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BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

"What America's slow-growing population means for immigration, the Electoral College, and more"

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P R O C E E D I N G S

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria. The Podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. My guest today is Bill Frey, a senior fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Program here at Brookings and one of the nation's leading experts on U.S. population demographics. He's here today to talk about his new analysis of Census Bureau data on America's population dynamics and their meaning for immigration, the electoral college and future presidential elections and the nation's future.

Also, on today's show Senior Fellow Molly Reynolds talks about what's happening in Congress as it returns this week. Impeachment is at the fore but the trade deal and conflict with Iran are also on the agenda.

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And now on with the interview. Bill welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria and Happy New Year.

FREY: Happy New Year to you Fred.

DEWS: Well, let's talk about your report: “The 2010's may have seen the slowest population growth in US history Census data show,” it's on the Brookings' website, Brookings.edu, and you open the report with these words. “The 2020's are beginning on the heels of a decade that saw considerable demographic stagnation,

highlighting important implications for immigration, congressional apportionment and the country's future." First, what do you mean by demographic stagnation?

FREY: Well, in simple terms we're growing very slowly in the last year for which we have census numbers up through the middle of 2019. The nation grew at less than a half a percent. That's the slowest rate of growth we've had since 1918, over a hundred years, and that includes the great depression and ups and downs of the economy and all that sort of thing. On top of that, I did a projection from 2010, the last census until 2020, April 2020 a couple of months from now which will be the next census and if you do that we have grown the slowest of any decade since they started taking the census which was back in 1790, 7.1 percent over the course of the whole 10 years. In perspective in the 1990's we grew almost twice that rate. Back then we had a lot of immigration and the millennials were coming into their fore and everything else.

So, we've kind of shut down, I think this is a transition to a longer-term slow growth in the United States. So, this is the stagnation I'm talking about. There's an aging component to it, which we can talk about in the sense that it's the older population that's growing much more rapidly than the younger population and the baby boomers moving into those older ages.

DEWS: Well, I want listeners to go look at the chart in your report on that decade by decade growth rates and it's really astonishing to see. And I for one was unaware that the highest periods as a percentage of the US population and growth were actually in the mid-19th century ,although we can think about the end of the

19th century also as high growth rates but then just seeing the 2010 to 20 bar is 7.1 percent is the lowest ever, even lower than 1930 to 1940 is just really kind of extraordinary. So, listeners should go and see this chart.

FREY: And it really popped out at me when I started doing the numbers but a lot has to do with what we've done in this very last year which is extraordinarily low rate of growth.

DEWS: Well, let's talk about then the factors for the declining growth. You mentioned some of the aging population, changes in immigration. Can you talk through some of what those factors are?

FREY: Sure, I mean from a demographic perspective the way population changes is through fertility and mortality and migration. Those are the main three. There are no others and what we've had is kind of a confluence of exceptionally low births, an increase in deaths and an exceptionally low immigration over this last year for which we have numbers.

Now, the low births and the increased deaths are something we're going to have to deal with for a while. It has to do with an aging population because as the population gets older there are proportionally fewer women in their child-bearing years. So, even though they may have a little of an up-tick in their fertility within those years, there's few of those women. So, compositionally, they were going to have fewer births going forward and of course, as the population ages there are more people in those older age groups and we're going to have more deaths going forward. So, that's something we can look at down the road. In this last year, both of those,

especially the fertility part was exceptionally low and I chalk it up a little bit to the continued postponement of births among millennials.

The millennials have gotten a slow start in terms of getting jobs, buying houses, getting married and all of that and some of that is a decline in a fertility as well. There's a decline in fertility among people in their 20's and early 30's and it's only in the late 30's that fertility is going up. That maybe a longer-term trend but I think it's accentuated a little bit by this millennial population. So, even though we're going to have a longer-term trend of sort of low fertility, it might tick down a little bit more in this last year.

