

Democracy Personified through Immigrant Integration and Community Engagement

Darlene Xiomara Rodriguez and Paul N. McDaniel

Immigrant integration has been a central topic of debate and research in the United States. It is a complex process influenced by various factors at multiple levels, including government policies, community perspectives, and individual experiences. Successful integration is aided by “receptivity,” the extent to which host societies welcome and accept immigrants. This special issue of the *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* (JCES) brings together an interdisciplinary and demographically diverse group of scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and students to examine immigrant receptivity and immigration policy. Specifically, we sought to surface how receptivity and policy are practiced and to champion organizations that facilitate immigrant integration and democratic engagement in the United States and Canada.

U.S. Immigration Primer

As of 2024, the United States has experienced significant changes in immigration patterns and numbers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2023 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, the U.S. immigrant population is 47.8 million, or 14.3 percent of the total U.S. population (Table 1). This diverse group includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, temporary residents, and unauthorized immigrants, with the most common countries of origin being

Mexico (10.9 million), India (2.9 million), China (2.8 million), and the Philippines (2.1 million) (Moslimani & Passel, 2024). In fiscal year 2024, nearly 3 million encounters (e.g., apprehensions, expulsions, or routine removal proceedings) occurred at U.S. borders, highlighting the ongoing dynamics at ports of entry, due to more people using ports of entry and increased border securitization. Looking ahead, the number of immigrants is expected to continue rising, with projections of net immigration reaching 3.3 million. This surge is anticipated to boost job growth and economic output, particularly in sectors facing labor shortages (Moslimani & Passel, 2024). Additionally, there is a notable shift in the demographics of immigrants, with more individuals coming from diverse regions, which reflect broader migration patterns influenced by economic opportunities, political instability, and environmental factors, as well as how the influx of immigrants brings both challenges and opportunities to local communities. These trends suggest that immigration will remain a critical and dynamic aspect of U.S. society, affecting the economy and community structures.

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted U.S. immigration. The Trump administration imposed travel restrictions, halted visa processing, and implemented Title 42 expulsions, which allowed for the immediate

Table 1. Total and Foreign-Born Population in the United States in 2010 and 2023

	2010	2023
Total Population	309,349,689	334,914,896
U.S.-Born	269,393,835	287,083,485
Foreign-Born	39,955,854	47,831,411
Region of origin		
Europe	4,817,437	4,819,049
Asia	11,283,574	14,607,826
Africa	1,606,914	2,791,326
Oceania	216,736	297,323
Latin America	21,224,087	24,479,660
Northern America	806,925	835,869

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 and 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table B05002 ("Place of Birth by Nativity and Citizenship Status") and Table B05006 ("Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population in the United States"). Foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens and non-citizens.

expulsion of migrants at the border to prevent the spread of the virus. These measures led to a significant reduction in legal immigration and an increase in unauthorized border crossings as migrants made repeated attempts to enter the U.S. The pandemic also caused a backlog in immigration court cases and delayed the processing of green cards and other immigration benefits.

During the first Trump administration, immigration policies were marked by a hardline stance. President Trump implemented several executive orders aimed at reducing both legal and illegal immigration. These included suspending immigration from several majority-Muslim countries, bolstering border patrol efforts, and initiating the construction of a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico (Jacobson & McKenney, 2024). Despite these measures, the number of deportations under Trump was lower compared to the early years of the Obama administration. (Hagopian, 2024; Roe, 2018). The Trump administration also saw a significant reduction in the issuance of green cards and non-immigrant visas, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Payne, 2024). One of the most controversial policies was the family separation policy, which led to over 5,000 children being separated from their parents at the border, with over 1,400 of those children still separated from their families six years later (Bump, 2024).

In contrast, the Biden administration has taken a different approach to immigration. On his first day in office, President Biden reversed many of Trump's policies, including halting the construction of the border wall and lifting the travel ban on several countries. The Biden administration has focused on creating an immigration system that prioritizes the protection of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and reduces the emphasis on deportations for non-violent offenses. However, the administration has faced challenges, including a significant increase in encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border. Despite these challenges, the administration has continued to push for comprehensive immigration reform, aiming to address the root causes of migration and provide a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants. The Biden administration has forced the departure of a large number of migrants from the United States, but in contrast to the Trump administration, has had a greater focus on the border as opposed to removing immigrants from the interior of the country (Chisti & Bush-Joseph, 2024).

Had Kamala Harris been elected president in November 2024, we could have expected a continuation and expansion of many of the policies initiated during her tenure as vice president. Harris had pledged to build on the Biden administration's efforts to create a more humane and efficient immigration system that includes prioritizing the protection of DACA recipients, expanding pathways to citizenship, and addressing the root causes of migration from Central America. Her administration would likely have focused on initiatives that strengthen the middle class by reducing taxes for working families and ensuring that the wealthiest Americans and corporations contribute to the tax base in a more equitable manner. Harris's presidency would have ostensibly aimed to unite the country around shared values and aspirations, promoting economic opportunity and social justice (Jacobson & Putterman, 2024; Kamala Harris Official Campaign Website, 2024). Given recent polling showing that both Democrats and Republicans want reduced immigration, the United States may see a shift in the Democratic Party's policy preferences in future years (Jones, 2024).

