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Brookings Cafeteria Podcast:
Foreign policy issues in the presidential election

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DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, A podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. I've got a really big show for you today. Four items are on the menu, all crafted to help inform your thinking about the US presidential election. First, foreign policy issues in the election; second, what went down at the first debate; third, what's the deal with polls; and forth, in our new "Ask an Expert" segment, what effect do refugees have on the economy. Let's dive in. We're entering the final stretch of the 2016 presidential election. The debates are underway and everyone is watching the polls intently. In the last episode I talked with David Wessel about the economic issues that are driving the conversation in the electorate and also the priority issues that the next president will have to tackle. now we turn to the foreign policy side: the issues that you hear about in the campaigns and the issues you don't hear enough about but that Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump will face as president starting January twentieth. here to lend his insight and expertise to our understanding of these issues is Michael O'Hanlon, senior fellow in foreign policy and co-director of the Center for 21st century security and intelligence here at Brookings. Mike is coordinating a series of papers and events here called election 2016 and America's Future. Mike, thanks for joining me once again on the show.

O'HANLON: Pleasure Fred; thanks for having me.

DEWS: it's been about two and a half years. before we dive into some of the specific issues, can you talk about the Election 2016 Project?

O'HANLON: the idea here is to recognize that Brookings has research expertise across many issues and we are always doing different things of course; writing different books some of them could be historical some of them could be more theoretical, people

in other programs maybe writing journal articles for academics but an election period, campaign period like this we should, even more than usually is the case, be trying to distill our best ideas and proposals into a form that's digestible, debatable, and accessible to voters, to candidates, hopefully to the president-elect him or herself and so it sort of seems in a way obvious that a public policy research organization would be doing that but as you know and as I just said, we're often pursuing other kinds of work that are either more academic, more long-term, it just seems right to take a moment and try to create a relatively standard template of writing and the way I think of it is something that's long enough that you get a little bit of background information about the issue whether or not you ultimately buy the proposal of the scholar who's making it and that you have a short enough version that you can read it in one sitting or an executive summary that you can even scan without sitting but that it's not, you know, it's neither so long as to require deep study, nor so shortest to just be a blog post that sort of, you know, seems nice but evaporates pretty quickly after you've read it and and so Strobe Talbott and Martin Indyk and others agreed this was a good vehicle, good approach, we've done similar things in past elections and there were various research programs out of our five programs here at Brookings that were already embarked on one variant or another of something kinda like this but there wasn't a systematic effort to pull it all together for the institution as a whole to create a part of the website where we would have these policy briefs all in one place, easy to find, to have an outreach strategy led by our communications colleagues or your colleagues here where there'd be sort of a brief of the day and we use all of our social media and other outreach efforts to try to promulgate and, you know popularize, that those ideas and so with those efforts

plus these events, these signature events roughly weekly from here through and not just the election but the transition period, we hope to highlight some of Brookings best work across all of our five research programs.

DEWS: That's terrific. I look forward to seeing the papers and talking about them on this podcast and the other channels and also particularly the events; they're live events so there's going to be an in-person audience but we're recording them and we will broadcast them as special episodes on shows in the Brookings Podcast Network coming up so looking forward very much to that. Let's dive into the 2016 campaign; there are so many issues we could talk about. Earlier, we discussed a few that are kind of salient in the campaign rhetoric right now including ISIS, immigration/refugees, and trade coming from a foreign policy perspective. Mike, I'm gonna ask you, thinking about Donald Trump's pronouncements on defeating ISIS, thinking about what Hillary Clinton has said, what are they proposing that is any different from what the Obama administration is already doing?

O'HANLON: Well, it's a good question, Fred. I think that the best we can gather from the relatively few comments that either one of them is made about their plans would be that Hillary would be a little tougher than Obama has been, that that Secretary Clinton would be willing to use air power a little more assertively, perhaps, than President Obama has, perhaps more special forces than the 300 or so that Obama has deployed to Syria, and, you know, more generally be willing to take some risks, maybe have a concept whereby safe havens as they developed on the ground could be formally established and further protected or supplied, reinforced, maybe that would

help reduce the refugee flows out of Syria if some of these kinds of safe havens could be established.

