

DEFINE
AMERICAN

Reimagining Immigration News

North Carolina's Case for the Nation

Journalism
Partnerships 2022



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Why North Carolina and Why Now?



More than ever, news media play a crucial role in providing the nation with strong, accurate, and culturally sensitive coverage of immigration.

With misinformation and xenophobia reaching heightened levels, journalists are examining the issue and grappling with how best to accomplish this mission. The news ecosystem of North Carolina, even though it is more than a thousand miles from the southern border, is a bellwether for the nation. Like other states in the South, its ethnically diverse population is increasing, along with its foreign-born residents. The immigrant population nearly doubled in the past twenty years. It is a political swing state with vocal conservative perspectives.

North Carolina also reflects wider trends in the journalism industry: a collapse of legacy news, reliance on early-career reporters to

cover underrepresented communities, and the rise in nonprofit niche outlets. How frequently and how accurately journalists cover these burgeoning immigrant communities can affect the future political landscape. We, at Define American, found that all of these factors made North Carolina a fitting case study for the country, to be used by news leaders throughout the nation. The findings of this report are the culmination of a one-year research project that included a content analysis of immigrant representation in 22 North Carolina print/digital, TV, and radio news outlets, interviews with more than 50 local stakeholders, and an audience survey of 1,160 North Carolina news consumers.

Key Findings



*WSOC TV headquarters
in Charlotte, NC.*

Newsrooms & Coverage

→ Immigration is usually considered an expendable beat, assigned to early career reporters, if at all.

These reporters have little training in a complex topic, nor do they have editors who are well-versed in immigration laws and history.

→ Immigration coverage tends to focus on the Latinx population because it is the largest immigrant community in the state (50.2%).

But that ignores the demographic reality. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) make up a full 28.5% of the immigrant community, yet fewer than 5% of immigration stories refer to this group.

→ Immigration reporting often reinforces stereotypes.

Among the negative connotations, the most prevalent was the representation of immigrants as either criminals or victims of crime.

→ Legacy newsrooms are missing a significant business opportunity in not covering the diverse communities around them.

Stories highlighting burgeoning immigrant communities can bring in new audiences, subscriptions, and advertising.

→ Dehumanizing language in news coverage damages trust with local communities.

Reporters should discuss with editors the specific language that most accurately describes people and their legal status without alienating sources.

→ It is not feasible for nonprofit news organizations to be solely responsible for amplifying the issues of immigrant communities.

The nonprofits have small staffs and a limited reach. Meanwhile, legacy news only covers immigrant communities occasionally.

→ Collaborations between news outlets create promising new opportunities.

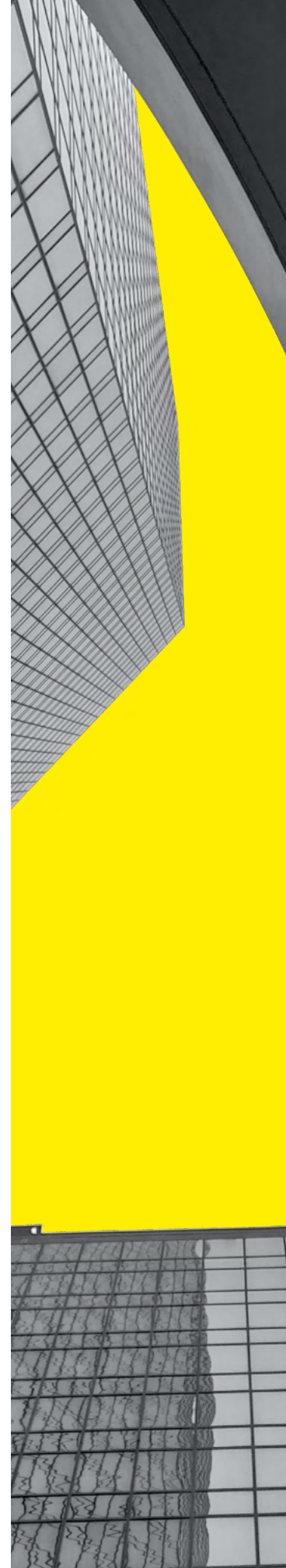
Collaborations strengthen accountability reporting and trust building with marginalized communities.

→ Community engagement can extend the impact of immigration reporting.

To be most effective, journalists should engage leaders and residents from the beginning of the project through the follow-up after publication. Newer nonprofit news outlets that are focused on service journalism are doing best in this type of engagement journalism.

→ When stories of immigrant communities are integrated into other coverage, such as sports, business, health or culture, they are more inclusive and more relatable to broader audiences.

News becomes less about policy that sets one community apart, and more about how immigrants are infusing new culture and opportunities into society.



News Audiences

→ **News consumers who say they believe they know a lot about immigration are most likely to believe stereotypical information about immigrants.**

They believed the falsehoods that immigrants coming to the U.S. are more likely to increase crime and put a burden on social services.

→ **News audiences with high respect for authority are also more likely to hold negative attitudes toward immigrants.**

Journalists need to recognize this correlation and question police accounts when they involve immigrants so as not to heighten the stereotypes of immigrants as crime victims or criminals.

→ **When news consumers believe that people are treated equally regardless of skin color, they also will likely lean toward stricter policies toward immigration.**

Journalists need to recognize that racial inequities are entangled with immigration and that this contributes to the complexity of the topic.

→ **North Carolinians who said they trust the national cable station Fox News Channel also tend to have negative attitudes toward immigrants and immigration.**

They are also among those that are most likely to believe false and stereotypical information.

Introduction

*Father and son order food at
immigrant-owned local food truck
in Charlotte, NC. August, 2022.*



Amid the tobacco fields and chicken plants of North Carolina, the bioscience research corridors, construction sites, and nail technician schools, generations of immigrant families have propelled the state's economy and culture over the last two decades.

In many areas, immigrants have revived sagging local economies and revitalized communities with new cuisines, small businesses, and sports leagues.

North Carolina is a bellwether for the nation, in terms of its demographics, politics, and journalism. Some 1,200 miles from the southern border, the state's diverse immigrant population represents 8 percent of the entire population. It is among the fastest-growing in the country — nearly doubling in the last two decades.

North Carolina's heated local politics are also symbolic of the nation's bitter polarization amid the 2022 midterm elections and the run-up to the 2024 presidential election — with a Democratic governor and a Republican-led state government, even as the plurality of the state's registered voters — 35 percent¹ — are unaffiliated by party.