Since Donald Trump was elected president, we can expect a return to many of the policies from his first term, with some being pursued more aggressively. Trump has promised to carry out the largest domestic deportation operation in American history, focusing initially on deporting criminals and using local law enforcement and the National Guard to assist (Gamboa and Murphy, 2024; Santucci, 2024). He also plans to resume and expand the construction of the border wall, aiming to complete it with additional funding from Congress. Trump's immigration policy would likely include stricter enforcement measures and reduced legal immigration pathways. Additionally, his administration would pursue an "America First" agenda, emphasizing isolationist foreign policies, increased tariffs, and a rollback of the rights of marginalized communities. These policies are expected to significantly impact the immigrant population and reshape U.S. immigration policy in a more restrictive direction (Jacobson & McKenney, 2024; Donald Trump 2024 Presidential Campaign, 2024).

This spectrum of approaches highlights the evolving nature of U.S. immigration policy and its impact on the immigrant population. The ongoing changes and challenges underscore the importance of immigration as a critical issue in American

society, shaping the nation's demographic and economic landscape.

Due to historic trends and future forecasts of immigration patterns in the U.S., it is important to recognize that regardless of which political party controls the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, there are many federal agencies that also play a critical and complex role in immigration policy formulation and implementation. Consequently, the U.S. immigration system is an intricate web, which includes the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the United States Department of State (DOS), and the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These federal agencies also must work with the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR), Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), Office of the Chief Immigration Judge (OCIJ), Office of the Chief Administrative Hearing Officer (OCAHO), U.S. Consulates (C), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), among others. Thus, navigating these federal agencies in the U.S. immigration process can be quite challenging, due to complex regulations, levels of documentation, legal representation, language barriers, federal versus state laws, as well as detention and deportation (American Immigration Council, 2021).

However, despite the U.S. federal government holding primary authority over immigration policy, states and localities also play significant roles in shaping how these policies are implemented on the ground. This is known as immigration federalism, which is the dynamic relationship between federal, state, and local governments in the regulation and enforcement of immigration laws (Varsanyi et al., 2012). Historically, the federal government has been responsible for setting immigration laws, such as determining who can enter the country and under what conditions (Ramakrishnan & Gulasekaram, 2014). However, states and local governments have some leeway to enact laws affecting immigrants' daily lives, such as issuing business licenses, providing health and welfare services, and regulating housing (Stratton, 2024). This interplay can lead to a variety of approaches across different states. Therefore, how states and local governments carry out immigration policy has direct effects on how communities and community-based

organizations help immigrants live, work, and thrive (McDaniel & Rodriguez, 2024).

Much like when we say, "the government" it means different things to different people; so too is the experience when one hears the term "immigrants." Here we provide an overview of some of the most prevalent terminology associated with U.S. immigration status from least to most fragile. The safest, or least fragile, are individuals who are classified as United States Citizens (USC) or Legal Permanent Residents (LPR). A naturalized USC undergoes a process of naturalization which is conferred by the U.S. Congress to grant them U.S. citizenship after birth. These individuals have the same rights and privileges of citizenship as those who obtained it as a birth-right (USCIS-Citizenship Resource Center, n.d.). LPRs, more commonly known as "green card holders", are non-citizens who have been granted authorization to live and work in the U.S. on a permanent basis. These individuals also generally have a pathway to naturalized citizenship after five years of maintaining their LPR status. LPRs typically have the same rights as U.S. citizens, however they do not have the right to vote in U.S. federal elections and in certain extreme circumstances can be deported (USCIS Policy Manual, n.d.; Office of Homeland Security Statistics [OHSS]-Lawful Permanent Residents).

Next are those individuals with immigration statuses that become increasingly fragile, and they are presented in order of enhanced vulnerability. Temporary Protected Status (TPS), is, as the name implies, temporary. It is an immigration status granted to individuals from certain countries who are experiencing unsafe or difficult political, economic, or social conditions. These include ongoing armed conflict, environmental disasters, epidemics, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. TPS beneficiaries may qualify for other immigration benefits, however having TPS does not provide a direct pathway for LPR status (USCIS Humanitarian, n.d.). Asylee/Refugee Registrants are two different classifications, but are inherently the same thing but vary based on the physical locale of the person. A refugee is a person who is

residing outside of their country of nationality and who is unable or unwilling to return because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. An asylee is a person who meets

the definition of a refugee *and* is already present in the U.S. or is seeking admission at a port of entry into the country. Refugees are required to apply for LPR status one year after being admitted, and asylees may apply for an LPR one year after they are granted asylum (OHSS-Immigration, Refugee and Asylees, n.d.).