Secretary Clinton gave a speech on that last year. But I would still say that even her plan is not particularly detailed and of course Donald Trump has become even more Trump-like on this issue than most because he's asserted that he has a plan that's so secret that he won't even tell us what it is and that to do so would be a mistake that General MacArthur or others wouldn't approve of; giving your best ideas to the enemy so he's tried to make a virtue out of not knowing what he would do and I think we have to conclude that he doesn't know what he would do because it's a hard problem and he's not known for having a lot of background on this issue and he's not known for being all that engaged with policy details in general on different issues and so I think that his assertiveness that, you know, he's got a plan or he's going to have a plan but he just can't say what it is for reasons of national security doesn't quite hold water but nonetheless if you're trying to be even-handed and I'm a Hillary supporter so I'm not going to try to be overly even-handed here but if I were trying to be just purely analytical or look for a nice thing to say about Trump I would have to at least acknowledge the Clintons plans themselves are fairly skeletal at this point and either one is going to have to do a much more detailed policy review before they can implement a new strategy once elected.

DEWS: In the first debate Mr. Trump even suggested that maybe NATO should be more involved in the fight against ISIS; what do you make of that kind of idea?

O'HANLON: Well, NATO, as Mr. Trump has correctly argued, is a lot of countries most of which don't fully pull their weight and so if we look for example at the

Afghanistan mission, even at the peak in the early Obama years, the United States deployed 100,000 troops the rest of NATO collectively deployed about 30,000. That was a max out effort for the entire rest of the Alliance.

Now, if we do wind up in a peacekeeping mission in Syria; if we can ever get to a peace deal that requires a peacekeeping force, it is true that some of our allies have historically been more willing to do that kind of work than we have; some of the Europeans and the Balkans or in Africa, for example, or Lebanon and I think that NATO would contribute a substantial part of the backbone for a peacekeeping force perhaps even more than the United States, but of course we're a long ways away from a peace deal and in the interim, getting the kind of air power, the kind of special forces to make the battlefield dynamic shift enough to get a deal is not an area where I think we can ask for a whole lot of help or expect a whole lot from NATO. We're getting a little bit right now from Turkey, in particular, and a little bit from, you know, Britain and France but and even Germany in this broader Iraq/Syria theater but I think we should view those efforts as complementary to our own, not as the essence of it and if you look at the Libya mission, I think you would have to acknowledge that President Obama, Secretary Clinton didn't really achieve a big success here in part because they hoped for too much from NATO and left the United States' role to be quite minimal especially after Qaddafi was killed. So I think the precedence and the military analyses would tell you, you better be tempered in your expectations of what NATO can or will do.

DEWS: Let me ask you this last question concerning ISIS and it has to do with competing narratives I think from the two candidates about the group's relative strength. Mr. Trump sees it as an expanding group. Speaking of Libya, he says they control the

oil in Libya; they're all over the place. We see kind of ISIS perhaps inspire terrorism lone wolf events around the world. Mrs. Clinton has said that she could see ISIS being kicked out of Iraq maybe this year; we know that a big battle is gearing up to happen for the Iraqi city Mosul. How do you assess kind of where ISIS is on the ground in the Middle East and as a threat right now?

O'HANLON: I think it's pretty serious, you know, we start with the bottom line and I think that overall there's enough left of momentum for ISIS and enough of success still with its narrative and its social media usage that we should not start to view this conflict as having somehow peaked and gone towards a happier place just because ISIS is losing ground in Iraq and Syria. It has lost about half of its territory in Iraq and about twenty, twenty-five percent in Syria. It's hard to imagine ISIS making big comebacks in either place.

On the other hand, it sort of felt like Al-Qaeda couldn't make much of a comeback in Iraq five, six years ago and then they transmuted into ISIS and took advantage of political vacuums or sectarian tension and the American departure and so if we get impatient, if we don't keep our eye on the ball, if our partners in the region don't do a good job with establishing some degree of consensus among their different sectarian groups, ISIS or something like it could re-emerge even in Iraq and Syria and ISIS remains quite powerful in Nigeria; in parts of Libya, even if it's lost a little ground there; the Sinai Peninsula where it brought down a Russian aircraft last year; parts of Mali where it was defeated to an extent by the French a couple years ago but is still in residual areas; and then there's even a little bit of ISIS out in the Afghanistan-Pakistan domain and the broader global message of course resonates with these lone wolf

attacks in the West and elsewhere. So I think it would be a big mistake to get overconfident about our progress even though we are having some classic battlefield momentum established in both Iraq and Syria against ISIS.