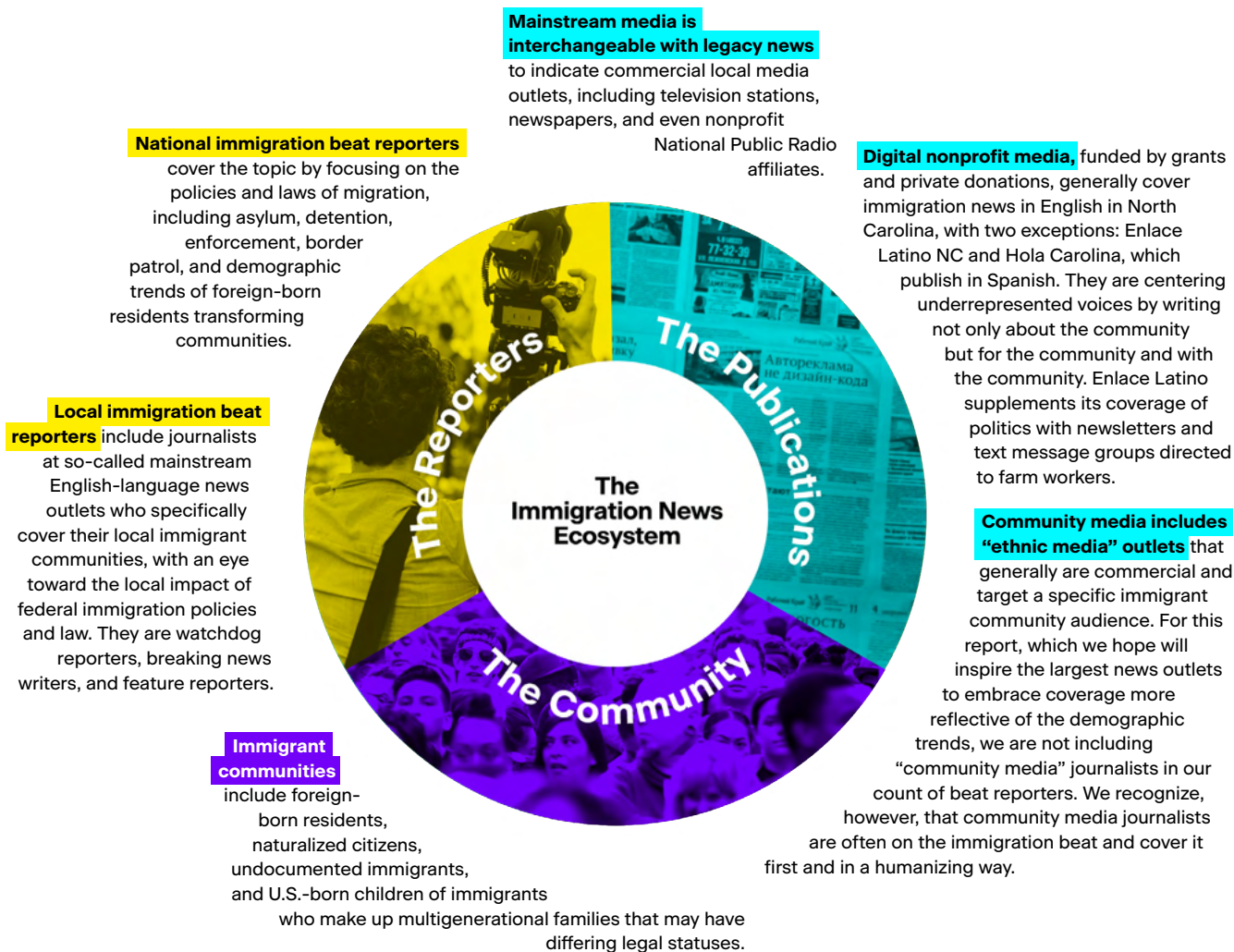
Against this backdrop, the state has one federal immigration court, which has one of

the country's highest denial rates of asylum seekers. Local police and federal immigration officers have cooperation agreements in 15 counties (known as a 287g agreement), which is the third highest in the nation behind Texas and Florida. Sheriffs' elections in North Carolina have been contentious because of this issue, showing how federal immigration policies and local communities are inextricably linked.

Too often, immigration coverage is treated as an afterthought, or an expendable luxury. It becomes necessary when tragedy affects immigrant communities; as a result, newsrooms often scramble to find diverse sources from within the community to provide context.

But because the makeup of the state's urban and rural areas is dramatically shifting, the topic and its local impact can no longer be ignored until convenient.

The Immigration News Ecosystem



A Note on Terminology

Language shifts over time, as does culture, and as an organization Define American is committed to staying in step with recommendations from the journalists of the communities referenced. We recognize the terminology is imperfect, and our intention is to be specific when possible and applicable.

Latinx is an inclusive, gender-neutral term for people of Latin American descent, and we are using it in line with cultural guidance from the [National Association of Hispanic Journalists](#).

Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) is only used in this report when referring to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Also, in alignment with the recommendations from [North Carolina Asian Americans Together](#), we refer, when applicable, to specific or regional heritages, such as South Asian or Vietnamese American.

Latinx immigrants, primarily from Mexico, have been increasingly coming to North Carolina since the late 1990s. Today, 60 percent of the Latinx population of North Carolina are U.S.-born. Overall, the Latinx population represents 10 percent of North Carolina's population of 10.4 million.

Meanwhile, the Asian-born – including those from India, Vietnam, China, and Myanmar – now represent more than a quarter of the state's immigrants. Immigrants from Asia increased by 65,000 people from 2006 to 2019. The state's public schools also reflect this growth. From 2010 to 2022, the enrollment of Asian students increased by 63 percent, and Pacific Islander students increased by 103 percent.

These demographic changes tell a story of a remarkable transformation from a Southern state historically divided by “Black” and “White” to that of a racially, economically, and globally diverse state. But North Carolina's local news outlets, on the whole, fail to tell these rich stories of their local communities, let alone weave them into coverage of everyday life.

of movement media, which centers on community voices and challenges the traditional concept of objectivity.

The challenges North Carolina media face also reflect the national reality. From state capitols to rural towns, outlets across the country rarely have the resources to dedicate a reporter to covering local immigration. Without consistent reporting on growing immigrant populations, though, local newsrooms are abdicating their responsibility to cover their region accurately and comprehensively — and are squandering a key growth opportunity.

“There's been a collapse of our newspapers,” said Paul Cuadros, a professor of journalism at University of North Carolina who in 2006 wrote the seminal book² on Latinx migration to the state. “These news deserts have been created, so that people who are working on immigration stories or working in the community – they are nowhere now. It's piecemeal reporting.”

Consider these sobering statistics: North Carolina has 158 English-language daily and

As of August 2021, only six reporters covered immigrant communities in North Carolina. By August 2022, that number dropped to three.

The state's media ecosystem reflects the significant disruption happening in journalism today: the decline of mainstream media outlets, the growth of nonprofit outlets and community media, as well as the emergence

weekly newspapers, seven Spanish-language newspapers, 16 digital-only news outlets, 55 television stations, including four Spanish-language broadcasters, and 54 English-language radio stations covering local news.



La Noticia's headquarters building. Charlotte, NC.

Yet, as of August 2021, only six reporters covered immigrant communities in North Carolina. By August 2022, that number dropped to three.

Two other independent writers report investigative pieces through the lens of immigrant communities for nonprofit outlets. Most of the beat reporters are early in their careers, without the background or support to cover the complexities of immigration.

Report for America, the nonprofit organization with a model similar to Teach for America, has provided the biggest boost in local coverage of underserved communities by partially funding these jobs. But they are mostly early career reporters on short-term contracts who leave before the contract expires. Turnover detracts from consistency.

News leaders are still figuring out how to respond to the seismic events of the last three years: from the murder of George Floyd to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting scourge of anti-Asian hate crimes, to the Capitol

insurrection and mass violence inspired by anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant extremists. One response has been to adopt Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging efforts, both in hiring and in coverage.

Reaching immigrant audiences is not only journalistically responsible – it is also good business. Immigrants are consumers who, as the demographics prove, are only becoming more essential in civic life in North Carolina.

Longtime news researchers and editors Fiona Morgan and Melanie Sill studied North Carolina's news ecosystem for the Democracy Fund⁴ in a seminal 2017 research project that found shrinking legacy newsrooms and their lack of “dedicated reporting muscle” on beats like agriculture. They found, with respect to immigrant communities, that the gaps in Spanish-language coverage were worse in rural areas; English-speaking newsrooms had a significant lack of bilingual reporters, and AAPI communities were vastly undercovered.



Diego Barahona, editor of La Noticia. Charlotte, NC.

These problems remain, even as a new cast of leaders who started nonprofit outlets attempt to address the issues. Today, it is clear: it is simply not feasible for nonprofit news outlets – with small staffs and limited reach – to be responsible for amplifying the issues of immigrant communities when legacy news only does so occasionally.

Define American, founded in 2011 by the Pulitzer Prize-winning and undocumented journalist Jose Antonio Vargas, is a nonpartisan research-led nonprofit that uses the science of storytelling to highlight the need for an accurate representation of immigrants in local and national news, as well as Entertainment, Social Media, and the Arts. Our Journalism Partnerships program advocates for responsible journalism that uses language, data, legal background, and diverse sourcing to humanize immigrants and provide context for policy reporting. Since the program launched in 2021, it has mentored young journalists, developed a toolkit for ethical reporting on immigrants, and conducted research on dehumanizing language at the border.

We see this research on North Carolina's news ecosystem as a next step in our program's evolution, one that builds on our organization's media consulting work over the last 11 years.

We conducted this research as a case study to be used by newsrooms nationwide.

Our research questions were simple, yet fundamental:

- Do news outlets produce accurate, nuanced portrayals of immigrants?
- How do stories about immigrants impact public attitudes?

To answer these questions, we worked with Media Ecosystems Analysis Group to provide a landscape analysis of the immigration content in 22 representative news outlets. Secondly, we collaborated with the University of Florida's Center for Public Interest Communications to understand how a cross-section of North Carolinians (primarily English-speaking) respond to news stories about immigrants.