In contrast to Asylee/Refugee Registrants, those who are labeled as self-petitioners are individuals who can apply for immigration benefits without the need for a sponsor. These would include individuals who are receiving employment-based immigration categories as well as individuals who have been abused by a U.S. citizen or LPR, who seek independence from their abuser without the abuser's knowledge or consent through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) (USCIS-Green Card Eligibility, n.d.a.; USCIS-Green Card Eligibility, n.d.b.). In addition to VAWA petitioners being among the most vulnerable in this category, is the individual who is referred to as a "visa overstayer". This person has stayed beyond the allotted time they were legally allowed to remain in the U.S. These individuals entered the U.S. legally and with authorization, but their time has expired, and thus their unauthorized stay is referred to as "unlawful presence". Overstaying one's visa can result in an individual being barred from re-entering the U.S. for three to 10 years, depending on how long they have overstayed their visa (Wilson, Kolker, Bruno, and Singer, 2023).

The final category of immigration statuses consist of those that are the most fragile within the overall immigration system. Here we present them in order of least to most vulnerable. Entry Without Inspection (EWI) is the legal reference for a foreign national who entered the U.S. without being inspected by an immigration officer at a designated port of entry (Neil, 2023). When one is an EWI, they are deemed as having violated U.S. immigration laws and more commonly referred to as "undocumented immigrants" because there is no document identifying their lawful admission into the country, hence an Improper Entry by Alien (Improper Entry by Alien, 1952). These individuals are considered "inadmissible" and may face immigration detention and deportation proceedings and other penalties.

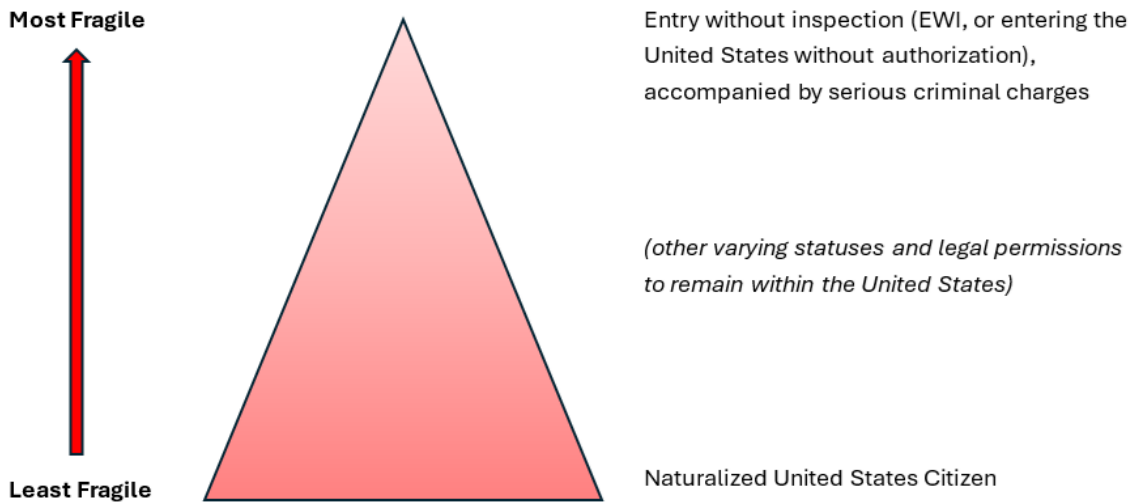
Among those who are EWIs, there is an important segment of individuals who are known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which was established in 2012 by executive order

and granted some EWI immigrants brought to the U.S. as children temporary relief from deportation. DACA recipients are granted work authorizations and driver's licenses. However, their status must be renewed and approved every two years, and DACA does not confer to them a lawful status or a pathway to citizenship. Thus, their perpetual deferred status puts them at great risk of detention and deportation at the discretion of prosecutors (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2022). Things significantly ratchet up for these final two immigration statuses. A felony criminal defense for an LPR involves defending an LPR against criminal charges that could lead to immigration deportation or other severe immigration consequences. Criminal Defense EWI, is an unauthorized immigrant in the U.S. because they were not inspected at a port of entry and is now facing criminal charges. This has significant implications for the individual, including deportation, criminal charges, and inability for current and future benefits (Aggravated Felonies, 2013; Improper Entry by Alien, 1952). Figure 1 illustrates the level of fragility persons who have these immigration statuses experience within the U.S. (Schaefer and Rodriguez, 2008).

As one can see, all non-U.S. citizens are vulnerable. It is like peeling back layers of an onion to understand how legal status impacts individuals and their economic opportunities, access to government institutions, and how they navigate their private cosmos of family and close relations. Figure 2 demonstrates how each of these layers manifest themselves in the "immigrant fragility onion" (Schaefer and Rodriguez, 2008).