The bigger wild card in all of this which is harder to predict for the future is immigration. In this last year we had about 595,000 immigrants to the United States. Now, normally a healthy immigration going over the last 20 or 30 years is somewhere between 800,000 and a million. Usually, I often just say a million is what we think of as healthy immigration to the US and three years ago, we did have more than a million people coming in to the US net. That's a net coming in minus the people leaving. So, it's gone down considerably in the last year. And I think part of this is a little bit of a fluke, we do have bigger restrictions on immigration right now. The current administration is not a big fan of a lot of immigrants in terms of curtailing refugees to the US and other sorts of measures that have been going on and there may be a little bit of fear for people who would come to the US and maybe not doing it as quickly. But if you look at the long-term trend in immigration, this is really a blip. So, this is more subject to public policy as well as the economic

situation in the United States but my guess is that, as I say, the longer-term trend continued low fertility, continued increase in deaths, the wildcard is immigration.

DEWS: Okay. Well, I want to come back to some of the longer-term effects of this decline in population growth but let's stick for a minute on some of the other characteristics of the decline in growth that you see around the country. For example, you observe regional variations in both growth and stagnation in decline around the country. Can you talk about some of those regional variations?

FREY: Sure. I mean even though we have a projected growth of about 7.1 percent of our population between 2010 and 2020, I projected different rates for different states and they're actually seven states where more than double of the national growth is going on in those states and many of them are on in the west and many of them are in the mountain west. So, if you look at those seven states they're made up of Utah, Texas which isn't in the mountain west but Idaho, Nevada, Colorado and Arizona and then Florida is one of the others. So, five of those seven states are in the mountain west, two of them are in very fast growing southern states and so that's the one extreme but the other extreme I project over this decade based on the recent numbers, they're going to be four states actually losing population and those are West Virginia, Illinois, Connecticut and Vermont. So, yeah, there is a shifting around within the United States and they're not fast growth rates in a relatively small state. Some of those mountain west states aren't as big as New York or California or someplace like that. It's easier to get that kind of rapid growth rate but there is still this shifting around and you could say from the long-term shift from

the snow-belt to the sun-belt but what's interesting is not just from the northeast to Midwest to the south and west but within the west there is this movement inward to these mountain west states.

And some of that has to do with an out-migration from California. California has grown in this last year at a very, very low rate even from the beginning of the decade. And what's happened is as the economy has gotten better in the rest of the country, the very high cost of living in California, especially in coastal California has prompted more people to move out of this state and the states like Arizona, Nevada and Colorado and so forth. You may remember that during the great recession in the last part of the previous decade, not only were jobs difficult to get but also housing was difficult to get. And to put the brakes on very fast housing growth in Nevada and Arizona and some of those western states. So, the out-migration from California wasn't as big during that great recession and for the first part of this last decade but now that the economy is getting better again, California is starting to lose people. And you could look at it in other parts of the country too.

The state of New York has shown an increase in that out-migration, again, as the economy has picked up people are going to other southern states or to other parts of the country. And, in fact, for the last four years the state of New York actually has a loss in their overall population. Not just an out-migration but their overall population loss is a result of this. So, as the economy is picking up, people are moving to these kinds of younger states or for the places where there's more booming economies going on and part of that are millennials as they're moving into

their high migration years.

DEWS: You also mentioned two other states that have lost population, Illinois and West Virginia. For example, they're very different states. So, what kind of factors are causing the decline in population in states like those?

FREY: Yeah, well West Virginia of course has not been growing very much in a long time. Some of it has to do with the changing economy in West Virginia. Juxtaposed against states that are quite nearby that are doing well. So, young people that are growing up in a state like West Virginia are finding it more attractive to move to Virginia or to Georgia or to some place on the coasts. Not as much of attraction for moving there.

Illinois is kind of interesting because for a while, even though Illinois had an out-migration of people to other parts of the country, they've been able to recoup that from immigration from abroad. I mean lots of times we think of big immigration states like being California or Florida or Texas or New York but Illinois is one of those too. And so, over the years, it's been able to recoup that out-migration and not so much this last decade. So, there is a bigger domestic out-migration from Illinois. Some of it is a cost of living thing. Some of it is from the greater Chicago area. There's also big black migration out of Illinois as well as the Chicago metropolitan area. They're not in these statistics but other statistics show that. And so, you think of Chicago as a big vibrant metropolitan area and a labor market and it is but over this course of the last several years, I think it's something to do with the combination of the cost of living and the opportunities that are opening up elsewhere. But it has

more potential, I think, than West Virginia going forward.