Last point, in Iraq, as Ken Pollock, our colleague will underscore, but even more so in Syria we do not have a clear vision for how to help our local partners establish this kind of a cohesive rule of law, rule of politics, you know, in other words a stable political outcome for either or so even if we beat ISIS in the short term, it's not clear how long that victory would last.

DEWS: Well I'll refer listeners here to the considerably large body of analysis and recommendations on our website from you, and Ken Pollock, Will McCants, Suzanne Maloney, everybody else at Brookings about ISIS, Syria, the Middle East. There's so much more than we could possibly even touch here so visit our website Brookings.edu and get a lot more of that. Let's switch over to immigration, maybe more specifically refugees. We didn't hear Mr. Trump talk about the border wall with Mexico but he's talked about it a lot. A lot of concerns in America about immigration, in particular about refugees from Syria who happened to be Muslims. Mike, how do you assess the rhetoric that you're hearing in the campaign? Should Americans be concerned about refugees from Syria and other places around the world?

O'HANLON: Well, we should be concerned. I don't think that we should shut them out, but we should be concerned and in fact one of my frustrations with the political debate, and here I would have to fault President Obama a little bit, even though I tend to agree with his position much more than with Donald Trump's. But President Obama, when I've heard him speak to this question of refugees and whether they could

be security threats, he's almost seemed dismissive of the concern as if anybody who had that concern was revealing a racism or a jingoism or you know some kind a phobia of foreigners and we know everything from insider attacks in Afghanistan and Iraq to what's happened with some Syrian refugees in some of these Paris and Brussels attacks in Europe that there is a threat and that ISIS is smart enough to recognize that refugee flows do create opportunities for interspersing real refugees who are 99.999% of all the people with that occasional one or two or three or five who blend in. And since a lot of these people are fleeing, you know, homes that were destroyed, lives that were destroyed, they may not even have their papers with them so how can you definitively prove who is an innocent refugee and who is an ISIS fighter.

So I think the overall danger is pretty low but I do think that candidates who would and presidents who would support current policies of taking in refugees should probably spend a little more time explaining to skeptical and scared Americans why the mechanisms that we have in place are probably pretty good for finding anybody who would be a threat, reminding them that so far we haven't had that problem here in America, even though the French and Belgians have, and then try to explain what else they're looking to do to risks- to reduce the risks even further, and then maybe the innately charitable and generous spirit of Americans can really come through and we can consider taking in even more refugees, which is what I would prefer. But I think we do need to explain to people, here are the vetting procedures and they're pretty good, I think there's an hour or two or three of interviews, you know, of any given would be refugee entrance to the United States. We obviously do every kind of background screening we can from whatever databases we might have on people, although those

are often lacking for some of the individuals. You know, maybe we need to think harder about how to track some of their communications once they're in the United States. I think some of the law and order concerns are legitimate.

So I'm ninety-nine percent on the side of Obama and Clinton but Trump's not making up the – even though he's exaggerating – the dangers, in some ways, and implying that so much of our violence in the United States is either from immigrants or Mexicans or Muslims. He's not totally inventing the concern and we should speak to it directly. Just let me add one last quick footnote on immigrants and crime. The statistics that I've seen show that first-generation immigrants from Latin America, for example, commit crime a lot less than the average in the United States. In other words, these people are more law-abiding than the average American who is already here from a longer historical and family background.

So when Trump begins his convention speech by talking about a terrible case of an immigrant who committed a murder, you know, I think that's pretty bad, it's pretty poor because it's trying to create a sense of fear that actually isn't really consistent with the facts of the situation and if he had particular proposals for law and order, that's fine. But if he's just trying to create a phobia of foreigners in regard, for example, to Mexican immigrants in particular, that's not backed up by information or the data and I think, therefore to me, that gets into an almost dangerous form of politicking even if some of his concerns like how do we make sure Syrian refugees are not ISIS operatives, you know, do have enough validity that we should be at least talking about them and explaining to Americans why that concern is being already well addressed.

DEWS: Alright, time here to take a quick break and find out what's happening in the election with senior fellow John Hudak. He's traveling but still sent me his thoughts.