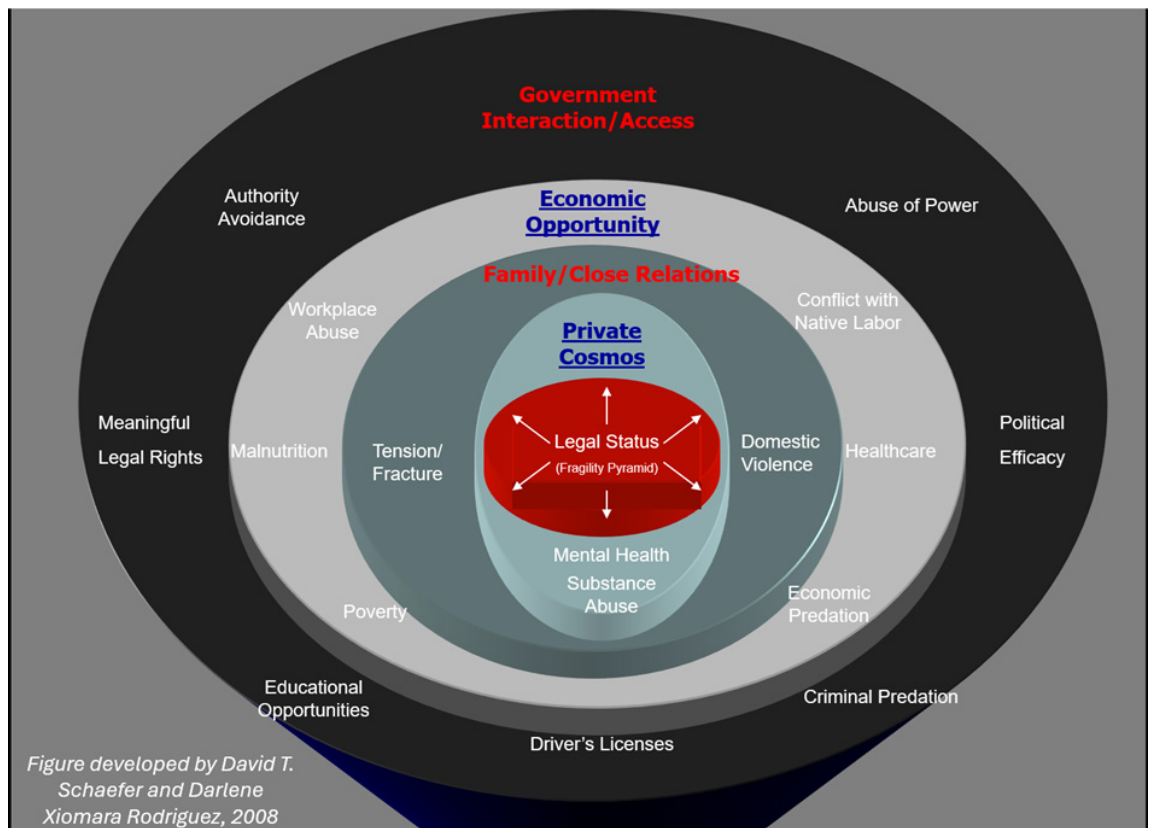
By understanding these two contexts of an immigrant's life, one can further understand how low-to-high levels of cultural acclimation, institutional familiarity, and language proficiency can help or harm their ability to be involved in seven core community areas: being civically engaged, becoming connected to their communities, fostering economic development, obtaining educational opportunities, having equitable access to opportunities and resources, engaging with government and community leadership, and doing their part to ensure communities are safe. We have found that individual immigrants, and immigrant communities' writ-large, who have had more time in the U.S. become increasingly less vulnerable as time passes (Moslimani & Passel, 2024). Thus, they can achieve higher rates of integration within the seven core community areas. Within this special issue we sought to highlight research into where

Figure 1. The Immigrant Fragility Pyramid



Note: Other statuses or permissions include Temporary Protected Status (TPS), an immigration status granted to nationals of specific countries who are faced with extreme conditions like an armed conflict, as well as Deferred Action, a discretionary determination by the government to delay deportation of an individual. Every immigrant's case is different, but, in general, entering the country without authorization as well as pending criminal charges increase the likelihood of deportation. An immigrant who has become a naturalized United States citizen is generally not subject to removal (or deportation) from the United States. A lawful permanent resident (LPR), or a non-citizen who is authorized to live in the country on a permanent basis, can be removed from the United States for certain crimes. Figure developed by David T. Schaefer and Darlene Xiomara Rodriguez, 2008.

Figure 2. The Immigrant Fragility Onion



these core community areas were being studied through a variety of methodologies, analyses, and creative approaches. We discovered that immigrant community engagement took place in a range of settings, from small unincorporated rural areas to large cities. Moreover, we came to appreciate the vital role community support and legal assistance play in helping newcomers navigate the labyrinth of legal and logistical challenges, as well as negative rhetoric surrounding their very presence in the U.S. It is our earnest hope that the strategic timing of this special issue's publication will facilitate civil discourse about the topic of immigration and the diverse immigrant communities that make the story of 'U.S.'

Why *JCES*? Why Now?

Since its inception in 2008, *JCES* has sought to be a scholarly peer-reviewed platform to elevate research, teaching, and service leadership that integrates these approaches to community engagement across various disciplines. In addition to doing this within each issue, in the last decade *JCES* has expanded its scholarly dissemination using special issues. These have included special conference issues from the annual Engagement Scholarship Consortium (2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019). However, since 2020, the *JCES* editorial board has made it part of their strategic vision to address challenging, and sometimes controversial, topics through a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) or Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) lens to better shape the conversations toward inclusivity and reflect the communities central to the conversation (Irby et al. 2021; Israel et al. 1998; Israel et al. 2019; Katsui & Koistinen 2008; Smith et al. 2016; Winter & Munn-Giddings 2001). These have included special issues on community engagement at historically Black colleges and universities (2020); climate change and knowledge translation (2021); well-being of service members, veterans, dependents and survivors (2021); and scholarship on the Cooperative Extension System and university-wide engagement (2022).