Finally, we conducted interviews during the spring and summer of 2022 with more than 50 North Carolina stakeholders – including reporters, editors, producers, publishers, podcasters, advocates, immigrants, journalism professors, and funders.

Reporters and editors at the two largest legacy newspapers, The Charlotte Observer and The News & Observer, in Raleigh, declined to be interviewed because their parent company, McClatchy News, would not allow them to speak. McClatchy would not explain why. In response to nine emailed questions, the company offered a short, general comment from Chief Content Officer Kristin Roberts that began: “Our purpose is journalism that serves the community – the whole community – and we are proud of the work we have done in North Carolina and across the country.”

We conclude our research findings with recommendations for local newsrooms nationwide on how they can improve immigration coverage based on lessons in North Carolina. This research also informs Define American’s outreach to newsrooms and journalism schools as we advocate for accurate, nuanced reporting of immigrant communities across the nation.

¹North Carolina State Board of Elections. (2022, August 27). Voter Registration Statistics.

²Cuadros, P. (2007). A home on the field: How One Championship Soccer Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America

³The number of full-time reporters on the “beat” does not include community media outlets dedicated to covering a specific immigrant community.

⁴Morgan, F., & Sill, M. (December 2017). Learning from North Carolina: Exploring the news and information ecosystem. Democracy Fund.



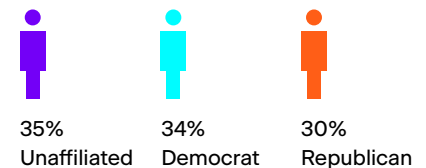


*Birds eye view of
Charlotte downtown.*

Demographic Snapshot

Define American worked with Carolina Demography to pull statistics around the growth of the immigration population of the state over the past two decades.

North Carolina is a political swing state with vocal conservative perspectives.



Of the 10.4 million North Carolinians, 833,000 are immigrants. The entire foreign-born population is roughly the size of Charlotte.

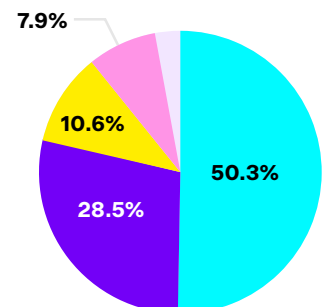


Immigrants make up 8 percent of North Carolina's population. While this percentage has been growing, it remains lower than the 13.5 percent that makes up the immigrant population in the U.S. overall.

Immigrants to North Carolina are from diverse backgrounds.

The American Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI) population grew more through immigration, increasing by approximately 65,000 people from 2010 to 2019.

Central and South America Asia Europe Africa Other



Between 2000-2020, the immigrant population in North Carolina nearly doubled and grew twice as quickly as in the nation overall.

94%

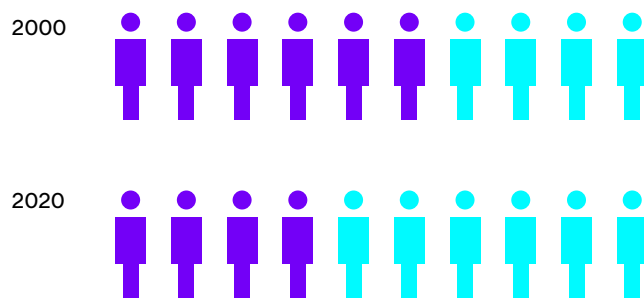
growth in North Carolina

42%

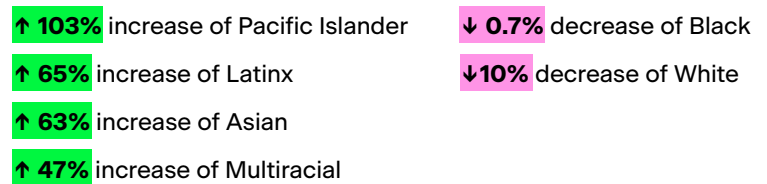
growth in the U.S.

The Latinx population is increasingly U.S.-born.

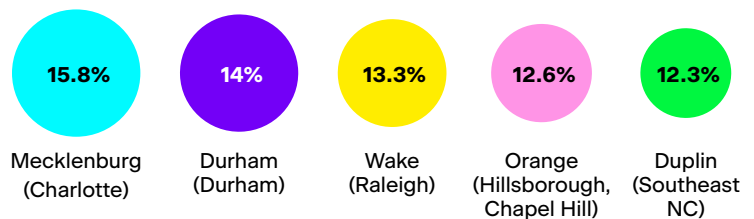
■ Immigrants
■ U.S. Born



Changes in school enrollments between 2010-2022 also reflect the swiftly changing demographics.



The counties with the largest percentage of immigrants:



The North Carolina News Ecosystem

By Liz Robbins and Sarah E. Lowe.

Original audience research conducted by Jack Barry, Ph.D., Elizabeth “Lissy” Calienes, Ann Searight Christiano, Juliana Fernandes, Ph.D., Rachel Grant, Ph.D., Annie Neimand, Ph.D., Matt Sheehan, T. Frank Waddell, Ph.D., and Kim Walsh-Childers, Ph.D. of the University of Florida’s Center for Public Interest Communications.



Sarah Mobley Smith, an editor at WFAE, coordinates coverage with news partner, La Noticia.

Immigrant Communities Growing as Coverage Shrinks

Key Takeaways

- The coverage of immigrant communities does not reflect the increasing diversity of the state, and less than a handful of reporters are assigned to the beat full-time.
- Most of those reporters are early in their careers, and on short-term contracts with Report for America. Turnover is high, adding to instability.
- The full-time reporters work primarily in urban areas. Coverage of – and for – rural immigrant communities, especially those who are the backbone of North Carolina’s food and agriculture industry, is rare.

When Lisa Sorg wrote her blockbuster investigation on a former missile factory polluting a Black and Latinx neighborhood in 2021 in central North Carolina, she wanted to ensure her Spanish-speaking sources got a print-out of the digital-only stories translated into Spanish.

Sorg’s nonprofit news organization – NC Policy Watch – agreed to pay \$1,700 to have the 7,400-word, two-part series translated. For the residents who did not have access to the internet, Sorg made 50 copies of the [series](#)⁵ that would later win multiple awards. She collated the stories with photos in a layout she designed herself and hand-delivered them with a note. It was like she was back on her bicycle paper route from the 1990s.

“That’s how important it was to me to make sure that people read this, that the people in the community who were living in the shadow of this plant had access to the information,” she said.

Sorg’s bespoke delivery method, while admirable, is not sustainable. Instead, it exposes the deficiencies in how North Carolina’s news ecosystem covers immigration and immigrant communities.

Even the best accountability journalism – most often produced by niche nonprofit news outlets in the state – is not fully equipped to inform the immigrant communities it covers. Legacy news outlets may occasionally feature immigrants – often in times of tragic breaking

news or an extraordinary achievement – but they mostly do not write for the people they cover.

Traditional news organizations are strapped for resources, and editors are often conducting triage to assign reporters to the most pressing stories. For these very realistic reasons, **news decision-makers across the state often tend to ignore the fastest-growing demographic (the AAPI population) in their coverage. Immigration coverage is an afterthought or a luxury.**

“I think it’s such a shame that we have this infrastructure in place already, this news dissemination vehicle that reaches so many people in the state, but we don’t have the content that everyone wants to read,” said Jane Elizabeth, a former managing editor of The News & Observer in Raleigh, who has been in journalism for four decades. “We’re

“Outside the small network of nonprofit outlets that do very good immigration coverage, it’s very clear that big newspapers don’t see immigrant communities as part of their community even though they live next door,” Vasquez said. “They aren’t speaking to them in their coverage at all, given how one-sided it is.”

The Observer and The News & Observer are emblematic of the industry: grappling with a lack of relevance, revenue, trust, staff, and resources. In 1995, the McClatchy media chain bought The News & Observer of Raleigh from a private owner, and in 2006, McClatchy bought The Observer from Knight Ridder. But in 2020, McClatchy declared bankruptcy, selling all of its papers around the country, including The News & Observer and The Observer, to its largest creditor, Chatham Asset Management of New Jersey.