DEWS: Well, let's turn to the census now because we're talking about population loss and gain in various states and as I hope people know, the census is the basis for congressional apportionment in the House of Representatives every 10 years. So, can you talk about what effect on the distribution of the 435 members of the House of Representatives will probably look like after the 2020 census and given this shift in population across the country?

FREY: What is the case is it's in the Constitution of the US, the reason we take this census. It is to do congressional reapportionment. Reapportionment across the House of the Representatives. Typically, states that are growing a lot after a 10-year period are more prone to gain additional seats in their House contingent, ones that are losing a lot and might lose one but it's not exactly that way because some of it's a little bit of catch-up. Some states have only few representatives to begin with, takes a lot for them to add that extra seat and so forth. So, it's not quite as intuitive as you might think. But if you look at the results of this, the state of Texas is going to gain according to my projections, three seats. The state of Florida is going to gain two seats and then all the other states that will change will only gain or lose one seat. Other gainers will include Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Oregon and North Carolina.

If you look at the losers, what's interesting as is I project from these numbers that the census will show that California will lose one of its seats. And California is the biggest delegation in the country. It's got 53 congressional seats right now, will wind up being with only 52. Still pretty big but it's the first time in its history that

California will have lost a Congressional seat. I mean, you've always thought of California as being a state where people were moving to, where's it's this kind of prosperous place and it's still a very big population and a big congressional delegation but because of this very slow population growth and out-migration over this last decade, I predict California will lose a seat. Other states that would lose a seat would be Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Rhode Island and in the South, Alabama and West Virginia. Now, if you look at these states you're going to say, well what does that mean for politics.

DEWS: The electoral college to be more specific...

FREY: The electoral college...

DEWS: ...that's the big thing.

FREY: Yes, I mean the congressional seats by themselves are important. It tells you within each state how many congress persons they're going to have there and there will be re-districting within there, which is another aspect of the census, those districts get redrawn in the base of census results and some of those seats will be Republican and some of those seats will be Democrat but when it comes to the electoral college which is also based on the number of people in the house of representatives in each state then that's a big deal because if some states who are largely red states or Republican states get a couple of extra seats that can mean a lot in a close presidential election.

Now, if you look at these states that I just rolled off here, you would say well, the states had voted Republican in the 2016 presidential election for President Trump

are gaining an advantage. You think of almost all of the ones that are gaining seats except for Colorado and Oregon, you're going to find a gain for Republicans, especially Texas and Florida and places like that and then if you look at the other side of the coin, you know, about half of those states that are losing seats voted for President Trump, the other five voted Democratic for Hillary Clinton, largely because Michigan and Ohio and Pennsylvania flipped to be voting Republican that time but overall there's a net gain for Republicans if you're thinking that people will vote the same way in those same states going forward in presidential elections. But that may not be the case, if you think of Texas, it's growing very rapidly but a lot of Texas' growth comes from Latinos, comes from African Americans, comes from people moving from Blue States like California. Now, those people might be voting Democrat, probably will be voting Democrat in future presidential elections. So, that may change Texas around. So, even though they may be getting more seats and had voted Republican in 2016, everybody's waiting for Texas to turn into a blue state. That could certainly occur in the next decade and that would give Democrats a big advantage, similarly in Florida, similarly in Arizona and maybe in North Carolina. Those are states that could flip to be Democratic. So, the Democrats could come out better as a result of this population shift as they do better in the Sunbelt with the kinds of populations in the electorate that are moving there.

DEWS: The US Census is conducted in 2020 but the results won't be available for the 2020 election. Right? We'll still be using the same Electoral College distribution in the November election this year.

FREY: That's correct. These numbers are going to be used to reapportion Congress for the 2022 congressional election and then will be used in the electoral college for the 2024 presidential election. But we'll be stuck with them for another 10 years. So, they have long-term implications for politics in the United States.

