such temporary visas for seasonal agricultural workers are expensive and difficult for employers to obtain. When farmers can't get enough of those visas, she said, they often subcontract to a middleman who ends up finding undocumented people to cultivate and harvest crops.

"We need a better understanding of what migrant labor does for us," Silva said.

"MY MOTHER IS AN ANGEL," RUIZ SAID. "Even though we lived in a trailer and were poor, she fed the hungry and gave clothes to people who needed them."

When, as a child, he told her that he too wanted to help others when he grew up, she steered him toward medicine.

College was the first hurdle. The summer before his freshman year at UCLA, Ruiz wrote a "contract" in which he promised to return to Coachella as a physician if neighbors helped him fund his undergraduate studies at UCLA. The 17-year-old printed copies, borrowed a briefcase and put on a suit in the 120-degree summer heat. He went door-to-door among Coachella's merchants, distributing his contract and raising $2,000, enough to pay for his books. He graduated magna cum laude.

Harvard Medical School followed, along with two master's degrees — in public health and public policy.

Ruiz trained in emergency medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. (Yes, he watches "The Pitt," HBO's award-winning series set in a Pittsburgh ER. "I can't turn it off," he said, "and, yes, that is the life of an emergency physician.")

After med school and while earning his master's degrees, Ruiz treated patients in the Chiapas jungles and consulted with government officials in Serbia and El Salvador on medical care delivery in those countries.

Then, as promised, he moved back to Coachella. Ruiz helped create the nonprofit Volunteers in Medicine, which provides free or low-cost primary care for local residents, and a mentorship program for local pre-med students who want to serve their communities.

He met his wife, a former ER nurse, when the two worked at the Eisenhower Medical Center. The couple live in Indio with their twin school age daughters and Blue, the family's large white Husky and Ruiz's running partner. Their photos hang in his district office, a cozy space crowded with books, plants and an array of plaques and certificates.

"WHEN DEMOCRATS WIN BACK THE HOUSE, THERE'S GOING TO BE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE MORE TRANSPARENCY AND TO HOLD [TRUMP] ACCOUNTABLE THROUGH THE POWER OF THE PURSE AND LEGISLATION."

CONGRESS WAS NEVER PART OF HIS PLAN, Ruiz said, with a laugh that accentuated his dimples. But when his predecessor, Rep. Bono Mack, supported a 2009 Republican policy statement calling for gradually converting Medicare from government insurance to government-subsidized and government-approved private insurance, he decided to run. He lost that race but unseated her two years later.

Last year, he and Rep. Bilirakis introduced legislation they hope will help prevent doctor shortages in Medicare by ensuring that payments better reflect the real cost of delivering care, especially in rural, underserved and low-income communities.

The two congressmen also helped draft and pass what ultimately became the 2022 PACT Act, providing benefits to veterans who develop any of several medical conditions following exposure to toxic substances while serving in conflicts abroad.

Their bipartisan partnership and friendship seem an exception in Washington DC.

Another example of polarization is Ruiz's Humanitarian Standards for Individuals in ICE and CBP Custody Act. He introduced it in February. The measure would set medical and safety standards for a growing number of detention centers where immigrants are being held under Donald Trump.

Since these operations began, more than 55 people have died in the custody of ICE and Customs and Border Protection, Ruiz said angrily. Seven detainees have died already this year.

"We've heard reports of detainees not able to find space on the floor to sleep, freezing temperatures, inadequate food, lights on all the time," he said. "We've heard stories of their inability to take showers or wash their hands freely."

The measure should be an easy one for even Republicans to support, he said. His bill currently has 87 co-sponsors, but he doubts he'll get a single Republican to sign on, even from among the 20 physicians now in Congress.

Will the measure be heard in committee?

"No."

That bluntness again.

Ruiz is betting on the midterm elections, but he is realistic about the limits of even Democratic victories.

"When Democrats win back the House, there's going to be opportunity to create more transparency and to hold [Trump] accountable through the power of the purse and legislation," he said. "The president may veto, but it would be a strong rebuke." ◤


U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
EXIT

A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS — AND DEPORTEES

America is a land of immigrants. It has accepted more immigrants from more countries than any nation in the history of the world. America is a land of deportation. It has sent home more migrants than any nation in history. Both histories are true, and they create considerable tension about what America stands for.

Where Do Immigrants Come From?

These five countries have contributed the largest number of immigrants to contemporary America.

MEXICO
11 MILLION

INDIA
3.2 MILLION

CHINA
3 MILLION

PHILIPPINES
2.1 MILLION

CUBA
1.7 MILLION

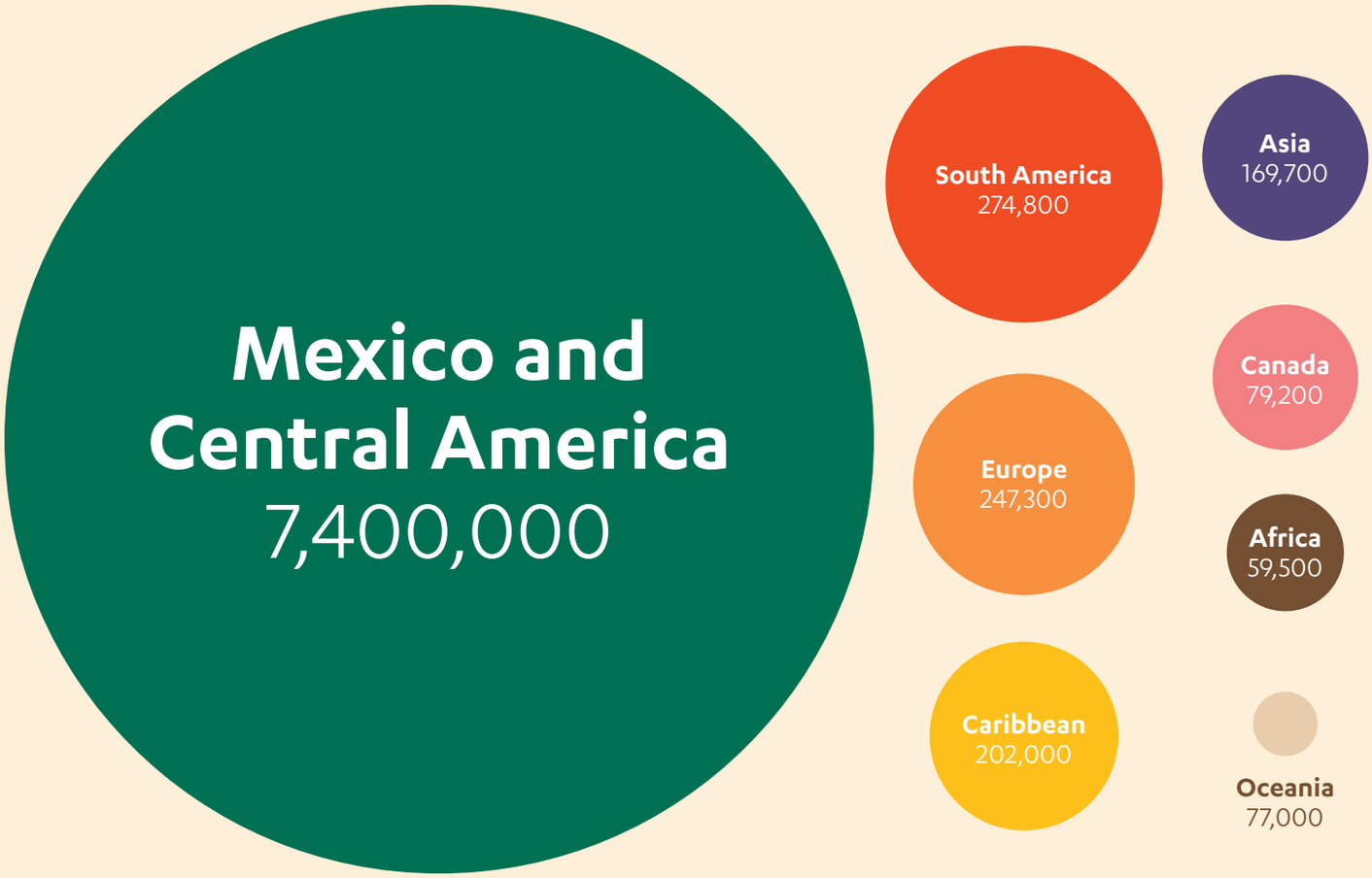
The rest of the world contributed another 11 million or so migrants, with about 10% from Europe, 5% from sub-Saharan Africa, 4% from the Middle East/North Africa and 2% from Canada or elsewhere in north America. These numbers were compiled by the Pew Research Center as part of a 2024 study.

Source — Pew Research Center: tinyurl.com/3txbyaff

Who Gets Deported?

From 1895 to 2022, the areas of the world to which deportees were returned:

Source — Mapping Deportations Project: tinyurl.com/37bksp9j



Immigration Over Time

U.S. immigration is sometimes described in "waves," with different populations in different periods.

From **1840 to 1889**, about 90% of immigrants came from Europe, mostly Germany, Ireland and Britain.

↑ Drawing of Immigrants coming to the United States in the 19th Century. (Library of Congress)

↑ Immigrants on a Ferry Boat Near Ellis Island. (Wikimedia Commons)

From **1890 to 1919**, most immigrants, though still from Europe, came from Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Poland.

Source — Pew Research Center: tinyurl.com/ywbjff73

Congress adopted the Immigration and Nationality Act **in 1965**, and since then, most migrants have come from Latin America and Asia.