“We’re not trying to reach these audiences. We’re going after the same old audiences that everyone did.”

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Tina Vasquez, a freelance reporter who has written for the nonprofit Southern-based outlet, Scalawag, has exposed immigrant labor abuses in North Carolina. She is outspoken about how legacy news coverage not only appeals to the same audiences but tends to reinforce stereotypes and lacks the nuance that’s needed in immigration reporting.

Both papers have cycled through editors since then. In her statement, McClatchy’s Chief Content Officer Kristin Roberts highlighted the company’s “investment in local journalism by hiring exceptional leaders.” Bill Church of The News & Observer is the paper’s first Asian American executive editor, and he also is the executive editor of its sister paper, The Herald-Sun of Durham. Rana Cash is the first Black executive editor of The Observer.

But McClatchy would not allow them to speak for this report.



Report for America Corps Members Eileen Rodriguez (WFDD-La Noticia), Laura Brache (News & Observer), and Dante Miller (WFAE) speak at a March 2022 conference at Elon University. Credit: Elon University School of Communications.

Relying on Report for America: A Solution and a Challenge

In June 2022, the Charlotte Observer published a culture series about the diverse immigrant businesses along Central Avenue, profiling owners from Ethiopia, Ghana, Vietnam, Mexico, Colombia, and Ivory Coast. The reporting was humanizing, explaining cultural traditions, showing the camaraderie of the owners, and emphasizing how Charlotte had become their home. The reporting only briefly touched on their struggles.

One video included Spanish-speaking sources with English subtitles, but the articles were not translated into Spanish or Vietnamese. At first, they were behind a paywall, but The Observer then made them and other articles accessible.

The reporter, Devna Bose, published the series right before she left The Observer for The Post and Courier in South Carolina in Summer of 2022.

Bose had been working for two years at The Observer as part of the Report for America program, which began in earnest in 2018 and now places 300 reporters in rural and urban newsrooms across the United States to cover underserved communities. But in late 2021, McClatchy, which had co-sponsored 31 corps members across 21 newspapers in the country, indicated it would be severing its relationship with the program because of a dispute with RFA's leadership.

It's clear that Report for America fills a critical gap in coverage of marginalized communities, but its long-term viability



Antennas outside WSOC tv headquarters in Charlotte, NC.

is still unknown. In North Carolina, the program has expanded from two reporters in 2019 to 12 reporters for 2022-2023 – and that’s without the two immigrant community positions lost with McClatchy’s exit.

But on the immigration beat specifically, one that particularly relies on building community trust and the understanding of a complex system, turnover has been high.

Working with Report for America is a good deal for a host news organization looking to expand its coverage and hire eager talent at a discount. After funding 50 percent of the reporter’s salary the first year and helping newsrooms fundraise for local support, RFA then pays for a third of the salary the second year. If the reporter continues, RFA pays 20 percent in the third year.

But legacy newsrooms have generally failed to use the infusion of money and multilingual talent as an incentive to make immigration coverage more permanent, said Sergio Bustos, a veteran news executive, who until the summer of 2022, was the southern regional manager for Report for America.

“RFA tried to fill that gap by allowing those reporters to stay up to three years, but it seemed not enough of a carrot for these newsrooms who don’t see immigration coverage as a priority – though it absolutely deserves more attention as a beat,” Bustos said.

He has been advocating for this since he began his career in the mid-1980s as the first Spanish-speaking reporter at his legacy newspaper in Delaware. Not enough has changed, Bustos said. He added that legacy newsrooms “tend to see the emergence of an immigrant community as something new and they’ll react by assigning reporters to do a series — as if the community were to disappear the following year.”

That’s the wrong approach, Bustos added. “Newsrooms need to cover these communities by going into them and asking questions — some difficult ones — about the issues they see as important. The ones their leaders are talking about.”

Kim Kleman, senior vice president of Report for America, said that her organization was offering free Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training to newsroom management because leaders needed to know how to make reporters “feel welcome in their newsrooms and in their communities.”

She cautioned that it was too soon to judge the response from newsrooms to create such

a permanent beat. “A good number of our corps members who cover immigration are in their second or third years of our program,” she said, speaking about the program nationally. “We’ll see at the end of this corps year and next what happens to these beats when the corps members have graduated from RFA.”⁶

In North Carolina, at least, the top two RFA reporters covering immigration have left the beat, adding to instability. Consider another challenge for any reporter: it takes time to develop sources, a luxury that news outlets do not always have. In a year, maybe two, early-career reporters must win over a community that has historically distrusted their news outlet as an interloper. And after that, they leave.

“I think it’s unfair to put journalists in that position, especially in legacy organizations,” said Lizzy Hazeltine, the director of NC Local

News Lab Fund, which supports local news ventures.

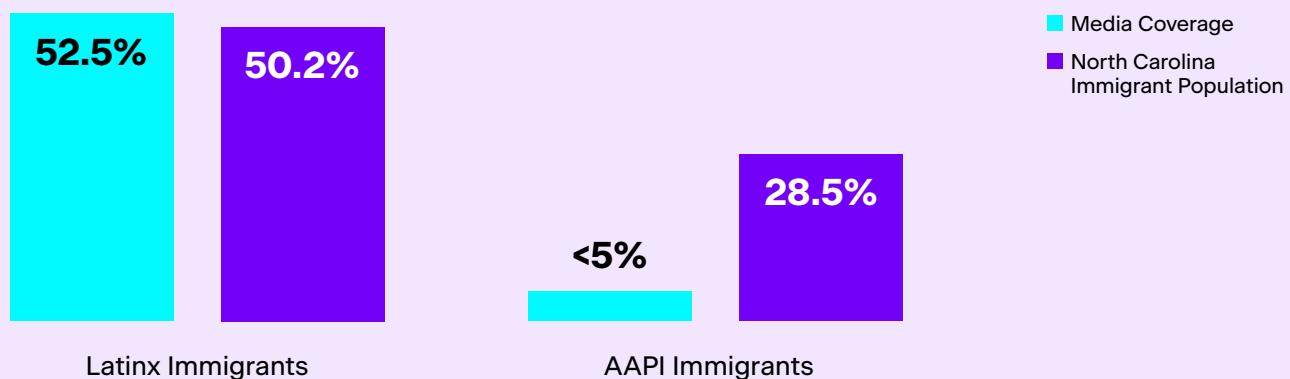
Maria Ramirez Uribe was part of Report for America, working for WFAE public radio in Charlotte and Charlotte’s leading Spanish newspaper, La Noticia. There, she was able to make inroads into the community. (See more in Models of Collaborations.)

It wasn’t easy at first. “There really wasn’t this huge sort of database or this person I could go to to get help,” Uribe said. “That was definitely a struggle, but also very rewarding to now know that all of those sources I made from the ground up. It was a little bit difficult at 24 years old to be seen as an expert on all things Latino immigration, Charlotte, et cetera.”

But Uribe was so successful that once she did make inroads, she got a new job. She now covers national immigration for PolitiFact,

Content Analysis Findings

The coverage is not equal across communities.



which is operated by the journalism nonprofit institute, Poynter.

As of fall 2022, there were only three journalists covering immigrant communities exclusively as their beat in North Carolina – all sponsored by Report for America. Two were reporters in a collaborative agreement between public radio stations and a long-standing Spanish-language newspaper. The third, a mid-career reporter, covers Statehouse politics for the digital Spanish-language nonprofit, Enlace Latino NC.

Three other reporters cover immigrant communities as part of their portfolio, including two independent reporters in the state who write occasional long-form pieces about immigration for nonprofit digital outlets.

In large national news outlets, as well as medium-sized markets near the border, the immigration beat is helmed by senior

And what happens when Report for America is no longer part of the picture?

In Nov. 2021, Columbia Journalism Review reported that McClatchy would no longer participate in the program in the 2022-2023 season. This was in response to RFA's president and co-founder, Steve Waldman, who had publicly criticized hedge fund ownership of newspapers.

The Observer still kept what had been the RFA reporting position, although broadening it to be part of its Race and Equity coverage. In Summer 2022, executive editor Cash hired D.J. Simmons, who had been a Report for America corps member in Georgia. The Observer was also chosen in August 2022 by the American Press Institute to participate in a 5-month program to engage with underserved communities, learning new strategies including how best to deliver Spanish-language content.