DEWS: Let's stick on the census and politics for a minute because last year there was a lot of politics around a question about citizenship that the Trump administration wanted to include in the US Census. My recollection is that the court process meant that the question would not be included, so, can you talk about where that stands now and what the implications are going forward for certain groups still being undercounted who might think that the census is asking them about their citizenship.

FREY: Right, well just to get to the bottom line there will not be a citizenship question on the 2020 census but the big hullabaloo about it was that the administration fought strongly to put one on there and they made the argument that they needed to have this citizenship question to be able to enforce aspects of the Voting Rights Act which says something about you need to know the citizen population of different rational and ethnic groups in different parts of the country. There was a big debate about that. Number one, some people pushed back and said no, we're able to do that anyway with information that's available from other census products, we don't really have to have that on the census.

But I think the bigger pushback was people felt the administration was trying to do this to drive an under-enumeration for certain groups that have large non-

citizen populations like Latinos, like Asian Americans and also that means an under-enumeration of states and communities that have large percentages of those people. The push-back was that the administration was trying to increase the political advantage of their party which don't get quite as many votes from those groups who would be under-enumerated. So, all of this was taken up by lower courts, many states, states' attorneys general pushed back against this form the basis of lawsuits with lots of other advocates and so forth against the administration and in three federal courts, the idea of putting the citizenship question on the census was struck down. It finally went to the Supreme Court. Their decision came at the end of June and the administration appealed those three lower courts and then Supreme Court did not uphold the appeal. They upheld the decisions of those three lower courts. They told the administration if they wanted to come back with other arguments that they would listen to them but the administration decided to buckle down and say no, we're going to keep the citizenship question off the census.

So, what that means is a lot of people breathed a sigh of relief, particularly advocates for Latino groups and the organizations and communities that would have been probably under-enumerated based on all kinds of research shows that some of these groups, even though themselves were not undocumented immigrants or just scared about having to share their information with a government that was a little bit hostile toward maybe their friends and their family and the people in their neighborhoods who might have those information sent to law enforcement for possible deportation. There's just a lot of fear, I think, that was engendered in those

communities. So, there was a sigh of relief that that's not going to happen.

Now of course the census is going to be taken in April in three weeks, and January 21st that will be the first person enumerated in the census in Alaska because the part of Alaska that's going to it is a remote area. Usually, there's a photo-op with the census director and a dog sled there, handing the census form to somebody. I don't know if we're going to do that this time but it's the official beginning of the 2020 census. In March people are going to get forms mailed to them about 80 percent of the country are going to get forms that just tell them to go onto the computer, give them a password and an ID and go and fill out their census there. There'll only be 10 questions, not including the citizenship question. The question is just like your age and your sex, your race, your Hispanic status, your relationship to the head of household and whether you lived in an owned or rented dwelling. It's a very simple form to fill out. It shouldn't take very long but there's this process that they will send these forms out, they'll send several follow-ups for people who may not have done this. For about 20 percent of the population, they will get an actual census form to fill out and write and mail in. This is the first time the census in a very big way is using the internet as a way for response. So, they, in advance, figured out which census tracks and which parts of the country people don't have easy access to the internet and they are going to get the form to fill out. But they'll be lots of follow-up to all of this and then when that doesn't work, if they find there's a certain percentage of the population who doesn't fill this out, they're going to send people out to actually do door-to-door post-censual NRFU, non-response follow-up

to come after the census. And that's a big deal and it's expensive.

So, it's much better for people to fill out the census the first time rather than be hassled and have people come to do the door. It's a very simple thing to do and it's very important. I can't stress this enough that the census for every community in the United States helps them not only in terms of their political representation that we talked about for reapportionment of Congress and re-districting within the Congressional but also the fact that about 1.5 trillion dollars of federal funds get redistributed on the basis of census results to states and localities within states. So, if you want to get your fair share of that money, if you're a mayor, you want to get your fair share of that money, or you're living in a town and you want to make sure your schools and your hospitals and all of that are getting a fair share of that money, it behooves you to fill out the census. Now getting back to your question, a long way around of getting back to your question...