↑ President Lyndon B. Johnson signing the Immigration Act, October 3, 1965. (National Archives)

UNSPLASH/YASMIN PEYMAN

Mexico **today** supplies about 25% of all immigrants to America, with another 25% coming from Asia, mostly the Philippines, China and India. About 12% have come from Europe in recent decades.

RAVAGED BY THE RAIDS

In addition to tearing apart families, federal immigration enforcement actions are wreaking havoc on the economy—both in and beyond Los Angeles

WRITTEN BY
JON REGARDIE

NOMA BAR

WHEN FEDERAL IMMIGRATION enforcement raids began in Los Angeles last June, the outcry among local leaders was immediate and pronounced. L.A. Mayor Karen Bass and others slammed the detainments and deportations that ripped families apart. They also cited something else — the economic repercussions of activity by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other agents in largely Latino areas.

News reports were detailing how the raids, and the fear they fueled, resulted in empty stores in the normally bustling Fashion District, the dearth of customers in Boyle Heights restaurants, and people not showing up for work.

When asked at a press conference that month what she would tell President Trump, Bass responded, "I want to tell him that if you want to devastate the economy of the city of Los Angeles, then attack the immigrant population." In a video, District 11 Councilmember Traci Park added, "Whether documented or not, they own homes and businesses. They work in every layer of the economy. ... They shop in our stores and they pay taxes."

Since that time, a growing body of research is demonstrating just how significant the economic impacts of the immigration crackdown are — not just in Los Angeles but across California, and potentially the country as a whole.

There are an estimated 948,700 undocumented immigrants among the 10 million people living in L.A. County, and 795,000 of them are Latino, according to a comprehensive February report from the L.A. County Department of Economic Opportunity and the L.A. County Economic Development Corporation. Undocumented workers, the report found, contribute an estimated $254 billion in total economic output, or about 17% of the county's gross domestic product.

A November brief from UCLA's Latino Policy & Politics Institute highlights the potential reverberations in both blue and red states. Using data from the Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey, it finds that there are 14.1 million Latino immigrant workers across the United States (many have legal residency). Further, it found that in each of the 10 states with the largest Latino immigrant populations—from California to Texas to North Carolina — Latino immigrants participate in the labor force at a higher rate than the overall state population.

Dr. Amada Armenta, director of the LPPI, recognizes that this trend in red states — consider the 74% Latino immigrant worker participation rate in North Carolina, exceeding the overall 63% — may surprise people. But she noted that Latino immigrants have dispersed in recent decades and become part of the workforce across the country.

"Sometimes what we think we know may be from 20 years ago, when it was absolutely the case that most immigrants were concentrated in U.S. border states or places we know of, like California, Arizona, Texas, New York and Florida," said Armenta, who is also an associate professor in the Department of Urban Planning. But those impressions, she added, are dated, as populations have shifted.

The brief, titled "What the United States Stands to Lose: Latino Immigrant Labor in the Crosshairs," includes data showing how, even without citizenship, many Latino immigrants contribute to sectors of the U.S. economy. It points out, for example, that in California, 57% of those who work in the agriculture industry — where many jobs are "labor-intensive and physically demanding" — are Latino immigrants. In Florida the figure is a hefty 38%.

The paper declares that Latino immigrants "form the backbone of the nation's service economy," with large numbers of workers cleaning, preparing food and performing additional tasks in hospitals, restaurants and other sectors. Latino immigrants account for 25% of the service occupations in California, and 20% in Florida.

Armenta and the LPPI team understood, even before the raids began, that the mass deportations Trump threatened during his 2024 campaign could hamper the economy of many states. The headline warning what the country "stands to lose" was intentional.

"We are really passionate about changing the way people think about and understand immigration, and particularly immigration enforcement," she said. "To understand immigration enforcement as something that wrecks economies, and local economies, and immigrants as something that sustains economies. And there's a lot of empirical evidence that shows this is true."

WORK ON THE FIRST MAJOR REPORT on the subject, the 68-page "The Economic Impacts of Mass Deportation in California," began after Trump won a second term. Produced by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute in partnership with the University of California, Merced, it was released last June, the same month the raids began in Los Angeles.

Like the other research studies, it includes some head-spinning numbers: Removing the undocumented workforce in California would lead to the loss of $153 billion in direct effects (their wages and the value of their labor). Undocumented workers in California pay more than $23 billion annually in local, state and federal taxes, the report found.

Abby Raisz, a report author and the vice president of Research of the Bay Area Council Economic Institute, recognizes that there is disagreement about what the term "mass deportation" even means. Still, a goal was to demonstrate immigrants' pivotal role in the working fabric of California, and their importance in sectors such as agriculture and construction. It noted that California's population of nearly 40 million people includes 10.6 million immigrants, with the 2.28 million who are undocumented accounting for 6% of the population.

UNSPLASH/MEG INDOORS

It also cited longevity, finding that 63% of the undocumented individuals have resided in California for more than a decade. "Because most immigrants have lived in California for long periods and have extensive experience in their respective industries," the report found, "they bring critical skills and knowledge to their work, despite taking on jobs often categorized as 'low skilled.'"

The report examines what would be lost if vast populations were removed or self-deported — it found that 35% of the maids and housekeepers in the state are undocumented, as are nearly 26% of California's construction laborers. A sizable decline in undocumented agricultural workers would increase costs for businesses, which would be passed on to consumers; it references national studies finding food prices would climb 5%-6%.

"Inflation knows no status," Raisz said. "Inflation is not going to say, 'Oh, you're undocumented, so we'll punish you, and you're not, so we won't.' Costs are going to rise for every consumer, no matter what your status is."

Raisz mentioned other points of concern, including the Bay Area Council's new research into "mixed-status" households, those with both citizens and undocumented individuals (often parents from another country and children born in the U.S.). In these residences, she said, the average income is $117,000, but "if you were to deport the undocumented breadwinner of that household, that would be reduced almost 66%, to $44,000 a year in household income."

The ripples are extensive — a family might not be able to afford rent, or could have to sell a vehicle, she said. Their neighborhood buying power would be severely curtailed.

That relates to another way that immigrants contribute to the economy — taxes. The report finds that in California, the average undocumented worker pays over $7,000 in annual taxes, and it extends beyond that to what is taken out of paychecks (which occurs even if someone is not a legal resident).

"Sales taxes are a huge part of it," said Raisz. "You're paying sales taxes that go toward infrastructure and public services for all residents, citizens and non-citizens alike."

She adds, "So obviously that's going to take a hit when enforcement activity happens."

WHEN THE RAIDS BEGAN, THE L.A. County Board of Supervisors was one of the governmental entities that sought to determine who was being affected, and to identify what help exists. It directed the County Department of Economic Opportunity to report back monthly. That work culminated in February's 102-page "Economic Impacts of Federal Enforcement in Los Angeles County."

Kelly LoBianco, director of the Department of Economic Opportunity, said the findings were not surprising, but rather "underscored what we already knew."

"This is not just a political or social issue, though it is all those," she added. "It is a real economic issue that will have ripple effects now into the future."

Like many others, LoBianco noted that the raids followed the financial hits suffered in the region through COVID-19 and the 2025 wildfires.

A variety of data detail the impacts to date. Surveys and interviews conducted with hundreds of business owners (the L.A. Economic Equity Accelerator & Fellowship, or LEEAF, helped with this) found that 82% were negatively affected by the raids, with many reporting a sizable drop in revenue or customer traffic. Nearly one-third of businesses responded by reducing hours, and 60% were concerned about the ability to maintain their workforces.

The report included a focus on downtown Los Angeles, where large, sometimes boisterous protests of the raids caused a week of nightly curfews. Total losses in the area during June, the research found, "was $312 million in labor income, and $840 million in total output."

Given the ebb-and-flow nature of the raids — including another burst in January of this year — LoBianco is worried about the cumulative impact, particularly on small businesses.

"What we know about small businesses, as an agency that supports them, [is] that a month or two of destabilization can be the thing that makes or breaks whether or not they can keep the doors open," she said. The impact is pronounced, she added, because "small business communities tend to hire local, diverse residents, and that means less dollars coming home to families as well."

IN DECEMBER, THE DEPARTMENT of Homeland Security reported that its agents "have made more than 10,000 arrests of illegal aliens" in Los Angeles since June 2025. Although that is only a fraction of the area's undocumented population, the resulting fear has changed many people's behavior.

An analysis of Metro ridership in the county report found 17,000 fewer monthly customers on what were termed "low vulnerability bus lines" during the peak of the raids, evidence that many people were not going to their jobs.

"This sort of absenteeism that's tied to fear, sometimes rather than actual enforcement, has become one of the largest constraints for employers," Raisz said.

Others have watched this play out. At a December luncheon hosted by the Los Angeles Current Affairs Forum, City Council President Marqueece Harris-Dawson explained how the threat of raids had altered the daily activity of undocumented Angelenos. He described their thinking as, "I'm not leaving my house to go to movies. I'm not leaving my house to go shopping. I'm not leaving my house to do anything. That impacts the economy of Los Angeles in a devastating way."

While the pain is being felt across the region, many local leaders are seeking to extend protections and help. UCLA's Armenta praised the mutual-aid efforts, with politicians and community groups that have responded in Los Angeles, Minnesota and elsewhere. Raisz described the importance of making business owners and leaders part of the "active mobilization" effort and encouraging them to communicate that continued enforcement actions are "going to be bad for business."