In a state far from the border like North Carolina...immigration is a young person's beat if it is covered at all.

reporters. Often, they have previously been foreign correspondents or have covered national politics; they have a wealth of sources and experience from covering government institutions.

But in a state far from the border like North Carolina, the opposite tends to be true: immigration is a young person's beat if it is covered at all.

The News & Observer was honoring the short-term RFA contract for Laura Brache. But, opting for security, she accepted a permanent job with the paper in August 2022, as an audience growth producer. That left the future unclear for the “diverse communities” beat in Raleigh.

Filling the rural reporting gaps, if only temporarily.

Cass Herrington threw herself into reporting on immigrant communities in Western North Carolina, but she left when the workload and stress became unbearable. She was hired in 2019 to host Morning Edition for Blue Ridge Public Radio out of the progressive city of Asheville. But Herrington also saw it as an opportunity to feature the large farmworker communities in neighboring counties, which were emblematic of immigration beyond the border.

“At the time, as [immigration] was covered on NPR, it was about Texas or California. I just wanted to show that, no no, it’s right here and it’s nothing new,” she said. “Second, third generation kids of farmworkers are starting businesses in Western Carolina.”

The Trump administration’s enforcement tactics, however, put the region on edge, with an immigration enforcement field office in the area becoming more aggressive in their arrests. Herrington felt it was her duty to humanize the most vulnerable residents. To do so, she said she ended up reporting in the afternoons, sometimes extending her working days to up to 15 hours.

When the pandemic hit in 2020, she struggled to reconcile how to inform her audiences without being extractive. She interviewed a woman for whom Spanish was a second language after her indigenous one. The woman lived in a rural area, far from community assistance groups. When seeing her refrigerator bare, Herrington returned with groceries. “I think newsrooms need to have a hard talk about doing things without exploiting people,” she said.



Laura Brache (left) speaks at a panel at Elon University.

Returning to Asheville to put together these stories felt dissonant. “It was essentially like diving headfirst into a tragedy,” Herrington recalled. “Listening to the audio for hours on end and then the next day waking up and raising money for the station.”

Herrington said that because the station was short-staffed, it could not allow her to focus solely on immigration reporting. She left in November 2021 to work at a record company in Asheville. Since then, Blue Ridge Public Radio has aired immigration-related pieces from its sister NPR networks in North Carolina, but it has no dedicated reporter covering local migrant farmworker communities. The station did not return multiple requests for comment.

Without the infrastructure to include rural community reporting permanently, the beat often lives through the passion and vision of an individual reporter.

Victoria Johnson, a 2020 graduate of the University of North Carolina’s Hussman School of Journalism and Media, was the lead writer, copy editor, and translator for *La Voz*, a Spanish-language companion to the weekly *Chatham News and Record*. She also wrote in English for the parent paper.

About an hour west of Raleigh, Chatham County has been a magnet for Mexican workers since the 1990s. By the turn of the century, immigrants from Central American countries also began arriving, living in and

around the town of Siler City and working at its chicken plant. By 2020, the census recorded the Latinx population as roughly half the population of the town of just over 8,000. And yet, Siler City never had a Spanish-language newspaper until the pandemic struck.

When Covid erupted, Bill Horner III, an award-winning editor who had purchased the local paper in 2019, applied for a four-month grant from Facebook to fund the enterprise. The goal was to cover how the hard-hit Latinx community was dealing with the pandemic – an effort of public service journalism. The \$33,300 grant ran out, but Covid kept steamrolling.

Horner secured sponsorship from the local hospital and the Mountaire chicken plant that employed many of the town’s residents. He acknowledged the potential ethical complications of the arrangement, made evident when another reporter for a different publication – Vasquez – dug deep into the labor abuses against immigrants at the plant in her July 2021 article, “[The Incalculable Cost of Cheap Chicken](#).”⁷

But Horner insisted that Johnson covered Mountaire without bias. And the service being provided was a different one from uncovering wrongdoing. Ilana Dubester, a Brazilian immigrant who is the longtime director of the community services group in town, *El Vínculo Hispano* (The Hispanic Liaison), said that even without such accountability reporting on

Without the infrastructure to include rural community reporting permanently, the beat often lives through the passion and vision of an individual reporter.

Mountaire Farms, La Voz was a revelation. For the first time, said Dubester, her clients told her they could “see themselves reflected.”

But then the reflection faded as quickly as it came. Johnson, who won multiple state press awards for her coverage of the Latinx community in Siler City, left in June 2022 to work at a Raleigh law firm. La Voz went on hiatus and Horner started applying for grants to pay for her successor. He hopes that Report for America will accept his application.

⁵Sorg, L. (2021, September 8). Clear and present danger: Former Army missile plant has polluted a Black, Latino neighborhood in Burlington for more than 30 years. NC Policy Watch.

⁶Report for America offers beat training for their reporters, including those covering immigrant communities. Define American conducted one of those training sessions in February 2022.

⁷Vasquez, T. (2021, July 20). The incalculable cost of cheap chicken—and the hidden industry that shoulders it. Scalawag.



Analysis

The Power of Relatability

By Sarah E. Lowe and Liz Robbins.

Original audience research conducted by Jack Barry, Ph.D., Elizabeth “Lissy” Calienes, Ann Searight Christiano, Juliana Fernandes, Ph.D., Rachel Grant, Ph.D., Annie Neimand, Ph.D., Matt Sheehan, T. Frank Waddell, Ph.D., and Kim Walsh-Childers, Ph.D. of the University of Florida’s Center for Public Interest Communications.



*Morrisville Cardinals cricket players gather for a team huddle.
Credit: Hasham Malik*

Analysis of Individual Stories

Key Takeaways

- Nearly half of North Carolina survey respondents believed that immigrants “burden local communities,” and more than a third believe immigrants “increase crime in local communities.”
- Those who say they are highly knowledgeable about immigration are, ironically, the most likely to believe false information.
- Having a “colorblind” worldview – believing that everyone is treated equally regardless of their skin color – is the strongest predictor of negative views toward immigration.
- Valuing authority is a strong predictor of negative views toward immigrants.

When Laura Brache introduced herself to readers of *The News & Observer* as the paper’s new “Minority Communities” reporter in July 2021, she told them the topic “hit home.” She was the American-born daughter of immigrants, though she lived with her family in the Dominican Republic for her formative years before moving to North Carolina as a teenager.

As an introduction to her readers, she described the three stories she first wanted to report: Muslim homebuyers seeking loans that fit their religious beliefs; a dramatic decline in the Latinx population in Carrboro; and the rise of cricket in Morrisville, a suburb of Raleigh.

Of the three, the cricket idea was the most far afield, especially along the college basketball-crazy corridor known as “Tobacco Road.”

Nonetheless, it worked. When she published it two weeks later, her piece was compelling because it was not the typical sports story. Or business story. Or immigration story. It was everything all at once.

She tells of a cricket league flourishing outside Raleigh, started by Indian and other South Asian immigrants on the local baseball fields. When the team built their own dedicated stadium, they hosted tournaments that spurred the local economy. Vibrant pictures

– the men wore fuschia and navy uniforms – accompanied Brache’s clear reporting.

The story didn’t dwell on a tragedy or an immigration policy but rather reflected the rise in South Asian diaspora in the Triangle area, and the cultural and financial opportunities it created. This story humanized immigration without playing into stereotypes or tugging on heartstrings. And it was unique.

Perhaps for those reasons, the North Carolina Press Association awarded “Crazy about

cricket’: How this small NC town became a hub for South Asian community”⁸ its second prize for beat reporting. (First prize went to a senior News & Observer reporter for his account of local ties to the Jan. 6 Capitol riots.)

Define American worked with researchers at the University of Florida’s Center for Public Interest Communications to use Brache’s story for an audience survey to determine what types of stories might shift viewpoints and elicit reactions.

Audience Survey Findings

46%

believed immigrants take jobs and resources from Americans

46% believed immigrants burden local communities by using more than their share of social services

38% believed immigrants increase crime in local communities

31% thought immigration should be decreased

After Reading “Crazy About Cricket”

94%

agreed that the immigrants depicted in the story are good citizens for our country

80% agreed: “They are people like me.”

86% agreed: “They are people that share my values.”

97% agreed: “They are good people.”