HUDAK: This week, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton faced off in the first of three presidential debates in the lead up to election day. The debate was hosted by Hofstra University and NBC News's Lester Holt moderated, covering a variety of topics foreign, domestic, and personal. The debate started with Hillary Clinton distinguishing her own upbringing while slamming Donald Trump's privilege and business practices in what was the sounding bell to a very contentious debate. C

Clinton's performance was dominant doing what none of the other 16 Republican presidential candidates was able to do during the primaries; minimizing Donald Trump and outperforming him in dramatic fashion. Clinton did three things that allowed her to finish the debate with a commanding victory. First she showed she did her homework; she had detailed incoherent answers to policy questions, was prepared to deal with attacks on her own character, and was ready with her own set of attacks demonstrating a thorough knowledge of her opponents record and weaknesses. In fact, her one-liners attacking Trump were oddly Trumpian being sharp, biting, and brutal, something Trump did masterfully throughout the primary. Moreover, her answers to a question about her email and servers scandal, though imperfect, was the most straightforward and sound answer she has given on that question during the entirety of the campaign trail over the past two years. Second, Clinton consistently baited Donald Trump with criticisms and lines hoping that he would not only be unable to resist but that he would lash out and lose his cool. That strategy was a successful one.

Trump kept his composure for the first 10 or 15 minutes of the debate, but eventually he lost his cool and began a downward spiral that would continue through the last question of the debate. Finally, Clinton maintained her own composure in the face of tough attacks, a near constant back-and-forth with her opponent, and frequent interruptions and shouting down from Donald Trump. Rather than trying to react to Trump's behavior, she let the American voter react, judge, and make up their own minds. It's unlikely that the debate changed many minds; Trump voters will have left the debate still voting for him, Clinton voters will still root for her, yet among the narrow set of undecideds, Clinton may have laid the groundwork for bringing them into her corner. More importantly, Clinton's performance and perhaps reactions to Trump's behavior during the debate may motivate women, individuals of color, and millennials to come to the polls rather than stay home. That turn-out, not changing of minds, may be the bigger impact of these debates. I'm John Hudak and that's what's happening on the campaign trail.

DEWS: Thanks John for that. I'll check back with you again in the coming weeks. And now back to my interview with Michael O'Hanlon. Let's shift to a third issue and that's trade. Now, I've talked on this podcast to scholars about trade, kind of from the economic point of view, the trans-pacific partnership, is free trade a good idea. I also want to ask you about how trade relates to alliances and security concerns; I'm thinking also in terms of, you know, the role of the United States military, the US Navy, and securing sea lanes of Trade and the Indonesia or the Straits of Hormuz. Can you talk about how you see trade kind of playing out in the campaigns.

O'HANLON: Yeah, as you know the so-called rebalance to the Asia Pacific, which President Obama articulated along with Secretary Clinton back in 2011 in particular and that has tried to keep ever since. That's a policy that he didn't want to lead with military tools to highlight or to implement. He wanted the military part of the rebalance to be important but not the lead element. He didn't want to seem like he was militarizing foreign policy or trying to contain China or otherwise inject, you know, tension and danger into the region. He wanted the military piece to be a modest response to China's growth and North Korea's real dangers, but he wanted something else to be the signature element of the rebalance and that was of course the trans-pacific partnership, which now looks like it's very unlikely to pass any time soon and anything resembling its current form. Whether even a lame duck session this year or certainly a future president, it looks pretty implausible to me or pretty unlikely.

So there's two ways to think about that. One is, okay, what does that do to the rebalance strategy and I think it does seriously damage the degree to which President Obama could say that the rebalance was his signature foreign policy accomplishment. But, you know, that's a particular prism through which to view the issue. It's sort of how President Obama wants to be remembered and any president was about to leave always has that question but it may not be as important to the rest of us as it is to him and so if the worst that happens out of TPP dying on the vine is that Obama doesn't get to claim that he accomplished the rebalance the way he had envisioned, that may not be definitive as a loss for the United States, but then there's the broader question, okay where is trade headed as an instrument of American foreign policy and globalization,

and here I think we know from this election that the American people are wondering if the cost of trade exceed the benefits; a lot of people who are out of work feel that way.