LoBianco said the county has dispensed millions of dollars through a small business resiliency fund and is striving to preserve the safety net. Part of doing that, she said, requires understanding what is actually happening — the research and data lead to the opportunity to provide aid.

"It really helps us better understand what we need to do and what levers we can pull from the county perspective," she said, "to try to stabilize as much as we can with care."

"This is not just a political or social issue, though it is all those. It is a real economic issue that will have ripple effects now into the future."

Mapping Deportations

UCLA project charts U.S. immigration history

WRITTEN BY
LISA FUNG

THE UNITED STATES HAS LONG STRUGGLED with its standing as a country offering freedom and opportunity to people from around the world. Even though it was founded as a nation of immigrants and has offered refuge to millions of people across generations, the U.S.' immigration law and policy also has been silently guided by an invisible hand of racism and xenophobia. Nowhere is that more evident than in American immigration enforcement.

To better understand this history, UCLA history professor Kelly Lytle Hernández, law professor Ahilan Arulanantham and cartographer Mariah Tso have partnered to tell the story of the origins of immigration policy by mapping government data on deportees.

The Mapping Deportations Project offers a comprehensive look at the history of migration and deportation in this country, while showing how federal laws and policies have been shaped by race-driven actions. The project unmasks the discriminatory, race-based patterns that repeat year after year, and it shines a light on the inequity of enforcement.

"For more than two centuries, U.S. immigration enforcement has favored Europeans and their descendants while targeting non-White migrants for exclusion, removal and punishment," the project website says. "Although U.S. immigration law and policy have shifted over time, the nation's immigration enforcement regime has consistently produced this result."

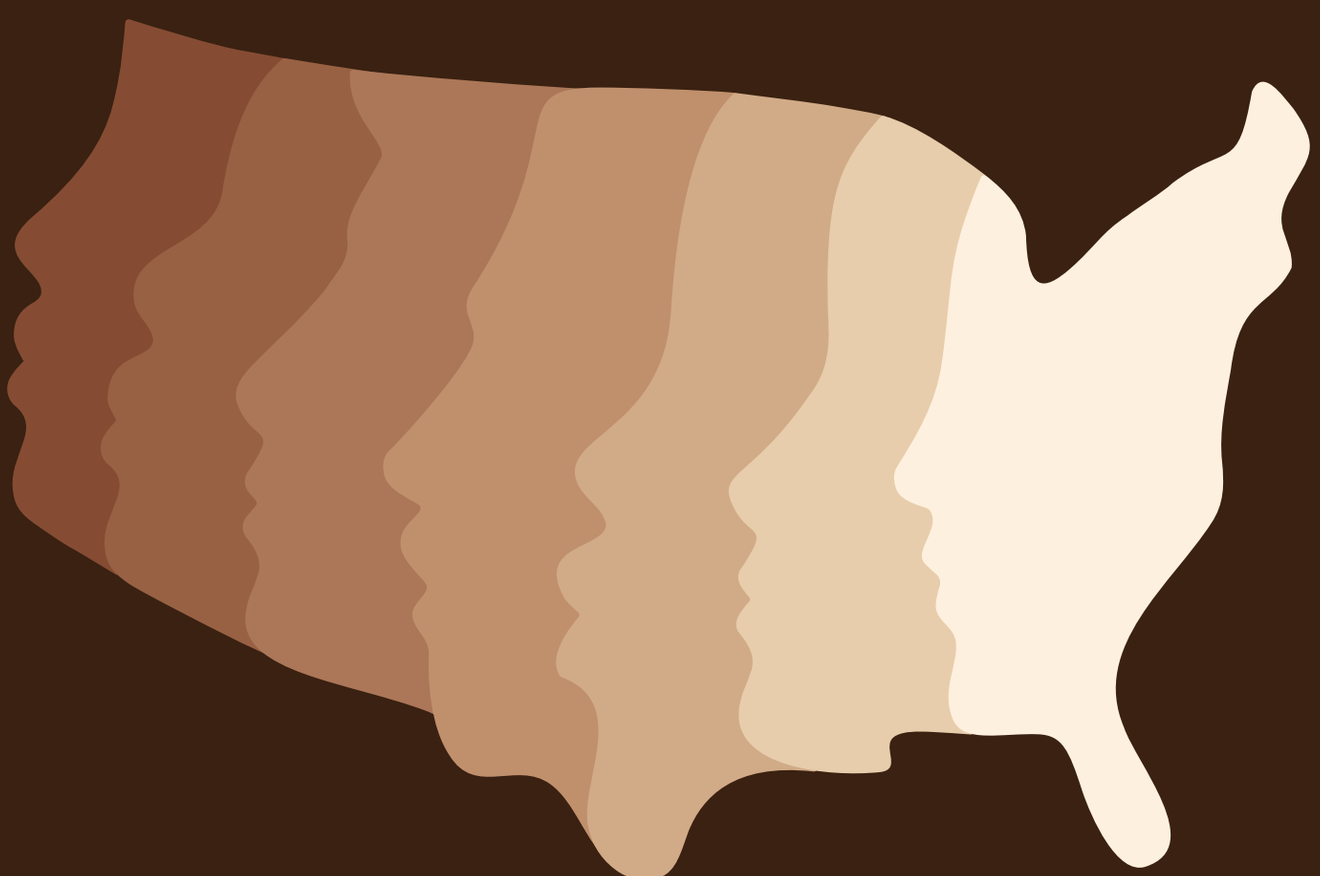
Using publicly available data, Tso created a series of multimedia maps, charts and graphs that track historical waves of immigration in the United States. These interactive visuals not only bring U.S. history to life but also challenge notions of just how open and accepting this country really is.

Anchoring the project is a timeline that provides a detailed look at the history and policies behind the numbers. The timeline begins in 1790, when Congress approved the first naturalization law, which applied only to "free White persons," and extended the possibility of citizenship to any such person who had resided in the country for at least two years, was subject to its jurisdiction and was of "good character."

From there, the timeline is broken into five eras that track the evolution of immigration and deportation while highlighting key events and actions during each period. An interactive collection of quotes from historical figures in politics and government provides additional context.

SO, WHO GETS DEPORTED?

Of the more than 8.4 million deportation orders issued since 1895, when the government first began publishing annual deportation data, 96% of deportees were from non-White-majority countries, with 7.4 million from Mexico and Central America. This striking figure is one of many on the main animated map, which shows how the focus of deportations shifted throughout time — from Irish to Germans to Japanese to Chinese — before overwhelmingly settling into a decades-long trend targeting Mexicans, followed by Central and South Americans.



NOMA BAR

↑ (Top) Kelly Lytle Hernandez, The Thomas E. Lifka Endowed Chair of History at UCLA and founding director of Million Dollar Hood. (Courtesy of Mapping Deportations)

(Middle) Ahilan Arulanantham, Faculty Co-Director, the Center for Immigration Law and Policy (CILP) at the UCLA School of Law. (Courtesy of Mapping Deportations)

(Bottom) Mariah Tso, G.I.S. Specialist, Million Dollar Hoods at UCLA. (Courtesy of Mapping Deportations)

But deportation orders are not the only method of expulsion. For example, the government may encourage individuals to leave "voluntarily." These departures, which date to the Alien Acts passed during the Thomas Jefferson administration, account for 49.2 million removals, or an estimated 90% of all forced removals since 1927.

"We realized we needed a separate visualization because there are other types of banishment," Tso said, noting that for the "voluntary" departures category, "we put quotations marks around it, because it's quite a coercive process."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, both the Trump and Biden administrations used Title 42 expulsion orders to restrict border immigration and limit asylum requests. By invoking this 1944 public health law, the government turned away 2.4 million people, including about 15,000 asylum seekers from Haiti, who were seeking refuge from political unrest in that country in 2021. The same year, the United States permitted entry for refugees from the Ukraine who were fleeing war with Russia.

"The differential in treatment, allowing virtually unconstrained migration of people from Ukraine coupled with stringent limits on people trying to come from Afghanistan, Central America, Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and other countries facing very, very dire humanitarian situations, was striking," Arulanantham said. "How could this be happening?"

Exclusion orders, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1862, added 695,000 to the tally. In recent years, the U.S. government terminated the Temporary Protected Status of 400,000 immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Nepal, Honduras and Sudan — many of whom had been living in this country for decades.

The Trump administration petitioned the Supreme Court in March to end deportation protections for Haitians. If the court agrees, it could make 350,000 Haitians living in the United States today subject to deportation.

A section on "hidden data" shows the erasure of Indigenous people from deportation figures. No data exists on the number of Indigenous people who have been removed, excluded and punished by the U.S. immigration system, according to the website. "As an Indigenous person myself," said Tso, who is Diné (Navajo), "I know intimately what it means to be erased in data and how statistical genocide functions when Indigenous people are removed because they're statistically insignificant or too small.

"It's especially apparent just how persistent anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity are in this entire story, and how it really is about racially engineering the U.S. population."

LAW PROFESSOR ARULANANTHAM HAS spent a career navigating the immigration landscape. As a senior counsel for the ACLU of Southern California, where he worked for nearly two decades, Arulanantham has argued scores of immigrant rights cases, including the landmark 2013 class-action suit, *Franco-Gonzalez v. Holder*, which established the right to legal representation for detainees with serious mental disabilities.

He has testified before Congress and argued before the Supreme Court. But a desire to teach led him to the UCLA Law School in 2021 as a professor and co-director of the Center for Immigration Law and Policy. The center, Arulanantham said, offered him a chance to bridge the divide between academia and legal practice. "There was a lot of interesting work happening in these two streams," he said, "but not a huge amount of cross-pollination."

