

**IAST CONFERENCE**

# **BORDERS AND BELONGING: MIGRATION CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

**MAY 5 & 6, 2026**



Institute for  
Advanced  
Study in  
Toulouse



Toulouse  
School of  
Economics



## **ABSTRACTS BOOKLET**

### **CONFERENCE VENUE**

Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse (IAST)  
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Auditorium 3 – JJ Laffont (Ground Floor)

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**Ala Alrababah**      *Return Intentions and Behavior: A Panel Study of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*

*(with Marine Casalis, Daniel Masterson, Dominik Hangartner, Jeremy Weinstein)*

Panel 4: Refugees: Integration and Return

Research on the return of forcibly displaced populations often centers on stated intentions rather than actual behavior and typically relies on cross-sectional or aggregate data. This paper addresses these limitations using a six-year panel of 3,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, complemented by a survey experiment, to identify what drives return behavior and when intentions translate into action. We examine the role of expectations about safety in motivating return, as well as the extent to which stated intentions predict realized returns. We pay particular attention to the role of confidence in information about conditions in Syria, and use experimental evidence to assess whether credible safety information shifts return intentions. The paper also explores what "safety" means to refugees beyond the absence of violence — including stability, local control, and freedom from coercive measures such as conscription. By integrating longitudinal and experimental evidence, this study advances understanding of refugee return dynamics and informs policies supporting voluntary, dignified repatriation.

**Bocar A. Ba**      *Market for Immigration Detention*

*(with Hantao Wu, Eyub Yegen)*

Panel 3: Coercion: Detention Markets and Deportation

We study the consequences of private immigration detention contracting using presidential elections as shocks to enforcement expectations. ICE contractors earned cumulative abnormal returns of 20 percentage points after the 2024 election, the largest effect in seven agencies and five electoral cycles, concentrated entirely among detention contractors, with GEO Group and CoreCivic implying  $\$1.8$  billion in combined equity gains. A shift-share instrument reveals that a one-standard-deviation increase in procurement raises the county-month detainee count by 2.7, roughly 32 percent of the pre-2016 mean. The marginal detainee has no criminal record: procurement expansion operates through workers whose detention removes them from the tax base, suppresses earnings, and generates no measurable public safety benefit.

**Alexandra C. Hartman** *Asylum Granted: The Integration and Well-Being Benefits of Obtaining Refugee Status*

*(with Marine Casalis, Dominik Hangartner, Joe Kendall, Rodrigo Sanchez Sienna)*

Panel 5: Belonging, Displacement, and Membership

How does a person's immigration status shape well-being, integration and opportunities? Immigration status is particularly high-stakes for people fleeing persecution and violence, who may face uncertainty in their ability to reside legally and move freely. In many countries, the process of obtaining refugee status has become increasingly difficult and politicized. In this study, we address this empirical gap by combining administrative UNHCR records linked with an original panel survey of asylum seekers and refugees in Greece conducted between 2022 and 2023. We use a difference-in-differences design to identify the impact of refugee status on labor market outcomes, integration into host communities, psychological distress and onward migration. We find that obtaining refugee status from the Greek state reduces psychological distress and improves overall integration, with effects being mostly driven by navigational integration, while also increasing secondary movements within Europe. These results are robust to a variety of checks and specifications, providing evidence for the multidimensional impact of granting refugee status.

**Kristen Kao** *Boundaries of State and Nation Membership: How Hosts and Immigrants Determine Belonging in Turkey*

*(with Karen Ferree)*

Panel 5: Belonging, Displacement, and Membership

The allocation of membership in two overlapping but distinct communities--the nation and the state--fuels contentious debates shaping politics within and across nation-states today. Although policy and scholarship often conflate the two, who belongs "to the nation" and who belongs "in the state" are not the same question. Nations allocate symbolic membership through descent, culture, and everyday boundary-policing; states allocate legal status through bureaucratic rules that are simultaneously affected and shaped by public opinion. This study investigates: what factors determine whether an individual is perceived to be a member of a nation, and do these same factors also determine perceived membership in the state? Employing a conjoint experiment embedded in a probability sample drawn from neighborhoods in Adana, Turkey (n=5514, evenly split between hosts and immigrants), we explore both inherited and acquired attributes and how they shape perceptions of belonging. We find that inherited attributes weigh most heavily for national belonging, while acquired ones--language, legality, time in country, intermarriage--loom larger for state inclusion. However, the degree to which this argument holds varies across individuals, with those having insecure membership in the state and identities that cross-cut immigrant and host being more likely to downplay inherited attributes. These results explain why naturalization can fail to produce full social membership "in the nation," but also where pragmatic everyday integration efforts on the part of immigrants can make inclusion more achievable.

**Alexander Kustov** *Toward Identifying Political Compromise: Rethinking Public Support of Immigration as a Conditional Preference*

*(with Marc Helbling)*

Panel 1: Public Opinion and Immigration-Linked Attitudes in the United States

Scholars often interpret widespread negative opinion polls as categorical opposition to immigration. In our conceptual contribution, we contend instead that many voters signal a conditional willingness to accept more open immigration policies depending on how these policies are regulated or when these policies are demonstrably beneficial to receiving countries and align with other shared values. Drawing on existing cross-national research and a new illustrative survey experiment in the United States, we develop a “conditional preference” framework that treats immigration attitudes as multidimensional and non-separable. We show that policy bundles offering credible assurances of legality, tangible economic contribution, and meaningful cultural integration consistently command majority support, even amid racial bias and general skepticism. Rather than seeking to reshape core attitudes and identities, we argue that researchers and policymakers could benefit from identifying, and rigorously measuring, the specific trade-offs citizens are prepared to accept across different immigration issues. We close by outlining survey-based tools for mapping voters’ conditional preferences and readiness to compromise on immigration and other contested policy domains.