DEWS: Sure.

FREY: ...is that what happens to these people who are afraid to fill out the census if there was a citizenship question on it. I think there still is the idea that there is a fear among those groups to have any interaction with the government in terms of giving information out. Some surveys have shown this even by the Census Bureau itself, that about 25 percent of the population is fearful that the Census Bureau will exchange that information with other government agencies for law enforcement and other sorts of purposes, which by the way, they're not allowed to do by law but sometimes it's hard to convince people of that. So, as a result, there are many, many

local government non-profit philanthropic private groups in partnership with the Census Bureau itself that are out there trying to persuade folks it's okay to fill out the census. Now, I am very hopeful that they will do that but I think there's still a chance depending on the kind of signals that come out from the Federal government or the president's office or anything like that, that there may be a little bit of fear in responding to those census items. But the Census Bureau itself, the professionals that work there are very interested in having a very complete census and they're going to do everything they can to fill it out. People listening to this, please fill out your census form. It's best for you, it's best for your community. It's best for us who do research on the census.

DEWS: Well, I endorse that view and just personally speaking, I'm always excited about the census to participate in the civic activity that's been going on in our country since 1790 and also as a family historian / genealogist I love looking at the old census return. So, I imagine in, you know, decades hence maybe somebody will find my name in the census and say hey, I was related to that guy. Well, Bill, let's try to wrap it up this way, I quoted the first part of this report that's on our website where you talked about the implications for immigration which we talked about, the implications for congressional apportionment which we talked about and also implications for the country's future generally. So, what are the general implications that you see for the country's future?

FREY: Yeah, I think the results of the census data that came out and the results that we'll see from the 2020 census will show underlying the fact that we're a

stagnating population, the United States. We're not stagnating as much as Japan or Eastern Europe or places like that because we do have some growth. I think Japan actually lost population last year and many of those countries are actually showing declines in their labor force age population. We're not at that situation. And one of the reasons we're not in that situation is because we've had a little bit higher fertility than some of those countries but more importantly we've had immigration to the United States in fairly big numbers for the last three decades or so and that's helped to beef-up not only the size of our population but the younger part of our population. Immigrants and their children in general are younger than the rest of the population.

And the reason that's important is because the otherwise slow-growing population we have will result in an aging population. The fastest growing part of our population now is age 65 and over. It grew by 30 percent over the last 10 years and the under 65 population is growing in the range of three or four percent. Now the baby-boomers moving into that age group have a lot to do with that but what that means is we move forward, there's going to be a requirement not only to keep our country successful economically productive, it means that people need to be going into that labor force that are well-educated and just the numbers of people ought to be there so that they can go in there and then we have the responsibilities of country to make sure that we take care of them, that they are able to be productive, have the right kinds of background, the workforce training and so forth. And one of the big beneficiaries of all this will be that older population as the baby-boomers are all retirement age after the year 2030. They're going to be very dependent on this

younger population which will largely be to a significant degree immigrants, children of immigrants, grandchildren of recent waves of immigrants to the United States and if we're going to continue to grow and we're going to continue to be productive given the low fertility, given the increased number of deaths in this country, there's no other way to go about continuing our growth and our productivity than to bring being very smart about thinking about immigration to the US. We definitely are going to need to continue it. How we're going to do it and how we're going to be able to make sure these immigrants are able to have the opportunities to be successful or other ways that we have to put our heads together and decide how this is going to go. I mean, I know immigration has been kind of a controversial topic now for quite a while and especially in the last few years but I think we have to wipe all that aside and just look at these facts. This is a country that's growing slowly and we grow much more slowly or not for immigration and we're going to have to be smart about how we look at it going ahead.

DEWS: Well, Bill, I want to thank you for taking time today, your insights on these demographic issues is always fascinating.

FREY: I enjoyed it Fred. Happy new year again.

DEWS: Happy New Year to you and you can find the report by Bill Frey on our website, Brookings.edu.