In preparing for the 2024 U.S. federal election, we began discussions with the *JCES* editorial board in 2021 about the possibility of leading a special issue on immigration and immigrant community engagement. Throughout this process, we worked with current and former *JCES* editorial board members to shape the call for proposals in a manner that would allow for a diverse array of opinions, communities, author groups, and

disciplines to feel welcomed and encouraged to submit to such a special issue. What has resulted is a special issue that is strategically being published after the November 5, 2024, U.S. federal election, which surfaces the voices of immigrants, those who work in partnership with them, and those who do research in collaboration with and on behalf of immigrant communities. Our aim is that the special issue could be a resource to encourage civil discourse and shape the narrative of democracy personified through immigrant integration and community engagement moving forward. By centering these voices, we seek to promote interdisciplinary research that showcase the value of including diverse immigrant populations and communities in CBPR and CEnR with the goal of advancing democracy and civic engagement for all.

Understanding this community-centric approach differentiates this special issue from the existing body of immigration-related research that frequently relies on secondary data or interviews with service providers, rather than directly capturing the voices and experiences of immigrants themselves. Moreover, research with immigrant communities and among other marginalized groups is often done in a “parachute style,” in which the researchers from outside of a community enter a community, collect their data, and then leave without further interaction or participation by community members involved with and impacted by the study. The resulting gap, due to a lack of the cultural, social and economic context that influence the community's experiences, coupled with incomplete data and community distrust or disengagement, can lead to a distorted and incomplete understanding of the challenges immigrants face, the strategies they employ to navigate new environments, and the contributions they make to their communities (Rodriguez & McDaniel, 2019).

In contrast, CEnR goes beyond theory, data collection, and data analysis. It involves long-term work of building relationships with immigrant communities, fostering trust, and empowering immigrants, practitioners, community partners, and policymakers to participate in the research process. Moreover, CEnR can help to challenge harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about immigrant communities. By working directly with immigrants and their organizations, researchers can dispel myths and promote a more accurate understanding rooted in the contributions that immigrants make to their communities.

This widening gap (made even wider by the U.S. 2024 federal election) and the role of CEnR in helping fill it (made even more crucial by the U.S. 2024 federal election) led us to decide that this special issue would focus on studies in which immigrants share their own stories, experiences, and perspectives. As a direct result, the work presented here highlights the importance of recognizing the diversity of immigrant experiences. Immigrants come from a range of countries and cultures, and their experiences vary widely based on factors such as legal status, education level, and economic circumstances, which in turn generate widely varying needs in their receiving countries and local communities.

Interdisciplinary scholarship like that engaged here is essential for understanding and addressing the needs of immigrants. For instance, understanding the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs requires insights from fields such as economics, economic geography, sociology, business, and cultural studies. Similarly, examining the impact of immigration policies on healthcare access requires knowledge of health geography, public health, social work, law, and social policy. By drawing on the expertise of scholars from different disciplines, the interdisciplinary research offered here provides a more holistic and effective approach to addressing these complex issues.

Interdisciplinary scholarship also helps to break down traditional silos within academia and foster collaboration among researchers from different fields (Akhtar, 2024; Friedlander, 2022; Holley, 2019; Van Hartesveldt et al., 2008). This can lead to new insights, breakthroughs, and innovative approaches to addressing complex societal challenges. By working together, scholars from different disciplines can develop more comprehensive and effective solutions to complex problems.

Why Us?

As your special issue guest editors, we have over a decade-long community-engaged research partnership focused on immigration and immigrant integration. Prior to joining forces, we both had a long history of utilizing community-based participatory research and community-engaged research as an approach for our scholarship, teaching, and service leadership. But we found that by working in community, with one another, we could better address an intractable problem – immigration – in a way that would inspire less division and greater cohesion.

Our community-engaged partnership with each other allows for reasonable minds to prevail when addressing a topic that is a lightning rod in U.S. communities and politics, and throughout the globe.

You see, Darlene, herself, comes from a mixed-immigrant family. And as part of her migration journey, she learned early on that faith and family are the two things one has when crossing borders, be they county lines or country lines. As a child, she experienced how each member of her family was treated differently in society, via anchor institutions, nonprofit organizations, and the law, based on their individual immigration status. Consequently, political, economic, and social factors further destabilized their fragile existence when in fact they should have been bringing her family closer together for stabilization in a new country. These early experiences shaped her understanding of immigration, local community receptivity, and how immigration federalism impacts all members of society. Consequently, it inspired her to become a macro-level social worker and one who studies social welfare and immigration policies. Now, Darlene is an associate professor of social work and human services at Kennesaw State University (KSU). KSU is a large public university in the major-emerging immigrant gateway metro area of Atlanta, Georgia. Here, Darlene equips emerging and established professionals in the fields of conflict management, human services, nonprofit management, public administration, public policy, and social work how to address with cultural humility and competency the various issues marginalized communities confront.