Cricket has similarities to baseball, as a batsman waits to hit the ball. Credit: Hasham Malik.

This story humanized immigration without playing into stereotypes or tugging on heartstrings. And it was unique.

We selected a sample of 1160 people, chosen to mirror the demographics and political party identification of North Carolina's makeup. The group read Brache's award-winning story.

Our findings revealed that "Crazy about Cricket" was, indeed, effective in generating very positive responses toward the immigrants in the story, even from those who generally held negative attitudes toward immigrants.

Nearly half of readers believed immigrants take jobs and resources from Americans, as well as burden local communities by using more than their share of social services. After

reading, nearly all participants agreed that the immigrants in the story, at least, were good people and good citizens for the United States.

The story related the local South Asian immigrants' culture to American culture – cricket to baseball, skills in technology to seeking North Carolina employment in the sector. The players also sang America's national anthem at their games. Further, most readers also indicated that those featured in the story shared similar values and traits with themselves.



International supermarkets serve the diverse Charlotte area, which has the highest percentage of immigrants in the state.

The pre-existing idea of “immigrants” appeared to sit differently to the audience than the immigrant representation they read about in Brache’s story. What they thought of as a national issue was localized and humanized. Researchers refer to a shift from an “out-group” mentality to an “in-group” mentality when describing the change that audiences feel when they see others differently.

From Social Identity Theory⁹, the concept suggests that we can increase audiences’ positive attitudes toward others by showing them how they are like the people featured in the story, such as shared identities like being sports fans or living in the same city. Stories that frame subjects – such as immigrants – as part of an in-group illustrate familiar connections between story subjects and their readers. Brache’s evocative coverage of local culture shifted perspectives from immigrants as a group outside of American identity to these local immigrants

being a valued part of American society, for the readers who participated in our study.

What Engages Audiences?

Journalists tend to depend on clicks and awards to determine the so-called success of their stories. But science reveals something perhaps more significant: stories can change minds.

Granted, traditionally journalists are not concerned with shifting public opinion as much as holding elected officials accountable, highlighting inequality, and changing corrupt systems. But in this age of disinformation campaigns, where social media holds sway, news organizations have a responsibility to uphold democracy and understand how their own narrative frameworks can help or hurt.

In our research, we showed that good writing – using humanizing details that reflect the breadth of local

communities lives and activities – does, in fact, engage an audience around deeply held beliefs like immigration.

We conducted an additional survey with University of Florida’s Center for Public Interest Communications to test the framing of immigrant news stories and the impact on politically moderate and conservative participants. Communications scholars worked with Define American’s research team to test how the structure of stories about immigrants impacts the way North Carolina news audiences view immigrants.

We chose one story that took a local approach to a national issue: the uncertain future of children of visa holders who, when turning 21, become undocumented. They are known as “Documented Dreamers.” The story, “This is Home: Children of legal immigrants in North Carolina fear deportation when they turn 21,”¹⁰ presented on an ABC affiliate, WTVD, in Raleigh, featured a young



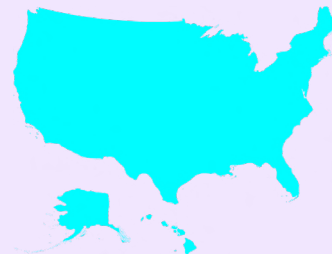
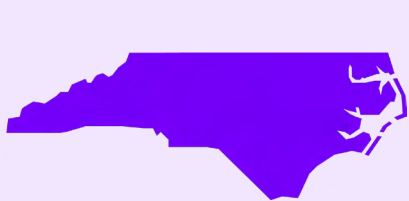
Subtle but significant: Centering news coverage on storytelling drives deeper audience engagement.

woman, Preethi Kandori, who grew up in North Carolina since she was six-years-old and attended American public schools. Her father came to the Research Triangle from India on an employment visa; the digital article did not mention the family's nationality, even though the 3 minute, 56-second video did.

In our audience experiment, some participants received the original version of the digital article – the original one that appeared on the WTVD website (without the video component). The story explored the subject's lived experience of the immigration system and American life through story details and

Audience Survey Findings

FOX: Levels of trust in national and local news



→ At the national level, we see that men are more likely to trust national news than women.

→ Locally, FOX 8 is more trusted by people who believe that men and women have different roles to play in society.

→ Locally, FOX 8 is more trusted by people with a high degree of respect for authority.

→ People who say they have a “colorblind” worldview are more likely to trust the Fox News Channel and are less likely to trust CNN or ABC News.

→ Moderates have higher trust in all three sources – Fox News Channel, CNN, and ABC – than those who are politically conservative, as well as those who are specifically conservative on immigration.

→ Politically conservative people are less likely to trust CNN or ABC News as much as other groups, but they trust the Fox News Channel at higher levels. They are also less likely to trust local news. This suggests that many of them only trust the Fox News Channel among the outlets we surveyed.

→ People who have high trust in the national Fox News Channel are more likely to report high perceived self-knowledge on immigration and also more likely to believe false statements about immigrants.

Q: In general, how well do you think each of the following statements describes immigrants coming to the U.S. today?

The percentage is those answering "Very well" or "Somewhat well" to the false statement, depending on trust in each of the media outlets below.

False Statement:

They increase crime in local communities

Fox News Channel

50%

CNN

30%

ABC

32%

False Statement:

They burden local communities by using more than their share of social services

Fox News Channel

57%

CNN

39%

ABC

41%

heartfelt quotes like: "I went to elementary school, middle school and high school down the road. I grew up here as a child planning college, a job and a life. Now, there's no certainty in any of that."

It laid out the scenario that if she were to be deported, it would be by no fault of her own because she had come to the country legally. The article uses the "in group" story framing: it is broadly written for native-born Americans and shows how the subject also displays typical American characteristics of hard work, diligence in following laws, and contributing to the community over many years.

In the second version, researchers from the University of Florida stripped away some of the details of the story to make it less of a profile and more a straight news story. The "Just the Facts" version edited the original story to remove almost all quotes and the details that conveyed Kandori's life experience. Most significantly, it took out the quote "This is Home" from the headline and the word "irony" from the lede, both of which seemed to sympathize with the subject.

The third version – the "Partial Details" version – edited the original story to remove references to her "American" experience but left her immigration experience.

The results?

Participants who read the original in-group story framing had more positive attitudes toward immigrants and immigration than those who read the partial version of the story. They also were less likely to hold negative attitudes than those who read the partial story and those who read just the facts.

This is subtle but significant. The more that journalists approach stories with details to show how immigrants are similar to everyday “Americans,” the more audiences could be inclined to understand the subjects through the lens of shared national values or similar shared identities. The end result could be deeper audience engagement overall with the stories.

Our broader experiments, not surprisingly, showed that one story does not substantially shift readers’ viewpoints on immigration. While more research is needed, consistent and frequent nuanced coverage of immigrants is more likely to create shifts in the attitudes of key audiences.

Shifting Opinions: Everyone, No One, or Select Groups?

As elections draw closer, strategists focus on swing states, and North Carolina is a key battleground once again. Our research indicates that currently, 40 percent of North Carolinians are moderate on the topic of immigration. They are moveable in their attitudes toward immigration, and we refer to them as Moderates.

40% of North Carolina is moderate on immigration.

Providing accurate coverage of immigrant communities – using neutral language and nuanced context – is especially significant considering that Moderates tend to trust their local news more than other politically-leaning groups. They are also more trusting of national news sources, and half of them consume their news mostly from TV.

By contrast, Conservatives exhibit more distrust in all local news sources compared to the other audience members.

Our findings show that some of the moral underpinnings of conservatism – respect for authority, being politically conservative, and having a colorblind worldview – are better predictors of attitudes toward immigrants than identification with political parties. Having a high respect for authority, more so than any other moral value, is the strongest predictor of negative attitudes toward immigrants. A belief that laws, policies, and other forms of authority are justified and unquestionable can create a blindspot. For those with high faith in authority, systems are not at fault therefore individuals must be. Furthermore, these Conservatives are less likely to be influenced by immigration stories that frame the current system as being out-of-step with migration patterns.

⁸ Brache, L. (2021, August 11). 'Crazy about cricket': How this small NC town became a hub for South Asian community. *The News & Observer*.