Once at the center, Arulanantham, along with co-director Hiroshi Motomura, launched an effort to trace the origins of statutes and federal administrative policy on immigration.

"I was working on trying to unearth the history of race discrimination that underlies a lot of prominent immigration law — both statutory law and constitutional law," he said. "We found there were a lot of foundational legal rules that trace their origins back to periods of American history when we had open, naked racism motivating immigration law and policy."

At the same time, Professor Hernández, the Thomas E. Lifka Endowed Chair in History, and Tso, who is a GIS mapping specialist at the Ralph J. Bunche Center, were already at work on an animated map that illustrated the history of deportation.

While lecturing on the three forced migrations that shaped modern America — the expulsion of Native nations, the trans-Atlantic slave trade and mass deportation — Hernández found scholars had created maps for the first two but, she said, "No one had ever mapped every recorded deportation in U.S. history. So I was interested in seeing if we could pull this together."

Hernández was completing a book, *Racist by Design: Two Centuries of U.S. Immigration Control*. It had been illustrated by Tso, and is due out in September. Both were ready for a new project.

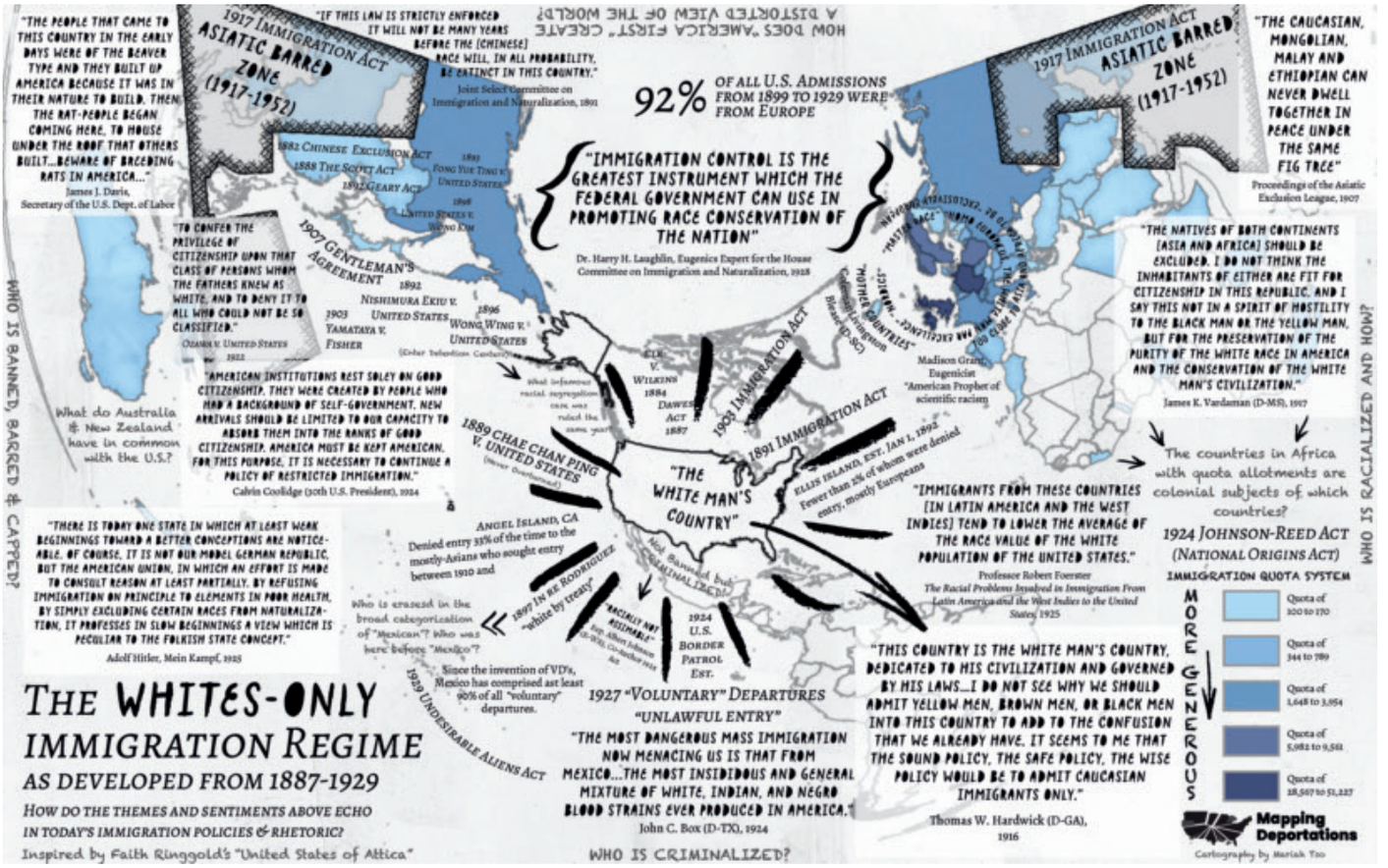
Work began on the deportation map in 2019.

The two initially created and began workshopping a pilot map depicting who was targeted for removal from the country. "The whole idea started with the main map," Tso said, "but as we got more familiar with how complicated the dataset was, it turned into an entire website."

THROUGH A NUMBER OF CHANNELS, Hernández and Arulanantham, both MacArthur "genius grant" fellows, heard about each other's work.

Their collaboration expanded the reach of the project from both a history perspective and a legal perspective.

"There's a particularly strong thread of legal history in the timeline," Hernández said. "We did the periodization, which is typically the work of historians, but Ahilan brought a litigator's eye to that periodization, which was really important to make it an applied tool."



↑ The "Whites-Only Immigration Regime" map created by Mapping Deportations. (Mapping Deportations/Mariah Tso)

For Arulanantham, the project's findings help bolster arguments on the need for change in the judicial system. Supreme Court rulings, such as cases that uphold a Muslim ban, or stay orders that allow for the termination of Temporary Protective Status for Venezuelans and Haitians, are built on precedents created by earlier decisions in cases from the Chinese Exclusion era of the 1890s, he said, that were motivated by racial animus.

Some laws, Arulanantham said, like the illegal reentry after deportation statute — one of the most prosecuted federal crimes in the United States — date back to "a very explicitly eugenic era" in the 1920s.

"It's crystal clear that governmental action motivated by racial animus is unconstitutional. That's the doctrine," he said. "In my view, there's no reason why that constitutional prohibition should be understood not to apply to courts."

Balancing the applied legal tool for litigators with the desire to create an educational resource for K-12 history students was challenging, Hernández said. "We wanted to reach all of them, so that took a lot of workshopping and a lot of refinement. But I think we got there."

FOR ALL THREE RESEARCHERS, THEIR IMMIgration work has deep, personal meaning.

Arulanantham recalls growing up in Lancaster, the son of Sri Lankan immigrants whose modest home became a refuge for large numbers of extended family members and others fleeing war in Sri Lanka until they could find their footing and move on.

"That profoundly shaped me," he said. "It's not like I decided when I was 11 that I was going to do refugee and immigration work. But by the time I went to law school, I knew I wanted to do work on human rights in Sri Lanka or refugee and immigration law in the U.S."

Hernández, who is African American, grew up in San Diego and witnessed first-hand what she called "the racial policing that was unfolding in plain sight, but that nobody was talking about. The Border Patrol and their operations were clearly targeting brown people.

> "It's crystal clear that governmental action motivated by racial animus is unconstitutional. That's the doctrine."
> — Ahilan Arulanantham

"I was always more than uncomfortable and rattled and furious about that. I saw its resonance when I got older with race and the policing of Black youth," she said. "So, I've dedicated my career, in some ways, to untangling questions I had as a kid around race and immigration control."

Tso got her start mapping the lack of access to healthy and affordable food in the Navajo Nation. "I saw maps as a colonial tool that's been used to seize land, and I wanted to take it back and use it as a tool of empowerment," she said. "Maps are ultimately about world building. Maps create a reality just as much as they reflect it.

"It's incredibly powerful in terms of building a counternarrative around the stories that we tell about immigration and immigration enforcement."

THE RESEARCHERS PLAN TO CONTINUE TO UPDATE THE Mapping Deportations Project long into the future. For now, though, it is stalled at 2022 because current deportation data is not available. "That 100 percent has to do with the current administration," Hernández said. "They haven't released the new data."

Meanwhile, they are looking for other ways to gather it, including Freedom of Information Act requests and working with UCLA's Data Deportation Project to cross-check numbers and resolve any discrepancies.

The final map in the Mapping Deportations Project sequence comes in the form of a butterfly. The image is animated in reverse, featuring the same data that is used in the first map.

But it imagines a future where migration is not a crime, where belonging is not dictated by race or birthplace, and where mass displacement is not the norm. ◤

The Suffering of Mothers

Birth outcomes suffer when mothers are afraid to seek care

WRITTEN BY
JEAN MERL

MAY SUDHINARASET FIGURES THERE ARE AT LEAST FOUR GENERATIONS OF IMMIGRANTS IN her family. They started out in Indonesia and migrated to China, then moved to Thailand before eventually landing in the United States. Sudhinaraset was born and raised in Long Beach, California, surrounded by families with roots in Cambodia, Laos and other parts of Southeast Asia.

"I grew up with a lot of these communities, witnessed a lot of the discrimination and the challenges that this population faced," said Sudhinaraset, a professor and vice chair of the Department of Community Health Sciences at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health.