Paul, during the same time, grew up as a person born as a U.S. citizen in the southeastern U.S. In his childhood experience, he began to see his local community transform as more people were settling into the Birmingham metro area in central Alabama who did not look or sound like him. Soon signs in his community were in different languages and new establishments opened catering to specific ethnic enclaves (McDaniel & Drever, 2009). As a curious child, he sought to learn more about where and how these new neighbors arrived in his hometown and about the countries from which they came. These formative experiences cultivated his interest in human geography, which examines patterns about human cultures, economies, geopolitics, and communities and how they interact with their environments, across time and space. Consequently, it led him to be a human geographer, with an emphasis on population

migration, immigrant integration, and receptivity toward vulnerable and historically marginalized populations (McDaniel & Rodriguez, 2024). Now, as an associate professor of geography at Kennesaw State University, he teaches courses that emphasize various aspects of cultural, economic, political, urban, population, and environmental geography at our campus and through numerous summer study abroad programs in other world regions.

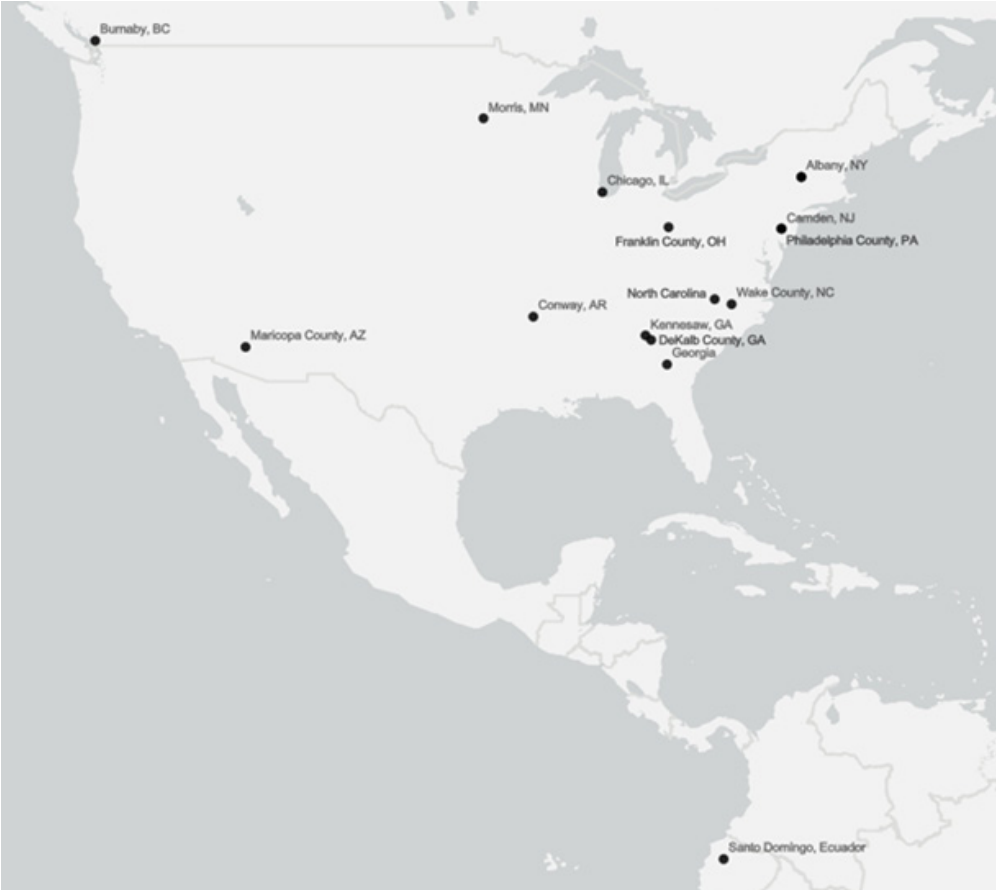
Despite our vastly different experiences growing up, we found that much like the book, we were *Same, Same but Different* (Kostecki-Shaw, 2011). This popular children’s book is about two people who grew up in different parts of the world and became friends. And like the children in the story, as Paul and Darlene shared more about our lived experiences, there were strong parallels, whereby we could foster empathy and find common ground. When we added our disciplinary training in social work, public policy, and human geography to the mix, we discovered through our research collaborations that we both used a similar way of breaking down how we see the world into micro, mezzo, and macro levels/

scales, but we each needed to make an intentional effort to become proficient in the others person’s disciplinary language. As we continued to break down disciplinary silos, we were able to leverage this greater and more complete understanding of immigration in a way that would bring more people to the table, rather than repel them. This special issue presents a wide variety of experiences surrounding immigration throughout the U.S. and Canada, and we trust it will increase reflection, conversation, and civility as a result.

Contributions to the Immigration and Immigrant Community Engagement Special Issue

This special issue offers a comprehensive examination of immigrant integration across various regions and contexts. The 14 articles within the special issue consist of five research articles, four research from the field essays, three community perspectives essays, and one student voices essay. To complete the special issue, there is also a book review and three artistic contributions. Figure 3 maps the locations of the places of focus across all contributions to this special issue.