It may be automation and changing manufacturing methods that have accounted for more of the job losses than trade, but if trade contributes to the problem than a displaced factory worker in Ohio has a legitimate question to ask about trade even if he or she is getting cheaper goods at the local Walmart because China's now manufacturing some of the stuff more efficiently or economically than we could, it may not be a good balance for that particular displaced worker, may be okay for a lot of us living in the eastern cities you know because we still have jobs and our incomes haven't necessarily declined as a result of globalization but for the manufacturing worker, it's a fair question and I think that even if, as I hope, Hillary defeats Trump, you know, shame on all of us if we don't see this as the central lesson that all of us need to think about coming out of the selection. What explains the Trump and Sanders phenomena and to what extent is the sort of dying middle-class stream in America a fundamental reality politically that has to be much more seriously addressed than we've managed to so far. And in that regard, I do think American internationalism is at risk, not just TPP and rebalance and specific things like that, but the broader notion of linking the world together in a community of countries, hopefully most of them democracies, that trade and invest with each other, and break down barriers and build bridges. I think trade's a key part of that and, you know, we're probably gonna have to get smarter at enforcing fair trade with China, in particular.

We're probably going to have to do better at dealing with that loss of middle-class economic opportunity in the United States even if trade is not as much the culprit as

Donald Trump wants to say, it has been a contributor. And so I think this is really answering your question with a question but still the central lesson that comes out of this election for me is that places like Brookings, and politicians, and everybody needs to think much more seriously, how do we restore the middle class dream in America because right now it is at risk politically and therefore our whole commitment to American internationalism is at risk and and so in that regard I think the stakes are very high.

DEWS: Well Mike, let's switch gears here a little bit. Let's look ahead, January twentieth, 2017, either we'll be saying President Donald Trump or we'll be saying President Hillary Clinton and they're going to face a set of issues domestically and internationally that haven't been talked about in the in the campaigns yet. David Wessel talked about the domestic side; what do you think are some of the maybe two or three of the foreign policy, national security issues that President Clinton or President Trump will have to deal with come January 2017.

O'HANLON: Let me begin just as a segue by picking up on the issue we already talked about, which is the fight against ISIS and I think the hardest part of that is going to be figuring out a new Syria policy. You and I've already touched on some of the elements that Secretary Clinton, in particular, I think has correctly underscored. I don't think they're adequate or at least they don't chart out a detailed strategy yet. The one big missing piece and what she has said that I would add to the equation is that politically speaking, we should be willing to countenance a future Syria that is a confederation in which President Assad may actually even stay in power in one sector of the country where his fellow Alawites in particular live along the Mediterranean coast

and maybe through parts of some of the major cities and if we don't do that then I think we need to recognize that we are sort of in an almost oxymoronic policy; we want to defeat both ISIS and Assad at the same time when Russia's on the side of Assad with real power on the ground. We are trying to limit our involvement and and we want to manage this sort of we- Goldilocks problem so we completely defeat ISIS, pressure Assad enough that he abdicates but in a controlled way that allows us to create a new power sharing arrangement with new Syrian actors, which can then stabilize the country. That is an extremely tall order and presumes a degree of finesse that I don't think we possess or I don't think any country's possessed in terms of its ability to influence the politics of another.

So to me, the only realistic outcome is something that looks like Bosnia with different sectors and a peacekeeping force to uphold the deal. So all those pieces need to be put in place even if we make that the strategy or the goal or the vision, it's gonna take a while to get there so let me say that's issue number one, not necessarily the most important but just in ordering these and keeping track of them. Issue number two would be what to do about Vladimir Putin, which does overlap with the Syria question obviously but to me, part of what President Obama's gotten right as foreign policy is not to over militarize our disagreement with Putin even though Putin's behavior in Ukraine has been abysmal, Ukraine's a place that Russians care about a lot, we care about less. We should be helping the Ukrainian people have sovereign right of their own self-determination but I think we should get the idea of Ukraine someday being in NATO off the table. We should think of a different security architecture for Central Europe and along the way we should avoid over militarizing our response so unless Putin escalates,

I would not favor arming the Ukrainian military with American provided lethal arms.

Obama's with me, most of his team already would like to provide those lethal arms, a lot of other American politicians would too.

Thinking all those questions through, how do you reinvigorate the Ukraine peace process, what do you do about arming the Ukrainian military, and then what's your long-term vision for European security to hopefully deal with this problem more at the source would be another set of issues. Number three is China, China's rise and I think President Obama's again done pretty well at pushing back without escalating and the rebalance has been successful for strengthening our military posture in the Asia-Pacific a bit, which I think was appropriate.