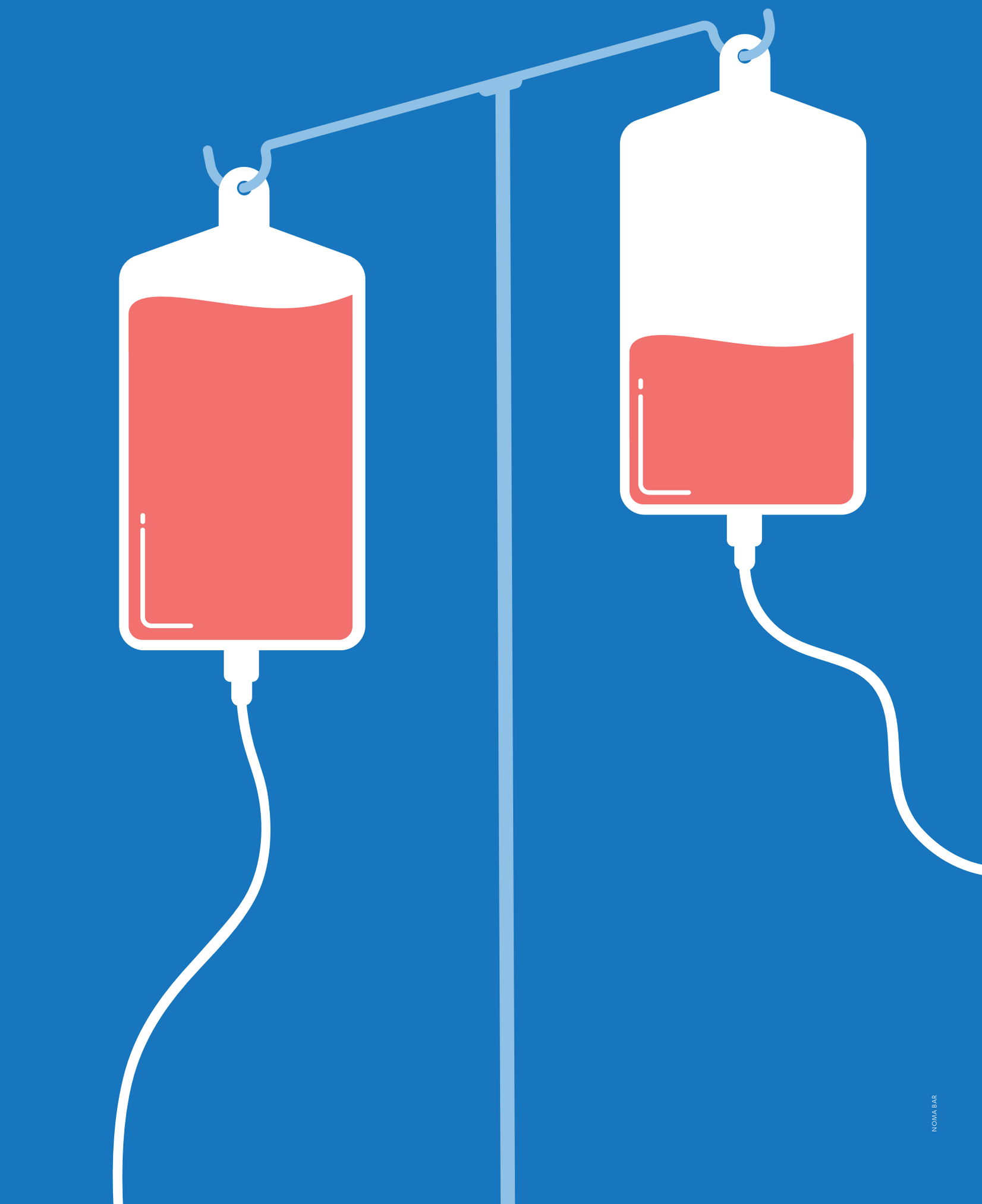
While her neighbors' circumstances seemed "normal" to her as a child who had not yet seen anything different, they set her on a path that would define her career as an adult. Her experiences eventually led her to a PhD from Johns Hopkins University, her professorship at UCLA and an impressive — and timely — body of research on immigrants and healthcare.

Initially, she focused on global healthcare issues, collaborating with institutions and researchers in Myanmar, Kenya, India, Thailand and China. But becoming a mother and seeing tightened reproductive rights,stepped-up immigration enforcement and an "increase in anti-immigrant sentiment" a few years ago, she said, caused her to concentrate more on what was happening in her home country.

Sudhinaraset was chosen to lead a multi-year study of the sexual and reproductive health of Asian immigrant women in the United States. The $3 million study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, was the first to assess the health status and healthcare use of undocumented Asian and Pacific Islander young adults. The study includes participants in California, New York, Texas and Georgia. It is a joint effort of UCLA, UC Irvine, Rutgers University and the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum.

"One of the things that I try to do with my work is to provide scientific evidence and rigorous evidence toward understanding how policies and structures impact people's health," Sudhinaraset said during a recent interview in her office on the UCLA campus.

"I think the real power of public health research is to be able to document — to make sure — that we have the data. ... It can take things out of the role of just emotional and anecdotal, although those are certainly important. But to be able to quantify things, and to measure things, and to show the impacts," those are more important.



NOMA BAR

SUDHINARASET SAID HER RESEARCH QUICKLY LED HER TO REALIZE THAT IMMIGRATION policy issues extend far beyond a simple matter of presence in a given country. "What we're finding is that immigration policy is health policy, and it impacts so many different outcomes.

"It impacts people's everyday lives."

This includes whether to have children, she said, a particularly fraught decision in this time of heightened anti-immigrant sentiment fanned by the current federal administration.

"I think that what we're finding right now is that [immigrants and even their American-born relatives, who are U.S. citizens] aren't feeling safe, now that people are fearful, that family separation is happening, and that it might not even be a direct immigration enforcement experience, but even the perception that it is happening. I think uncertainty and fear impact the way people make decisions and plan their lives."

↑ Dr. May Sudhinaraset. (Courtesy of Dr. Sudhinaraset)

Last year, Sudhinaraset expressed that view to the Daily Bruin. "Immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented, are fearing for their safety and that of their families." She noted that undocumented immigrants "are much more likely to be [medically] uninsured compared to their documented peers, and are also more likely to delay care when they need it."

Using vital statistics data from more than 3.5 million births, Sudhinaraset and her researchers confirmed what many who work with immigrants and other disadvantaged populations have long believed: "When you have inclusive immigrant policies, it is good for people's birth outcomes," she said. "When you have criminalizing policies, it is really detrimental to birth outcomes."

For example, when a worker speaks a woman's native language, it improves communication and confidence, and the woman is more likely to return for additional prenatal care. When she feels criticized or judged, she is discouraged from seeking further care, which in turn can threaten her and her baby's health. Rather than criticize a woman for having many children or getting pregnant at an advanced age, it is more effective to talk to a woman about how pregnancy is rigorous and that multiple pregnancies can undermine a mother's health, researchers found.

Interviews conducted by Sudhinaraset and co-researchers in 2018 and 2019 included remarks that illustrated difficulties encountered by immigrant mothers during pregnancy and childbirth.

- "English is one of the things that has closed doors to me in many places and made it quite difficult for me, appointments and all, because I do not speak English," recounted an undocumented immigrant from Mexico.
- A Chinese woman with a visa said: "There was one time I saw a doctor who speaks Chinese but has too many patients, like she's working an assembly line. ... There are so many patients in line!"
- Another undocumented woman from Mexico told of being pressured to have a hysterectomy: "The doctor started saying, 'Have you thought about having an operation? You have to be operated on because you are quite old to continue having children. You don't have to think about it, you have to do it!' She was mad and asked why I had so many kids at the age I was, and I didn't like that treatment."

"What I would love to see come out of this work is a deeper understanding of how policies really impact communities."
— Dr. May Sudhinaraset

SUDHINARASET SAID SHE DOES NOT BLAME HEALTHCARE WORKERS for the inequities that stem from what she calls "an under-resourced healthcare system."

One of her research goals is "highlighting how the inequities that we see across populations isn't because of lack of effort or lack of knowledge or people not wanting to do something," she said. "It's really that the policies aren't designed with certain populations in mind.

"What I would love to see come out of this work is a deeper understanding of how policies really impact communities, that they impact their whole lives, from financial, to whether they're still able to be here, to their aspirations and sense of safety and resilience in this country," she said. Then, after thinking a moment longer, she added a further wish:

"I spend a lot of time thinking about the institutions and the practices within healthcare, ensuring that there is culturally concordant, trauma-informed, person-centered care, so that people feel valued and respected...and that they don't feel judged." ◤

Burdens? No

Cato report finds immigrants a net positive for budgets

WRITTEN BY
JON REGARDIE

↑ A street vendor selling tamales at Santa Monica Pier on a cloudy day. (Unsplash/Alison Tu)

DO IMMIGRANTS, INCLUDING undocumented individuals, contribute more to the economy of the United States in taxes than they utilize in services? The question has endured for nearly as long as the overall immigration debate.

Some studies have focused on broad economic impact, which takes into account not just the specific contributions of individuals but also their wider reverberation in the economy — the owner of a food truck, for instance, who makes an income and spends on goods and services, has a specific economic impact individually but a far wider influence if one includes the incomes and spending of his employees, the mechanic who services his truck, the wholesalers of his food and so on.

Other studies narrow or broaden definitions — an undocumented person's federal taxes, for example, compared to the federal services such a person receives. Or that same person's contributions to state or local tax bases compared to services received from those entities.