Figure 3. Focus Locations of the Contributions in this Special Issue



The research articles appear first. These works draw on a variety of methods and conceptual frameworks to engage with research findings that are practical with applied policy implications, while also demonstrating the crucial central involvement of students and community partners to advance the field of community engagement scholarship. Immediately following this introduction, in “So much potential”: Latino/a Immigrant Emerging Adults, Legal Status, and Educational Participation,” Gonzalez, Gaffney, and Mejia, explore immigrant young adults’ experiences and perspectives about what it is like to live with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals status, with temporary or unauthorized legal status, or in mixed-immigrant-status families. Their study took place in central North Carolina.

In “It’s an Odyssey: Centering Mexican and Central American Immigrant Entrepreneurs in an Examination of County-Level Sanctuary,” Carr-Lemke examines perspectives on sanctuary policy among Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs and associated agency staff. Participants live in four disparate U.S. counties in the Midwest, Southwest, Mid-Atlantic, and the South.

While Carr-Lemke focuses on urban and suburban environments, in the following article Ortiz, Berberi, Genova, and Roberts turn our attention to a rural context. In “The Morris Intercultural Education Initiative: A Decade of Advancing Democracy Through Community-Engaged Learning in the Rural Midwest,” they present a retrospective article exploring the genesis and organic responsiveness of a university-community partnership initiative in the small town of Morris, Minnesota, offering insights to those who wish to pursue similar projects in like communities.

In “Our Blood Is Not Cheap”: A Photovoice Project on Being Arab in a Racialized United States,” Villarreal Sosa, Tabahi, and Shalabi, present a community-based participatory research project based in the South Suburban Chicagoland area, using Photovoice as a methodology to better understand the lived experiences and narratives of Arab Americans in the post-Trump era and as a tool for advocacy. In “Inclusive Storytelling: Immigrant Experiences and Community Reaction in Georgia,” Rodriguez, McDaniel, Tuschling, and Smith-Sitton report the results of a multiyear, interdisciplinary, qualitative, community-based participatory research project in Atlanta.

Results demonstrate the role of storytelling in the transference of knowledge, history, and sense of purpose among immigrant youth and the impact of such stories on public perceptions of immigrant experiences.

The four research from the field essays complement the empirical studies by sharing best practices, practical wisdom, and applied knowledge examples. Context is an essential component of community-engaged work, and it is critical to situate research within its real-world context to systematically extend our knowledge and understanding. In “Building and Strengthening Communities Through Culturally Responsive Inter-Agency Collaboration in Southern New Jersey,” Villacis and Ross document the challenges and social-delivery practices that immigrant Hispanic families and agency collaborators must navigate in the Southern New Jersey region. They present insights into service providers’ reflections on their work and families’ perspectives on the assistance they received. In “Building an Oral Repository of African Immigration Experiences in French: The Griotte Project’s Reparative Historiographic Praxis Through Service-Learning at the University of Central Arkansas,” Okoli critically reflects on the translation of decolonial, antiracist, and feminist theory into pedagogical praxis through the coordination of a French-language oral history service-learning project at her institution.

In “Engaging With *Refuge or Refusal* to Assess the Impact of an Immigration History Exhibition,” Langer assesses the impact of *Refuge or Refusal*, a museum exhibit created in 2018 at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education to teach the public about U.S. immigration history. The essay considers the value of museum-based public history for sparking conversations, raising questions, and initiating a search for answers to questions. In “Exploring Best Practices and Tensions in Immigrant-Led Community-Based Social Service Planning Models for Immigrant and Refugee Communities,” Dhillon, Machado, Lai, and Grain explore immigrant-led, community-based social service planning models to inform and strengthen integration support for newcomers and refugees in British Columbia, Canada.

The issue’s three community perspectives pieces foreground community members working with academic partners from different disciplines, showcasing examples of the perspectives of community partners, practitioners, and policymakers about the importance

of community-engaged work. In “BIPOC Community Perspectives on Environmental Justice in Georgia,” Cho, Green, Chung, Lee-Hong, and Rodriguez describe the work Democracy Lab South and partners conducted as the first and only multilingual statewide environmental justice survey of Georgia’s BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) immigrant communities in 2022. They report from the frontlines of establishing a baseline understanding of these communities’ current perceptions, needs, practices, and potential localized solutions. In “Lessons From a Decade in West Hill: Community Perspective From the West Hill Refugee Welcome Center,” Doherty and Klane provide a brief history of the West Hill Refugee Welcome Center in Albany, New York. The center is run by a nonprofit organization that works to assist long-term refugee well-being by providing affordable housing and vital services and addressing the systemic roots and contemporary repercussions of neighborhood blight. In “Challenging Our Assumptions: Listening to Refugee and Immigrant Women’s Voices About Career Aspirations,” Warner, Herring, Baranik, and Coles share two case studies gathered in connection with the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in upstate New York and its service to recent arrivals to the United States.

The student voice contribution is “Becoming ‘la señorita de inglés,’ in the U.S. Peace Corps: My journey from practitioner to Ph.D.” Doctoral students, Bharwani and Hodges, describe how serving in the U.S. Peace Corps led to applying for and working towards a Ph.D. because of those experiences. Lastly, Brockway provides a book review of *The Power of Morality in Movements: Civic Engagement in Climate Justice, Human Rights, and Democracy* edited by Sevelsted and Toubøl, noting that the book is an analysis of how morality leads individuals to join movement organizations, such as those related to immigration and refugee issues.