But as China continues to rise, you know, and now has a GDP, an official market exchange value of I think more than 11 trillion dollars, easily the number-two economy in the world, we're 19 trillion so we're well ahead by that measure but they've caught up by the so-called purchasing power parity measure. They're the number one manufacturer in the world and they're still, even if their growth rate is slowing, it's still six, seven percent. China is still emerging as in some ways the second superpower and I think we're going to have to continue to deal with that across issues from trade to the South China Sea to how we mutually address the North Korea crisis and North Korea maybe deserves mention, I won't go through, you know, details but on my short list of additional topics, North Korea, which is partly derivative of China policy but also Afghanistan-Pakistan and terrorism and extremism in that part of the world, and then keeping an eye on the Iran nuclear deal to ensure its successful implementation. So

these would be sort of my top five or six issues: fighting ISIS with a particular emphasis on Syria, Russia, China/North Korea, Afghanistan/Pakistan, Iran.

DEWS: We can have podcast episodes about every single one of those and I know a lot of the papers in the election 2016 in America's future series are going to touch on, not even touch on, going to deal with these issues in great detail and again I'll remind listeners that there's so much about all of these on the Brookings website; it's quite an amazing body of work.

O'HANLON: If I can very quickly thank you for that, very quickly add upcoming papers that I expect out of this election 2016 series on those topics. I do think that will have a paper by Bob Einhorn on Iran, we will have a paper by Evans Revere on North Korea, a paper by Jeffrey Bader on China, a policy brief like these others by Steve Pifer and Fiona Hill on Ukraine, I've done one on Syria, Ken Pollack's done one on Iraq, Bobby Mackenzie is doing one on refugees, so when we go through the list of topics, I don't know yet if we'll cover Afghanistan/Pakistan but we do have a paper up at the Brookings Website separate from the election 2016 project that a bunch of former ambassadors, and generals, and some of us scholars have worked on on future paths for Afghanistan policy.

DEWS: Okay, well Mike I want to thank you for your insight and expertise today; I wish we had more time but I'll have you back on the show and talk in more detail about some of these issues.

O'HANLON: Thank You Fred.

DEWS: You can get more election analysis and commentary from Brookings experts on our website Brookings.edu/election2016 and again look for the Election

2016 and America's Future series of policy briefs and events coming up on our website and in the Brookings podcast network. Should you believe the polls? That's the question senior fellow EJ Dionne Jr. tackles in this next course, which is taken from our elections 101 video series where Brookings political experts answer common questions about the election process. You can find all of them on our website and watch EJ's entire answer. Here he is.

DIONNE: Polls, the media can't live with them and they can't live without them and neither can anybody else. The best use of polls, usually, is not to confirm what you believe or confirm the media conventional wisdom, but to challenge it. There's a problem these days because there are so many polls and you can be very confused by what you see. One of the things to be careful about is whether polls are asking people about issues they know anything about. People who are answering pollsters questions tend to be polite and they give them an answer even if it's not an answer they have talked about very much. That's something you should always look for if you really care about something is whether the same question has been asked in a different way by different pollsters because sometimes when you find that how the question is asked affects what the answers are, that probably means people haven't thought much about the question.

The other thing to keep an eye out for, always, is who makes up the sample. There are so many different approaches to polling and so many people not answering that telephone call in the middle of dinner that you have very wild variations in the nature of who gets called and you should always keep an eye out for who has the best reputation for sampling a group of people that actually look like the country and aren't

biased toward one group or another. A lot of people criticize reporters for doing too much of what's called horse race journalism during elections based on the polls. Now as Frank Deford, the great sports writer, pointed out, if you're going to use a sports metaphor, use a pennant race not a horse race because horse races are over in a minute and a half. The truth is, as many reporters have said over the years, if you're a journalist covering a campaign, the first question everybody always asks you is who's going to win so it's inevitable that journalists are going to report on the polls and tell you why someone's up and someone's down and who's gained and who's lost and so I think that what we have to do is accept a certain amount of horse race journalism but put it—call it pennant race journalism and put it in its proper place and not let it to dominate all campaign coverage, which it sometimes has a tendency to do.

DEWS: Remember to visit our website to watch all of our elections 101 video series, which includes topics like swing states, the ground game, and congressional races. Finally today, the debut of our new feature “ask-an-expert”. I went outside with the team and asked people what questions they would pose to experts at a leading public policy organization; take a listen. Hi, what's your name and where are you from?

BRENNAN: Hi my name's Brennan and I'm from New York.