And, of course, many researchers bring an axe to grind, hoping to present data in such a way as to reinforce an idea: Supporters of mass deportation look for evidence that immigrants are a burden, while critics of removal mine data for evidence to the contrary.

As all that suggests, it's a divisive topic, with conclusions that seem at least as driven by politics as by data. However, a recent report from an unlikely source firmly declares that immigrants, including those without papers, are much more of a benefit than a drain.

In February, the libertarian Cato Institute released a white paper that examined data from 1994 to 2023. The findings are stark: It reported that in each individual year, "The U.S. immigrant population generated more in taxes than they received in benefits from all levels of government." It also said during that three-decade span, immigrants created a cumulative fiscal surplus of $14.5 trillion — in 2024 dollars.

When it came specifically to undocumented immigrants, it's still a net positive: The report finds they likely reduced the federal deficit by $1.7 trillion over those 30 years.

The Cato paper updates a widely cited 2017 report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine on the financial impacts of immigration. Its findings are all the more notable given that Cato's work is often cited by conservatives and libertarians. It's not the ACLU.

The question of whether immigrants contribute to or take from the economy generally extends from employment: Unless they are being paid under the table or in cash, working immigrants, including those who are undocumented (who may be employed under borrowed or stolen identities, the report notes), are subject to payroll and income taxes and other deductions we all see. Yet they are largely excluded from benefits programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

As a result, undocumented migrants help prop up those systems, contributing without drawing from them, in effect subsidizing Social Security and Medicare for the American citizens entitled to claim their benefits.

Some maintain that even without these amenities, immigrants consume more than they contribute. A 2024 report from the conservative Center for Immigration Studies starts by stating, "Illegal immigrants are a net fiscal drain," and finds that undocumented individuals have an estimated $68,000 lifetime deficit in terms of contributions and expenditures. Why? "They have a low average education level, which results in low average earnings and tax payments," the report states. "It also means a larger share qualify for welfare programs."

The findings are very different in the Cato study. It states that immigrants generate more income and taxes than the average American. It adds, "Even if immigrants earn lower hourly wages, they can still account for more total income per capita than the U.S.-born population by working cumulatively more hours."

It also finds that although immigrants are much more likely to be in poverty, they are not more likely to receive welfare. Immigrants also generate 17% more in taxes per capita than U.S.-born individuals, while at the same time costing the government less (through Social Security, government retirement payments and more).

Even when there are expenses, the Cato report says that spending on immigrants does not spark government deficits. In the period when immigrants created that $14.5 trillion surplus, the U.S. population cost the government nearly $45 trillion.

"In other words," the report states, "immigrants cut the U.S. budget deficits by nearly one-third in real terms." ◤

BLUEPRINT
SPECIAL
REPORT
A Closer Look

Special Report: At the ICE launch point

Last summer's L.A. raids began a national campaign that tests our values and our history

WRITTEN BY
ROBERT GREENE

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S ASSAULT ON LOS Angeles began on June 6, 2025, with the asserted aim of capturing and deporting "the worst of the worst," which it defined as dangerous criminals unlawfully present in the country.

First to arrive were agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, both of which are law enforcement agencies under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security. They were quickly followed by federalized troops of the California National Guard, and then U.S. Marines. Each of those authorizations and deployments came with implications for our Constitution and our history.

It was the Marines that especially caught the nation's attention, at least at first. After all, there is no greater image of authoritarianism than armed combat troops in the street, wearing their camouflage fatigues, trained to fight the nation's foreign enemies yet deployed instead on American soil (ordered there on the anniversary of D-Day, no less) and presumably prepared to face off against Americans.

Next in line would be the National Guard — less menacing than the Marines, perhaps, because they are literally our neighbors, who leave their homes, families and jobs to respond to natural disasters like the cataclysmic fires of a few months earlier. Yet they are also constituent parts of the Army or Air Force. On the president's order, they are transferred from state to federal command. On duty, in their fatigues, they are indistinguishable to the average American from Marines.

And then there's ICE and the Border Patrol, federal police whose authority is ostensibly limited to apprehending people who aren't supposed to be here. If you're a citizen, or a lawful permanent resident ("green card" holder), a refugee or an asylum applicant, until recently you weren't likely to be troubled by or even to see the immigration cops, unless you were returning from a visit to Mexico or passing through the checkpoint north of Oceanside inside Camp Pendleton. Even undocumented but otherwise law-abiding residents who kept their heads down were generally left alone, although at perpetual risk of being exploited, reported, arrested, separated from their families and expelled.

A YEAR AND A HALF INTO THE SECOND TRUMP administration, we now know better. The presence of military troops was little more than an exercise in power, politics and performance. It was not the Marines who snatched people from car washes or Home Depot parking lots while they worked or sought work. It was not the National Guard that grabbed young students on their way to school, families on their way home from church, asylum applicants sitting in court. The military did not shoot a Los Angeles man dead on New Year's Eve after the victim fired a celebratory shot in the air, as an off-duty ICE agent did.

Americans instinctively know the difference between military troops, who are deployed to our streets only during emergencies, and police, who are there in the normal course of everyday life and generally respond to local rather than federal or state authority. But the lines between these forces can blur. When police come in the form of large contingents of federal agents who dress and behave like soldiers, they can for all practical purposes occupy cities militarily just as surely as the Marines or the National Guard. The peril they pose to freedom and local control can be just as great. The ongoing deployment of agents, even more than the presence of Marines and National Guard, should spur some serious reexamination of presidential powers to deploy federal agents, and of the adequacy of safeguards that ought to protect states, cities and individual Americans from abuse.

Most of the 700 deployed Marines never even set foot in Los Angeles, except for a small contingent briefly stationed at the Federal Building in Westwood. The rest clustered in tents miles away in Orange County,

↑ Roxy Sotu, left, and her fiancée Athena Godoy hug during a "No Kings" protest Saturday, June 14, 2025, in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/Noah Berger)

with no clear mission, before being rotated out and sent back to their base in Twentynine Palms.

On the street level, there wasn't much evidence of federalized National Guard troops, either, except for a few protecting federal buildings downtown in the early days of the operation and, a month later, when they joined in the immigration cops for a bizarre march through mostly empty MacArthur Park. The spectacle was apparently an attempt to intimidate local residents, many of them immigrants from Latin American countries. Some agents were on horseback. They looked less like a heroic D-Day brigade or fearsome stormtroopers than a team of actors rehearsing a military comedy. Plumed helmets would have fit right in.

Los Angeles was Donald Trump's opening gambit and was followed by chaotic assignments of federal agents to Portland, Chicago, Minneapolis-St. Paul and elsewhere, and a tragic deployment of National Guard troops in Washington, D.C.

For context, it's helpful to recall how Trump responded to protests in 2020, during his first term, in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Trump called the National Guard into the District of Columbia, where the president enjoys unique powers, and threatened to deploy not just the guard but regular U.S. troops in other cities. His top officials, including Attorney General William Barr, Defense Secretary Mike Esper and Joint Chiefs Chairman Mike Milley, objected to such a flagrant breach of norms — and, by the way, the Constitution. So did the governors of many U.S. states. Trump urged the governors to instead call in the guard on their own authority.

"When police come in the form of large contingents of federal agents who dress and behave like soldiers, they can for all practical purposes occupy cities militarily just as surely as the Marines or the National Guard."

↑ California National Guard and Marines hold back demonstrators at the Federal Building during a protest June 14, 2025, in Los Angeles. (AP Photo/ Noah Berger)

One did. That was Tim Walz of Minnesota, who formerly served in his state's National Guard.

Dissuaded from sending in the military, Trump instead sent federal agents from a variety of departments into U.S. cities without local consent, ostensibly to protect monuments and buildings.

For Trump, a second term offers the chance at both a double-down and a do-over. After purging military leaders and selecting legal advisors and Cabinet members with less experience and more personal loyalty to him, Trump took control of the California National Guard from Gov. Gavin Newsom and ordered both the guard and the U.S. Marines into Los Angeles. It was just over five years since Floyd's killing and the protests that followed.

THE POINT WAS LESS THE ACTUAL USE OF TROOPS than the demonstration to the nation that Trump could — and this time, would — deploy them whenever he felt like it.

But military troops are of limited use to him. They are painstakingly trained and supervised, and subject to military codes of conduct and discipline. They have

"They dress not like police but like soldiers, and they scoff at decades of policing reforms and best practices, including such niceties as the Fourth Amendment and judicial warrants."

a heritage and a culture of loyalty not to any one leader but to the American people and the Constitution.

ICE and the Border Patrol, as currently constituted, have a much shorter history. They were re-created from predecessor agencies after 9/11 as part of the new Department of Homeland Security. The agencies grew rapidly with too little oversight. A panel headed by former Los Angeles Police Chief William Bratton found the Border Patrol's discipline system "broken."

A second expansion came last year after a supine Congress passed and Trump signed the "One Big Beautiful Bill." Together with other agencies in the Department of Homeland Security, ICE and CBP agents form the nation's largest police force.

Yet they dress not like police but like soldiers, and they scoff at decades of policing reforms and best practices, including such niceties as the Fourth Amendment and judicial warrants. Immigration enforcement is their justification, but the agents have stepped into the shoes of the military troops that Trump said he would use against "the enemy from within," broadly defined as anyone who opposed him. They confront protesters, they arrest ("detain") citizens, they lock up children.