⁹ Brewer, M. B. (2001). The many faces of social identity: Implications for political psychology. *Political Psychology*, 22, 115–125. doi:10.1111/0162-895x.00229

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Neimand, Annie. (2018). The Science of Belief: Move Beyond "Us" and "Them" to "We." *The Arc*, Medium. <https://medium.com/bending-the-arc/the-science-of-belief-move-beyond-us-and-them-to-we-877a5d714a9c>

¹⁰ 'This is home:' Children of legal immigrants in North Carolina fear deportation when they turn 21. (2021, August 2). WTVD.



A woman votes during the 2020 election.

Models of Collaboration

By Liz Robbins and Victoria Bouloubasis.

Content analysis was conducted by Emily Boardman Ndulue of Media Ecosystems Analysis Group.

*Daniel Viotto, Telemundo.
Charlotte, NC.*



New Expertise, New Audiences

Key Takeaways

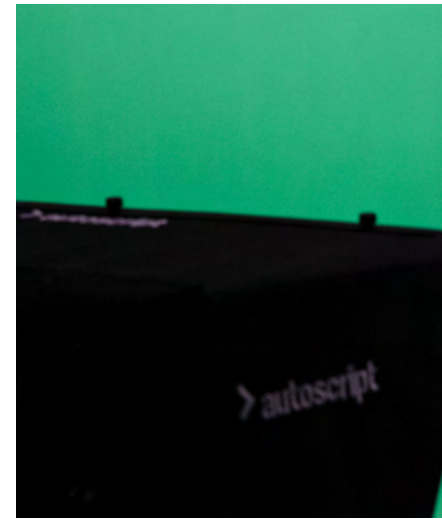
- Collaboration helps solve coverage gaps of marginalized communities when news outlets, on their own, do not have enough staff or resources to tackle stories.
- Designate a liaison to work between multilingual coverage teams. Ideally, this person would be a patient, flexible leader who understands the needs and unique approaches to news coverage.
- Have one staffer lead local outreach, engaging the community closest to them by holding focus groups and meetings. This will help establish reporting goals and find sources who are more comfortable speaking other languages.

North Carolina's news ecosystem has for the last decade fostered a state network of English-language outlets and a collaborative of seven media organizations in Charlotte. In addition, at least three intriguing partnerships in the state have developed since 2018 – each involving Spanish-language news organizations. We studied these three because they offer unique forms of partnership and innovative ways to engage their communities.

- **A side-by-side partnership between English and Spanish local television news stations**, where they share sources and stories and have one editor coordinating their teams.

- **A permanent position with a rotating reporter** who produces work in English for a public radio station, and also writes in Spanish for a for-profit weekly newspaper.
- **A grant-funded, topic-specific collaboration between small nonprofit digital news organizations**, one in Spanish for North Carolina, and the other in English, spanning the Southern states.

In the following sections, editors and reporters discussed the challenges – from bridging cultural differences to relying on short-term, grant-specific projects – that they faced in integrating legacy and nonprofit news with the community-centered model of media.



Mike Oliveira, WSOC. Charlotte, NC.

A Good Liaison is Key: Telemundo Charlotte-WSOC-TV

Across the country, most Telemundo Spanish-language stations are under the NBC umbrella, but not in Charlotte. The Atlanta-based Cox News Group decided to start a Telemundo local newscast, pairing it with the ABC affiliate there in 2018 when they saw just how swiftly the Latinx population was growing.

At first, the two teams sat in separate areas of the newsroom. The staff of WSOC, a leading news station in Charlotte for decades, wasn't quite sure about Telemundo's local mission or how best to incorporate them into their operations.

Mike Oliveira, the WSOC news director, initially thought Telemundo would be reformatting stories that his staff reported. "In the beginning, we made them come to our morning meetings and it was just kind of a waste of time," he said. "I thought that we'd be going after the same stories in different languages."

Instead, Telemundo's local reporters developed their own sources to report stories important to their communities. Especially during the two biggest news stories, though, they have worked together: covering Covid and Charlotte's first Major League Soccer team as joint rights holders.

But it wasn't until February 2022, when Oliveira chose longtime WSOC executive producer Linda Nester to become the liaison between the stations, that the two began to fall into sync.

Now, every morning, Nester meets with the teams separately in back-to-back meetings and then helps each identify which news stories they will combine to report, and which are exclusives they could translate.

"In order to make it really feel like we are one team, I feel like you need somebody in this position, somebody who is looking out for the Telemundo team," Nester said.

And it works both ways.



Daniel Viotto, Telemundo. Charlotte, NC.



Eloy Tupayachi Salas, Telemundo. Charlotte, NC.

Telemundo Charlotte's local bilingual reporters have pointed their WSOC colleagues to breaking news stories and educated them on the complexities of immigration issues in Charlotte's diverse Spanish-speaking communities.

In early July 2022, when North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, a Democrat, was deliberating whether to veto Senate Bill 101, which would require local sheriffs to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to identify potential undocumented immigrants, that was Telemundo's top story. But it wasn't even on WSOC's radar.

"That's what makes this relationship so important is that here was this big story in the state that somehow didn't come up during the WSOC meeting," Nester said. "I could go back out into the newsroom and say, 'we're missing a big story. Now we need to make sure we're covering this the right way on WSOC.'"

Eloy Tupayachi, Telemundo's lead producer in Charlotte, said that before Oliveira created

Nester's position, there wasn't "an organic way for these ideas to flow. We were like our own island."

Then local immigration crackdowns during the Trump administration served as a flashpoint among the staffers.

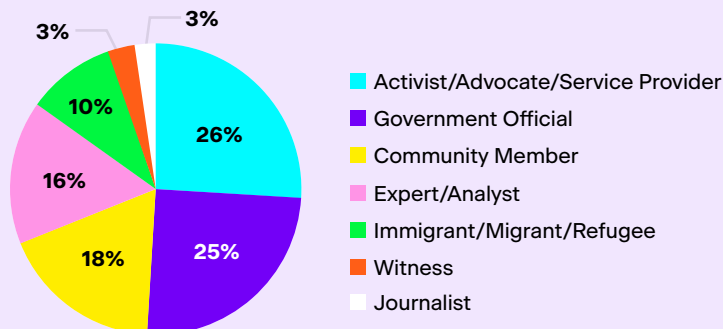
When ICE began arresting community members and conducting workplace raids in late 2018, Daniel Viotto, the managing editor and lead anchor of Telemundo admitted that he felt pulled to be more empathetic, showing the effect it had on families. At the same time, he communicated with ICE officials to understand the situation, and would not shy away from reporting when an immigrant had committed a crime.

"Being objective about this is hard because there is a lot at stake for the community," Viotto said. "Before the pandemic, ICE was storming homes and breaking glass and windows and doors and taking people in custody and deporting them right away after that. No due process, nothing."

Content Analysis Findings

Role of Quoted Sources

The majority of quoted sources in stories about immigrants or immigration were government officials or activists, according to the designations journalists gave them in the stories.



“We were getting emails in English thanking us for delivering the message in Spanish.”

Telemundo’s approach raised a familiar tension between ethnic media and legacy media over advocacy. “I admit we had a couple of concerned anchors on the English side who were like, ‘What are they doing?’” Oliveira said.

Rather than let the feelings fester, the newsrooms addressed their concerns with a series of joint staff meetings.

“Daniel and I would talk through the facts, the tone, and where the line would be,” Oliveira said. “That helped everyone feel better. **Like in any newsroom, the more conversations you’re having the more likely you are to land in the right place.**”

Viotto explained to his WSOC colleagues the

nuances of immigration laws and what they meant for community members of differing legal statuses.

“Sometimes, because they are not used to this type of news, they miss the big picture, and the big picture is to have all the parts of the story – the person they are looking for, their family, ICE, an immigration attorney,” Viotto said. “They got it.”

While the line between engagement and advocacy is a delicate one, that wasn’t as much concern during the pandemic, when the news was an urgent public service for all audiences. With Telemundo attending every official local press conference, Viotto said, he and his reporters helped prod the state to include Spanish interpreters. That

led to another innovation: WSOC was the only television station in the city to continue broadcasting official updates once the news conferences shifted to Spanish, simulcast on Telemundo Charlotte.

“We were getting emails in English thanking us for delivering the message in Spanish,” Nester said.