And now here's senior fellow Molly Reynolds with what's happening in Congress.

REYNOLDS: I'm Molly Reynolds, a senior fellow in Governance Studies at

the Brookings Institution. Congress returned to work this week with perhaps its highest profile agenda item: the articles of impeachment approved by the house in December in a holding pattern. A Senate trial cannot begin until the House of Representatives formerly transmits those articles to the Senate and name a set of mangers to make the lower chambers case starting subsequent proceedings. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has been waiting to take these steps to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell reveals more information about the procedures his chamber will use to conduct the trial. McConnell for his part has indicated that a majority of Senators support an initial organizing resolution for the trial that resembles the one adapted for President Clinton's trial in 1999. Procedures that importantly would push a decision on what if any witnesses to hear from until after the trial is underway.

With several Democratic Senators indicating that they are ready to receive the article to begin a trial, a long-continued delay seems unlikely. But we have uncertainty about exactly what will transpire on the senate floor, however, remains to be resolved in the coming weeks. In the meantime, Congress finds itself confronting two other major agenda items one expected and one less so. With consideration by the Senate finance committee the senate began action this week on a new trade agreement with Mexico and Canada that the House approved last month.

The exact timing of final Senate action remains unclear, in part because consideration may get pushed by an impeachment trial but also because other Senate Committees will have the opportunity to review the pact before it goes to the Senate

floor. The deal's bipartisan support in the House and among finance committee senators however bodes well for its chances but it does ultimately come up for a vote.

The second major issue with which Congress finds itself confronted alongside impeachment is a less expected one: a potential military conflict with Iran. After a US drone strike killed Iranian military leader Qassim Soleimani last week, members of both the House and Senate have introduced measures that, at least, symbolically would push back against the president's ability to order military operations against Iran. The House, where Democrats hold the majority and thus control over what comes to the floor, is planning to vote on a measure that would direct President Trump to end the current military engagement with Iran unless Congress explicitly authorizes that the efforts continue. The form the resolution takes means that even if it is also approved by the Senate it would not necessarily compel a change in strategy but it would send a clear message about where House members stand on the question. In the Senate meanwhile, Senator Tim Kaine has introduced a slightly different measure co-sponsored by 29 of his Democratic colleagues. Importantly, it could be eligible for special procedures that will allow debate on it to begin if a simple majority of Senators voted to do so rather than the super-majority required for many items in the Senate. These same rules will also make it more difficult for Senate Majority Leader McConnel to prevent such a vote from happening. Last year the House set a bi-partisan basis approved language to limit President's Trump's ability to use force against Iran. That provision did not

ultimately become law, a similar language received only 51 votes in the Senate. Not enough to clear the 60 votes threshold necessary to end debate. Despite this recent support for restraining the precedent in this area, a hypothetical restriction on potential future activity as last year's vote was is likely to be seen as different politically than the attempt to limit the president's ability to respond to an ongoing situation on the ground.

Even the House's version authored by Democrats steers clear of directly criticizing the conduct of President Trump or his administration. While some defections from party line are possible, Republican Senators Mike Lee of Utah and Rand Paul of Kentucky, for example, have come out in support of the Senate measure, the votes are, like many high-profile measures in the contemporary Congress, likely to be largely party-line affairs. Indeed, research suggests that even during the cold war which is often held up as a more bipartisan period, partisanship played a role in foreign policy-making Congress. When one party holds the White House, but the other party has a strong and sizeable coalition in Congress legislators have been more successful at reining in the president's behavior abroad.

One of the most often used figures of speech on Capitol Hill is that Congress is capable of walking and chewing gum at the same time. That doesn't always mean that legislators are trying to balance items as high profile as impeachment, a major trade deal and the engagement of US forces abroad but sometimes like now, that is what's happening in Congress.

DEWS: The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the product of an amazing team

of colleagues starting with audio engineer Gaston Reboredo and producer Chris McKenna. Bill Finan director of the Brookings Institution Press does the book interviews and Lisette Baylor and Eric Abalahin provide design and web support. Finally, my thanks to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horne for their guidance and support.

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