The federal immigration agents, and not the Marines or the National Guard, form a key feature of anti-democratic, dictatorial rule: a paramilitary force, the identities of its agents hidden from public view, loyal to the regime in power.

Los Angeles was the opening act. But Minneapolis is where Trump tried to over-write the events of nearly six years ago: the police murder of George Floyd, and the Black Lives Matter protests that helped doom his reelection effort — and which for a brief moment focused Americans' attention on continuing racial inequity, needlessly violent policing, and the danger that both pose to American justice and liberty.

Minneapolis is also where protester heroes took a cue from Los Angeles protesters and challenged federal agents, and did it undaunted by subzero weather. And it was there that events reached a crescendo: An ICE agent shot and killed Renee Good in her car, and CBP officers killed Alex Pretti in the street. Neither was a suspected illegal immigrant.

Court rulings have slowed federal incursions in some U.S. cities, and Americans are re-learning from news reports and commentary some basics about their laws and rights. What's the difference between an administrative and a judicial warrant? When is the National Guard a state force, and when is it a federal one? What exactly is the definition of military troops, and when can the president send them into American cities? What powers do governors have to counter unconstitutional acts by the president when Congress refuses to act? What recourse do citizens have when their non-citizen neighbors are targeted?

These are among a host of fundamental questions for citizens of a free and democratic republic. The circumstances under which we try to answer them would have been unthinkable a few short years ago. Yet the questions are timely, as the nation fast approaches the 250th anniversary of its declaration of freedom from Britain.

It's as good an occasion as any to debate who Americans are, how we protect our liberty, and whether a nation of freemen, as Lincoln said in his very first public address, must live through all time or die by suicide.

"A New Political Order"

L.A. City Council President Marqueece Harris Dawson on the state of L.A. leadership and politics

IN THE FALL OF 2015, *Blueprint* was a new magazine, publishing its second issue, and Marqueece Harris-Dawson was a new face in Los Angeles politics. We described him then as "a politician with a different style, different allies and even different looks" from his predecessor on the Los Angeles City Council, Bernard C. Parks. That description holds up nicely.

It's 10 years later, and we've grown up together, Blueprint finding its place in the civic information infrastructure, and Harris-Dawson rising to the office of City Council President. Harris-Dawson's ascent has been no accident. He combines refreshing candor with a soft touch, and he has bridged the seismic shift that is underway in this city's politics, as it moves from a moderately Democratic bastion to the home of an emergent left. Harris-Dawson once seemed at the edge of that change; now he feels more astride it, bringing deep experience and a worldliness to his work, earning the respect of traditional Democrats and the ascendant Democratic Socialists who now command a block of votes on the council.

It was thus with some nostalgia and a palpable sense of time passing that editor-in-chief Jim Newton and the council president sat down this spring to reflect on the city and its challenges. An edited version of their conversation follows:

BLUEPRINT: I thought, since we go back to the beginning of this magazine, that we could start by looking back over these past 10 or 11 years. What has gotten better about L.A. over that time, and what's still eating at you?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT MARQUEECE HARRIS-DAWSON: At the meta level, ... I would say that Los Angeles, at the time we were talking then, was in the process of closing an old political chapter, a political order, and opening a new one, which is exciting but also scary as all get-out. At least you knew how the other one worked, what was possible and what wasn't possible.

This one is very different. We don't live in an environment where incumbents are safe. We don't live in an environment where there are third rails that you can't touch....

We have two people on the council that people spent millions of dollars saying they were basically complicit in high crimes because they opposed greater police funding. In the old political order, you were done [if that happened]. You didn't even want to get close to that kind of accusation.

I can remember when some of the activists who were a bit older than me, to be sure — Antonio Villaraigosa and Karen Bass and even Mark Ridley-Thomas and Gil Cedillo — ran for office, there was this big fear that whatever run-ins they had with law enforcement when they were young activists would become a central issue. Now, that's just nothing.

BP: That would be a source of pride now?

MHD: Yeah, or just not a thing. And there are a variety of issues that are like that. Land use is another one. If you came out for density or up-zoning, that was dead on arrival. The debate on that has completely changed.

It doesn't mean that there isn't a debate on that, but you can actually have a debate where both sides are represented.

BP: One side is not prohibited from speaking up...

MHD: Exactly.

So I think we're entering a new political order. It's turning out that I'm more of a bridge than a member of either [order]. You remember that when I came in, I was quite critical of the older guard, but I didn't have in mind that it was going away. I didn't have that idea.

It's been a very fascinating time to be in local government.

BP: Do you feel that you've changed during this period? You've talked about the atmosphere around you, but how about you? You've learned a lot, I'm sure, but do you feel philosophically changed?

MHD: I wouldn't say that I'm changed at the level of philosophical difference. Something I remember saying when we spoke 11 years ago — and I remember it because it was the first time I'd said it out loud — I felt like I had a lot of preparation to be in public office, but I didn't have the emotional preparation. And so in that way, I feel like I've changed. I don't run as hot or cold.

You learn that in a city this big, when you wake up, it could be anything. You could be under federal occupation. Half your city could be on fire. There could be a giant sinkhole. It's just the nature of running a big city. Stuff happens.

And it's different from being an activist or a commenter or even a member of the council, where your instinct is to look for someone to blame. When you're running a city, you don't have time for that. You really have to fix the problem.

The political conversation is often about whom to blame. But when you have responsibility, the requirement is to deal with the issue in front of you.

IRIS SCHNEIDER

BP: And how good is the city at solving problems?

MHD: The city is good at solving problems, the vast majority of which the public doesn't ever know about. That's the thing with the government. When it's going great, it means you never hear about it. If you hear about it, it's because there's a problem of some sort that's not being resolved.

I have come to have profound and deep respect for city workers — all the engineers and accountants and investment managers who figure stuff out; lawyers who figure stuff out; workers who just solve a problem so that it never bubbles up. I can't tell you how often I go to a neighborhood council meeting or run into somebody in the supermarket and have somebody say, "Hey, we had a problem with this intersection and so-and-so called out some engineer, and it was all fixed." And I had never heard a word about it. And so, to that extent, the city works great.

I also watched city workers take us through COVID. COVID obviously was a disaster and a tragedy, but when I saw what the city workers pulled off during that time, it was very, very impressive. And they did it without us having a big loss of life. We lost some people for sure, but compared to the other big cities, we did really, really well. [*Editor's Note: New York City, with a population of 8.3 million people, suffered about 45,000 deaths from COVID; Los Angeles County, with a significantly larger population of about 10 million, had notably fewer deaths, roughly 36,000*].

BP: I find it frustrating now to see this revisionism setting in, with some people arguing that COVID was no big deal because more people didn't die, rather than acknowledging that the steps that places like Los Angeles took to protect against the epidemic are precisely the reason that more people didn't die...

MHD: Exactly. One of the things that's frustrating about government is that people forget about comparative science. Look at cities our size and compare them. If you want to say that Mexico City, for example, is about our size and they did better, then that's an argument we can have, but it's hard to argue that it wasn't a big deal, because in some places it was a very big deal.

That's where I think the government does a great job, and we don't often know about it.

BP: How has the council changed in the time you've been a part of it?

MHD: The council is vastly different. When I first got to the council, the only two members who did not have any experience in the city public sector were me and David Ryu....

It was a very insider game. Now we have a council where a majority of the people, this is their first foray into city government, so it's a different thing. And obviously, we are majority women now — when I arrived, there was one woman out of 15 members, Nury Martinez. I don't know what the average age was then or what it is now, but it's vastly younger. I was one of the youngest people there then; I'm one of the oldest now.

It's a young council, and we have a handful of council members who are renters.

BP: I believe it's true that when Alex Padilla [now California's senior senator, then a 26-year-old newcomer to elected office] was elected in 1999, he was still living at home, and I believe he was the only member of the council who did not own his own house. That's a big change.

MHD: When you're a homeowner, you have a different relationship to the city than when you're a renter. You just do. Different interests. Different things are important to you. That is a very real, material difference.

Age is a material difference, too. We have way more parents of school-age children now. ... We have far more people who are single than before. It's people living different lives.

BP: Does the council feel more representative of the city now or less?

MHD: Definitely more representative of the city. Part of what happens when you have a structured order is that society moves, while the structure doesn't. The structured order gets more entrenched. ... To have a council with no renters on it when, even then, you had a city with easily, easily 35% or 40% renters, just that, by itself, says something.

We've also broken out of a little bit of the machine politics, where you have to be from a certain group to get elected, or you have to pass through a certain process to get elected. You now have a lot of people on the council who didn't pass through any of that. And they're there, and they're just as strong as anybody else.

BP: It feels like we're at a moment where we're developing new political coalitions, but still looking for governing coalitions...

MHD: It will form because of the people who've won and made inroads. There's nothing worse than being an insurgent and then having no backup. It means you can't do anything....

The other thing that will happen is that there actually is a governing coalition. Members of that coalition don't want to accept that they're part of it because they still think of themselves as outsiders. They still think of themselves as the insurgency, but I keep having to say: "No, no, no, you have the votes. That's the deal."

"WHEN YOU'RE A HOMEOWNER, YOU HAVE A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP TO THE CITY THAN WHEN YOU'RE A RENTER. YOU JUST DO. DIFFERENT INTERESTS. DIFFERENT THINGS ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU."

BP: That's a hard psychological switch to make.

MHD: It's a very hard flip to make.

BP: There are still conservatives in this city. There are even some Republicans. Do they have a right not to feel represented by their council, their mayor?