DEWS: Okay, New York. If you could ask one of the top public policy experts in the nation a question about anything, what would you ask?

BRENNAN: I would ask whether accepting refugees would be good or bad for our economy.

DEWS: Refugees, alright I'll try to get an answer for you. Thanks.

BAHAR: Thanks Brennan for this question. My name is Danny Bahar and I am a fellow at the global economy and development program here at Brookings. This is a very important and timely question and also a very difficult one to answer. The economics pros and cons of emigration and refugees in this case have been debated for decades both in academic and policy circles. The relevance of this topic is not surprising as about one-quarter of the US population is either first or second-generation migrants and also the ongoing global refugee crisis makes this question a particularly important one in the context of this year's presidential election. A study recently published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine titled "The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration," provides some answers to begin with. The report shows that, measured over a period of 10 years or more, the impact of immigration and the wages of natives, overall, is very small. It is actually the wages of other immigrants rather than the natives that tend to be more affected by an inflow of refugees. This is because often migrants or refugees bring a different set of skills than the natives have and therefore they are not substitutes for native workers. In fact, often migrants complement the local workforce implying that refugees could have even a positive effect on the salaries of the local population. This would especially be the case, the report suggests, the more high-skilled the immigrants are.

We also have to remember that refugees not only work, they also consume housing, food, clothing as all of us do and therefore this consumption also boosts the local economy and might encourage more jobs, more competition, and with it, lower prices for all consumers both natives and immigrants alike. There's also a question on whether the fiscal burden of receiving refugees is too high. Well there are some public

goods that refugees would consume and are typically subsidized by local governments such as health, education, other public goods such as national defense, for instance, can be provided at almost no additional cost. But this actually also an intergenerational question. The story I referred to before also estimates that the net cost to state and local budgets of first-generation migrants is on average about 1,600 dollars each. This is not a small number, however, second and third-generation migrants create a net-positive fiscal contribution of about, on average, seventeen-hundred and thirteen-hundred dollars each respectively.

Finally, there is another important factor that goes beyond numbers and in my view it is one of the most important ones. Refugees, as all other migrants, are much more likely to initiate new business ventures and become entrepreneurs. Bill Care from Harvard Business School and his co-author have shown that migrants actually account for twenty-six percent of all entrepreneurs in the nation and about thirty-six percent of new firms have at least one immigrant in their leadership team. Migrants play an important role in lowering transaction costs and easing trade and foreign investment between their sending and receiving countries. We all know that trade and foreign investment are typically strongly associated with higher economic growth.

Refugees also play a role in doing something that can only be done through human interaction, which is transferring know-how and knowledge across borders. Together with my co-author, Hilda Rapaport from Paris School of Economics, I found that migrants, by bringing productive know-how from their home countries, are an important determinant of the emergence of new export sectors in the countries that receive them. One additional aspect in this context is the importance of immigrants in

the development process of their sending countries. For example, many migrants tend to return to their home countries after spending a few years abroad. Rashtra Hodri, also from Harvard Business School, has shown that in the context of India, for example, return migrants file higher number of patents compared to local employees and returnees emerge as the most important group of innovators when they are reabsorbed in their labor markets back home. Given that the United States cares so much and very deeply about the developing world is a very important factor to take into account as by receiving refugees, the U.S. is providing assistance to developing nations in a very effective way.

So Brennan, all-in-all this implies that accepting refugees into the country is not only a moral choice but also an economic one. The impact of refugees in the economy can be very positive if provided the right business environment. It is not a coincidence that countries that have historically engaged in aggressive policies to accept immigrants and nowadays refugees such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are actually very strong and robust economies.

DEWS: If you ask an expert a question, we'll get an expert answer so thanks Dany and thank you Brennan. I'll be sending you a Brookings coffee mug. Hey listeners, you can send your own questions to our email address bcp@brookings.edu. If you attach an audio file, I'll play it on the air or maybe I'll meet you outside on the street. And that does it for this edition of the Brookings Cafeteria brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network. My thanks to audio engineer and producer Gaston Reboredo, with assistance from Mark Hoelscher. Vanessa Sauter is the producer, Bill Finan does the book interviews and design and web support comes from Jessica Pavone, Erica

Abalahin, and Rebecca Visor. And thanks to David Nassar and Richard Fawal for their support. You can subscribe to the Brookings Cafeteria on iTunes and listen to it in all the usual places. Until next time; I'm Fred Dews.