**Hans Lueders** *Geographies of Engagement: How Domestic Migration Shapes Political and Civic Life*

Panel 2: Geography, Mobility, and Electoral Sorting

Millions of people move within their country every year. But the consequences of this domestic migration for politics and civil society remain poorly understood. My book manuscript demonstrates that domestic migration produces a largely overlooked divide between places that gain (“in-migration places”) and lose (“out-migration places”) population through domestic migration. I argue that political and civic engagement works fundamentally differently in in- and out-migration places because those who do (“movers”) and do not (“stayers”) move are distinct types of citizens: movers are less likely than stayers to feel a strong bond to their place of residence. Since individuals with stronger local attachments tend to focus their engagement on the local community, domestic migration sorts people into two electorates: a nationally minded one with greater national engagement in in-migration places, and a locally minded one with greater local engagement in out-migration places. The divide between in- and out-migration places extends beyond race and partisanship and is distinct from the rural-urban divide that dominates our theorizing about geographic cleavages in rich democracies. Drawing on illustrative narratives, household surveys, survey experiments, and novel quantitative data from Germany and the United States, I show that in- and out-migration places differ in many of the core outcomes in the study of comparative political behavior: political participation, civil society, and representation—outcomes we care so much about because of their significance for democratic governance and stability.

**Hannah Postel**      ***Return as Displacement: Deportation and Capabilities in Honduras***

***(with Daniel Masterson, Juanita Ruiz, Cynthia van der Werf, Kimberly Zelaya)***

Panel 3: Coercion: Detention Markets and Deportation

This talk will present findings from two empirical studies that explore what the non-democratic roots of mass education imply for (1) the characteristics of education systems in democracies and (2) the political behavior of citizens in democracies. The first study, based on original data from 160 countries between 1945 and 2021, reveals that while both non-democratic and democratic regimes use schooling to indoctrinate, the content of that indoctrination differs significantly: in democracies, education systems promote uncritical reverence for democratic norms and institutions. The second study, based on evidence from Mexico, argues that non-democratic education systems can shape the functioning of subsequent democratic regimes by using primary schools (and the curriculum) to discourage long-term political participation. Taken together, these studies illuminate how the authoritarian origins of mass education systems continue to shape education and politics even after their demise. These enduring legacies, I argue, make the realization of genuinely democratic education an ongoing and uphill battle.

**Marcel Roman**      ***The Immigration-to-Reproduction Shift: Latino Population Growth and White Support for Legal Abortion***

***(with Tyler Reny, Benjamin Newman)***

Panel 1: Public Opinion and Immigration-Linked Attitudes in the United States

The literature on White Americans' reaction to demographic change continues to focus on immigration despite the fact that the ethnic diversification of the United States is increasingly driven by non-White births. We extend past research on White backlash against ethnic diversification to the domain of reproductive policy—testing the idea that prejudiced Whites will support abortion in response to growing minority populations as a means of slowing demographic change via non-White reproduction. Using large-N and original surveys of the American public, we find that Whites residing in locales with substantial growth in the Latino population are more supportive of access to legal abortion. This relationship is not observed among non-Whites and is confined to Whites higher in prejudice. We replicate these findings with a series of experiments showing that priming prejudiced Whites to think about Latino population growth increases their support for racially-targeted abortion as well as other reproduction-limiting policies.

**Alessio Romarri**     *The ideological segregation consequences of electing extremists*

*(with Massimo Anelli, Italo Colantone, Massimo Morelli, Piero Stanig)*

Panel 2: Geography, Mobility, and Electoral Sorting

Geographical sorting based on ideology and partisanship has attracted considerable attention in the study of American politics. We provide novel evidence relying on data from the American Community Survey, which allows us to trace both county of origin and county of destination of over one million respondents over the 2016-2022 electoral cycles. The ACS does not contain information about ideology or partisanship. Therefore we impute to ACS respondents measures of political leanings based on models estimated on data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study: ideology and vote choice are modeled as a function of demographic characteristics; we then predict the political variables for ACS respondents based on their observables. To estimate the effect of political considerations on decisions to relocate, we adopt a regression discontinuity design exploiting the victory of a candidate from the radical right faction of the Republican party in close congressional races. Extreme Republicans are identified based on Bonica's (2023) ideology scores and on endorsements by specific political action committees. We find that the victory of an extremist Republican in their district induces individuals who are classified as the least likely to support Trump to relocate, and in particular to relocate to Democratic districts.

**Sigrid Weber**     *Building Business Networks to Strengthen Refugee Economic and Social Integration*

*(with Mae MacDonald, Adam Lichtenheld, Andrew Zeitlin, Jens Hainmueller)*

Panel 4: Refugees: Integration and Return

Can a targeted business intervention expand the networks of urban refugees and hosts in developing countries? Does expanding different kinds of business networks foster economic and social integration? We provide business grants and implement "networking groups" for refugee and host entrepreneurs to study the impact of business networks on economic outcomes, psychological well-being, and social cohesion. We randomize 8,000 refugees and hosts from 10 nationalities into weekly networking groups in Nairobi and Kampala. The groups vary in their nationality composition and meeting setup in order to induce 'strong' and 'weak' ties, and same and mixed nationality network ties. We find that the network intervention increases collaborative behavior in business—as a core mechanism through which social networks operate -- but cash remains more critical to improve the economic and social wellbeing of refugees and hosts.