MHD: I think they're represented, over-represented. They are over-represented on the council. Let's just take the ratio of landlords to tenants in this city. To listen to the council debate, you would think that there's an almost even number of each. In fact, one number dwarfs the other.

I think that the nature of politics and the role of money in politics insures that those interests are represented and will continue to be represented for the foreseeable future. Now, what they do with their representation is another matter. The whole idea that you could dominate politics — I don't think that's in the cards anymore, as it's historically been.

BP: Are there policies or priorities of the city that you can point to that reflect that changing balance, the evaporation of that dominance?

MHD: Yeah. There are robust conversations about police funding, for example, that would have never happened before. And it's not an automatic, one-side-against-the-other [debate]. People go back and forth depending on the situation. That, to me, is the most glaring example of [the new balance on the council].

But there are others. The Rent Stabilization Ordinance hadn't been updated in 48 years. We did the Tenant Harassment [Ordinance]. We did no-fault eviction. Those are things that just didn't see the light of day in prior councils. Those are examples of issues that move that couldn't move at all before.

We hadn't raised the sanitation fee. We were 10

years late on that because we had some members who said, "We're not voting for new fees." But what happens is, you still have to pick up the trash, and you still have to pay for it. And you have lighting assessments. There are a number of things.

I don't have to tell you what the prior council would have done. They just didn't do it. It came up. We were at a deficit, and they just didn't do it. They said, "We'll do another study." Or, "We'll wait for manna to fall from heaven."

Now you're seeing people step up and take responsibility.

BP: What about the other side of that? Do you feel like the city's finances are well-protected at this point?

MHD: I think they're well-protected. The city could use a lot more room for comfort. But the city's budget is designed to never collect a penny more than it takes to actually run the city.

I haven't seen a big downturn like we saw in 2009, but I was here for COVID, when we went over what the layoffs were going to be until Biden came in and rescued all the cities. So I saw what was going to happen, and it was parallel to what had happened in 2009.

But I've been at the City Council when the economy was humming, and we had a surplus ... the biggest reserve we've ever had. We were hiring back the positions we'd eliminated in 2009 less than 10 years later, and we were not facing bankruptcy. It was all fine. And one of my staff stopped me from getting on the mic and saying: "But it still takes two years to get your tree trimmed."

So even when the economy is performing at its best, the way that taxation and revenue is set up, the city still doesn't have enough to run it at the level that it's supposed to run. So that's the challenge financially. You can succumb to feeling like we're always on the cliff. What you learn over time is that's by design.

BP: The cliff is where you live.

MHD: (Laughing) The cliff is our address. ... Even when you have a surplus, you can't hire a bunch of workers because then you have them for another 30 years...

There's a sense in which you're always running behind. Sometimes you're running far behind, and sometimes you're running close behind. And that's just the challenge of the way cities are financed in our country.

BP: Is the city where you would like it to be in preparation for the Olympics?

MHD: Mostly. I would say most of the big items are in place. And, frankly, it is the outstanding parts that are most public. So this debate between the federal government, LA28 and us over who's going to foot the bill and what are going to be the arrangements, that gets a lot of public press. But all the other things that have been worked out — around water and utilities, transportation — that doesn't get any ink because it's getting figured out.

Security is a real issue. I am very concerned about it, and a host of people are very concerned about it. This is where you have to be comparative. One of my good friends compared it to getting ready for a prom, and said proms are better planned [civil rights lawyer Connie Rice, in an interview with *LAist*, criticized the city's efforts, saying: "I know 10th graders who plan their prom better than this."]

Well, OK, other places have had the Olympics. We can compare where they were at this point to where we are at this point. And a big difference with L.A. ... is that we don't have to build anything.

We sent a delegation from my team to Italy for the Winter Olympics. When they landed in Italy, the stadium for hockey was not finished. They got there the week the Olympics started, and the stadium was not finished because the hockey games did not start until the middle of the second week. Not that you want to use that as an example, but there are things to compare to...

I'll tell you what I'm worried about on the Olympics. I'm worried about the international situation. FIFA [the World Cup] has already gotten complicated. And I don't know what the ultimate resolution will be, but Iran qualified for two of the games that are supposed to be here, and they're not likely to come. Even if they were willing to come — if the Trump government lets them in — if we continue on the path we're on, I can see a scenario where a number of countries boycott. The IOC [International Olympic Committee] has made it more difficult to boycott ... but at a certain point, the IOC is only as strong as the countries that are in it.

BP: You have the strong possibility that you'll have a governor, a mayor and a president who will not see eye to eye on these Games. I don't know how important that is, the Games don't exist to make the president happy, but it does seem awkward.

MHD: It is awkward. It is every bit as awkward as it seems, if not more. ... But I don't think any configuration of people involved could offset the drama and chaos that Trump causes. It wouldn't matter who it was.

BP: On the subject of Trump, ICE. How do you assess the city's response to these ICE raids, going back to last summer and continuing through now and likely into the future?

MHD: I think the people of this city have responded in a way that I'm so incredibly proud of. No matter what part of town you're in, ICE shows up and people hit the streets. Whether it's Eagle Rock or Van Nuys or Woodland Hills, South Central, San Pedro, people hit the streets, they start taking pictures, they start doing what they can.

Mostly what the people of Los Angeles have done is that they will not let ICE conduct its business in peace. Which is important. It's going to be known: The people don't want what you're doing.

I'm just been so proud of this city, from one end of the city to the other.

Our elected officials have been great. The council has been great. The council has been unified on it. There hasn't been any daylight between any factions of the council on the issue. We've resolutely rejected ICE, and said we don't want them here, and we'll do anything we can to keep them out. That's true of the council and of our citywide electeds as well.

The LAPD is in a tough spot, but also they have in many ways the highest profile. ... I've been disappointed in the way the chief has talked about it. It's a tight rope to walk, I get it, but this is L.A. and we've gotta do better. I wish that they could message better but also figure out a better posture on the streets.

BP: What would that look like?

MHD: I don't know. I'm not law enforcement. But what they do, it looks like they're giving security to ICE. You can't even let it look like that. There's got to be another way.

BP: I have to tell you, I'm not sure what a police sergeant or supervisor should do if an anti-ICE protester throws a rock at ICE. Who gets protected from whom? If the mission is to "protect and serve," who's entitled to that protection and service?

MHD: I don't know what the right answer is. It's a new situation. I understand that no one's dealt with this situation before....

The other thing is that you want to make bold pronouncements. You might say: "Normally, we want to work with the feds on this issue, but while these ICE officers are in the streets, we can't really work with them." Our citizens don't know who's who or what's what....

BP: I think about all the years and all the good consciousness-raising that happened around officers wearing their badges and identifying themselves. And then, all of a sudden, here comes ICE wearing masks and fatigues, and it really looks like kidnapping. It's such a reminder that ground is hard won and easily lost.

MHD: That's exactly right.

CLOSING NOTE

MYTHBUSTING AND IMMIGRANTS

NOMA BAR

THE UNITED STATES IS A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS. AND IT IS, AT least sometimes, a nation of xenophobes. California is at the leading edge of both those histories. It is the nation's most diverse state and home to more immigrants than any other state in the union. It also championed the Chinese Exclusion Act in the 1880s and demanded the removal and incarceration of its substantial Japanese-American population during World War II.

These are the contradictions of American history, and they are compounded — sometimes encouraged — by misunderstandings about what immigrants give to this nation. Rarely have those misunderstandings been more widespread than they are today. Lied to by their leaders, many Americans believe that migrants are disproportionately responsible for crime. They are not. Or that they drag down wages and prosperity. They do not.

The research featured in this issue of *Blueprint* helps dispel those and other assumptions that are distorting the national debate. To name a few wrong contentions:

- Immigration law enforces legal status, not racial identity. That's inaccurate, as the creators of the Mapping Deportations Project graphically illustrate. American immigration law has targeted Irish, Italians and other southern Europeans and Chinese at different points in history. Since 1895, 96% of those deported from this country came here from non-White-majority countries.
- Undocumented migrants don't pay taxes. False. They pay sales taxes, of course, and property taxes, either directly or through their rents. Moreover, because they contribute to Social Security and Medicare but are barred from receiving benefits, they represent a vast net contributor to those programs, relieving pressure on the federal budget. A recent study by the libertarian Cato Institute concluded that over a 30-year span, illegal immigrants reduced the U.S. deficit by $1.7 trillion.
- Immigrants take away American jobs. Nope. They dramatically add to the overall economy, creating jobs. During the three decades studied by Cato, migrants contributed in excess of $14.5 trillion more to the economy than they imposed in terms of costs.
- California suffers from its very large population of immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants. To the contrary, the state's economic growth depends on those workers, whether in Silicon Valley, downtown Los Angeles or the fields of the Central Valley. Undocumented immigrants in California alone pay more than $23 billion annually in federal, state and local taxes.
- Immigrants come to this country to take advantage of its healthcare. In fact, many undocumented workers avoid the healthcare system for fear of apprehension, adding to their health difficulties. That includes pregnant mothers. May Sudhinaraset, vice chair of the Department of Community Health Sciences at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, explained: "When you have criminalizing policies, it is really detrimental to birth outcomes."

In this time of disinformation, it is distressing to see one lie after another sidetrack debates into the cul-de-sacs of false accusation and calm rebuttal. It may be naïve to think that presenting these facts — supported by research, driven by data, backed by intelligent analysis — would hold the field against the avalanche of lies that fall upon them.

Still, facts are stubborn, and those are facts.

— Jim Newton

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DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY?

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