In addition to including these academic and scholarly pieces, we have also incorporated artwork from two young artists, who are like us, with one who identifies as coming from an immigrant background and the other with an established U.S. heritage. Tahir’s image graces the cover of the special issue as she reflects on her Pakistani American upbringing and the challenges adult immigrants endure to provide for their children. Kelly moves us from the personal story to the larger narrative through pictorial maps representing each of the countries that are written about throughout

the special issue. To complement each manuscript, we have provided country maps, created by Kelly, which correspond to those geographic locations identified in the piece. At the conclusion of the special issue, we share Kelly’s cartography portfolio in which a map of each of the countries identified by the United Nations is represented. We believe that by including these art pieces we advance creative scholarship and provide a rich opportunity to help readers understand the human condition at the micro level and its impact on the mezzo and macro levels of society.

An overarching theme of this special issue is the critical role of community-based organizations in providing essential services, advocating for immigrant rights, and fostering social cohesion. These organizations serve as vital lifelines for newcomers. The research presented here indicates a range of supports, including language assistance, legal aid, job training, healthcare access, and cultural orientation. By working directly with immigrant communities, community-based organizations help immigrants and society come together by promoting understanding, tolerance, and challenging harmful stereotypes.

Furthermore, this special issue highlights the importance of community-engaged scholarship in collaborating with immigrant communities to co-produce knowledge and drive social change. By engaging with communities and addressing real-world problems, public universities—and other institutions that adopt the same mission—can fulfill their goal of public service and contribute to the economic and social well-being of their communities. University–community partnerships can help to bridge the gap between academia and the broader community, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Through the partnerships with scholars presented here, community-based organizations have amplified the voices of immigrants and advocated for policy reforms. As such, the work they do demonstrates that, by bringing together scholars from diverse fields and working closely with communities, researchers can develop innovative solutions to pressing problems that arise with increasing immigration.

Concluding Thoughts

Immigration and the immigrant experience are inextricably tied to the past, present, and future of the U.S. and Canada. Yet, the cultural understanding of this unbreakable tie typically treats the immigrant as “the other”. Much is said about immigrants without centering their own

stories and contributions; we believe that such centering has the potential to inform and inspire community change and scholarship. By centering the voices of immigrants and fostering meaningful partnerships, we can work towards building a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

The works presented here demonstrate the indispensable role of community-based organizations in supporting immigrant integration and advancing social justice. These organizations serve as vital lifelines for newcomers, providing essential services, advocating for immigrant rights, and fostering social cohesion. As stated earlier, by working directly with immigrant communities, community-based organizations offer a range of support, including language assistance, legal aid, job training, healthcare access, and cultural orientation. Furthermore, community-based organizations are often at the forefront of advocacy efforts, working to address systemic barriers and advocate for policies that benefit immigrant communities. Through their tireless efforts, these organizations contribute significantly to the well-being and integration of immigrants, fostering a more just and inclusive society.

In conclusion, the research presented in this issue highlights the importance of applied, interdisciplinary, community-engaged scholarship in collaborating with immigrant communities to co-produce knowledge and drive social change. This type of scholarship not only contributes to academic knowledge but also has a direct impact on people's lives and communities. By engaging with stakeholders and applying research findings to real-world challenges, public research universities through CEnR and CBPR can fulfill their mission of serving the public good, representing good stewardship of public resources and of giving back to the communities within which universities are located.

This special issue contributes to the field of immigration studies by showcasing the diverse experiences of immigrant communities and the important role of community-based organizations and community-engaged scholarship in supporting their integration and advancing social justice. By centering the voices of immigrants and fostering meaningful partnerships, we can work towards building a more inclusive and equitable society for all. As immigrant-receiving societies continue to grapple with issues of immigration and diversity, the insights offered in this special issue are essential for informing policy, practice, and community engagement efforts. The contributions

also offer scholarly examples of community-engaged university-community partnership. By fostering a deeper understanding of immigrant experiences and the challenges they face, we hope, we are contributing to a more just, inclusive, and democratic society.

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About the Guest Editors

Darlene Xiomara Rodriguez is an associate professor of social work and human services at Kennesaw State University. Paul N. McDaniel is an associate professor of geography at Kennesaw State University.

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Personal Dedication

"*Pa' tras ni pa' coger impulso*" is a Spanish idiom that translates into "Don't go back even to gain momentum" in English. It conveys the idea of moving forward without hesitation or looking back, even if it means not taking a step back to gather strength or momentum. Essentially, encouraging perseverance and determination in the face of challenges. During the production of this special issue, we both lost two indescribable and inspirational people who shaped our lives: our grandmothers, Darlene's Abuelita and Paul's Nana. In reflecting on how we grew up – and what brought us here today to complete this special issue – we found that it was largely because of their shared vision to look forward despite the great odds they had to confront and their mutual willingness to value those who were "same but different." In loving memory of Victoria Yolanda Bello (1930–2022) and Gloria Ann Steele Schaefer (1928–2022).