Today, the nightly local Telemundo broadcast may translate three to four stories from WSOC. At crucial times, the two newsrooms collaborate more closely.

In mid-May of 2022, a dump truck hit a school bus headed for the local high school, injuring 14 people. Because WSOC has a helicopter, it got the first pictures of the crash and posted them online. Then, Telemundo found a bilingual student on the bus through social media. They reported her perspective. When

WSOC needed a source, that reporter called her back to ask her to repeat her version in English.

Telemundo, in turn, reported information from WSOC’s investigative unit that found the bus was involved in a safety recall.

“Just like you need in any newsroom, you need individual collaborators to be friends,” Oliveira said. “Once the assignment desk and planning desk started talking, it was like, ‘Hey, I got you sound in English from this person,’ and then vice versa, ‘I got you sound in Spanish for that.’ It was pretty organic.”

While it was natural, it was also an accomplishment worth celebrating in any language. “I feel good,” said Tupayachi, Telemundo’s lead producer, “because we are changing minds in the newsroom.”

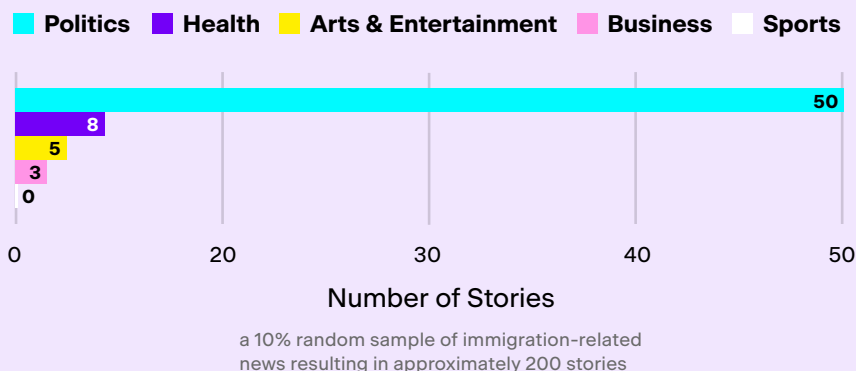


Sarah Mobley Smith (left), the Race and Equity editor from WFAE who coordinates with La Noticia, founded by Hilda Guardian (right).

Content Analysis Findings

Immigrants and Immigration Across Verticals

We found that local immigration coverage mostly focuses on politics. Journalists can engage new audiences when they integrate more of their stories into relatable topics like health, arts and entertainment, business, and even sports.



Telemundo's local success in Charlotte led Cox to announce in June 2022 that it was expanding to two other markets where the Latinx population is growing, and where they will collaborate with an established English-speaking station: Jacksonville, Fla. and Seattle.

"Those audiences, they really need information that will impact their lives every day," Viotto said.

Fostering Trust Through Collaboration: WFAE-FM and La Noticia

Ju-Don Marshall was ready for change. In the wake of President Trump's election, Marshall, a longtime news executive, saw how underrepresented communities of color felt ignored and more vulnerable. As a Black woman, she had felt it, herself.

When she became Chief Content Officer

at WFAE 90.7, the NPR affiliate in Charlotte, Marshall wanted to expand the station's coverage to engage the Spanish-speaking communities.

She created two beats to reach Charlotte's underserved communities: a race and equity reporter, and an immigrant communities reporter. Marshall approached Hilda Gurdían, the Venezuelan American publisher of La Noticia, the first and longest-running Spanish-language newspaper in North Carolina. Published weekly and distributed free, it relies on advertising sales for profit.

"We have a lot of things to learn about covering communities of color as a more mainstream newsroom," Marshall said. She then referred to La Noticia's respect among Spanish-speaking readers. "I think it's important to recognize the equity they've built in these communities that we seek to amplify and compliment and not compete with that work."

The third partner Marshall enlisted was the nonprofit organization, Report for America, which partially funded the two beats earmarked for early-career journalists.

Today, the WFAE-La Noticia collaboration exemplifies robust, humanizing immigrant community reporting in the state. In 2022, another NPR station in Winston-Salem, WFDD, adopted Marshall's model.

The key to a successful collaboration is mutual respect, and Marshall set the tone. She drew on her experience as managing editor of Washington Post Digital from 1999 to 2009. "Coming from the Post and being the big kid in these relationships, there could be an institutional ego and arrogance," said Marshall, who is now also WFAE's Executive



Maria Ramirez Uribe, former reporter for WFAE/La Noticia. She is now an immigration reporter at PolitiFact.

Vice President. "I just wanted to disrupt all of that and change the dynamic. We're going to be full-on partners. Your voice is going to be as important as ours."

It took trial and error for each partner – and the reporters – to find their voices.

Laura Brache, who grew up in the Dominican Republic and received a master's degree in journalism from Syracuse University, was thrilled to be what she called, the "guinea pig" for this hybrid job. "I thought it would take at least a decade into my career before I'd be able to report on immigration," she said.

At first, the editors thought Brache, then 25, could produce two to three stories a week. But while La Noticia was revamping its digital product and looking for page views, Brache did not want simply to be aggregating content. Instead, she wanted to do "deep dives" in the community, and therefore enlist sources to develop meaningful stories. First, she needed to educate her WFAE editors on how to gain the trust of the community.

"The biggest struggle was getting everyone on the same page about language," Brache said. Her two editors at first didn't want to use "undocumented," but insisted on using the terminology "who entered the country illegally" to describe residents without legal status, she said.

But this would be an inaccurate description since many undocumented immigrants come with visas that later expired. Other immigrants may be in the process of adjusting their legal status, and that could drag out for years. The general term "undocumented" is more precise and also culturally accepted in the immigrant community because it does not carry a criminalizing connotation. For a time,

*Paola Jaramillo, Enlace Latino.
Raleigh, NC.*



the station kept the illegality reference.

The reporter who succeeded Brache, Colombian-born Maria Ramirez Uribe, also found WFAE's use of "illegal" to be frustrating. "As someone who is a part of the community, too, it's so hard to build trust. And then to have one potential word take that away is tough," she said.

Marshall responded by restructuring the editing of the beat, hiring Sarah Mobley Smith, to oversee the race and equity reporter, as well as the immigration/WFAE-La Noticia reporter. Smith pushed back with the station's news editor about language.

Smith said he told her he was following The Associated Press guidelines, but more so, the station's own traditions. Smith recalled her response: "We don't have to always do things the way we've always done them." The station changed its language style.

The hybrid print/radio job meant these young reporters had to decide when to use Spanish in English radio pieces and also how to write the pieces in Spanish for La Noticia. This also presented challenges. Both Brache and Ramirez Uribe said they had to fight to use sources' names in their Spanish pronunciation. One editor told Uribe that he didn't understand her accent when she correctly pronounced "Honduras" with the silent "H."

"What the newsroom learned is that I'm speaking and saying the words that are in Spanish – in Spanish – because that's just what happens when you hire someone who's bilingual," Uribe said.

When Brache left Charlotte for family reasons and moved to The News & Observer to cover

immigrant communities, Ramirez Uribe moved into her role in 2021. She amplified La Noticia's digital presence by appearing on its YouTube channel to explain her stories in Spanish, including one about the school system's inadequate translation for Spanish-speaking parents.

When Ramirez Uribe left to cover immigration nationally for PolitiFact, RFA's third reporter in three years – Kayla Young – jumped into the role in June 2022.

La Noticia has only four full-time reporters, and two of them are in collaboration with Report for America and public radio. It still offers its products in rusty white boxes or at Spanish supermarkets in four different regions in North Carolina, while trying to grab its digital readers nationally.

La Noticia's Vice President, Alvaro Gurdián, said the website averages about 1.2 million page views per month. He added that it was hard to quantify metrics for the partnership with WFAE because there were two different languages and mediums.

Marshall also said that engaging new audiences was similarly hard to track. "We see spikes in Latino listeners around specific immigration efforts," she said.

Even less quantifiable, but essential, is the chemistry that the two partners must have. "Just because I do this whole thing on collaborating, it's not easy," Marshall said. "And you have to have not only the right philosophy and structure but also the right people." At times, she has had to pull people off projects when they were too inflexible.

She and Hilda Gurdián speak frequently.

*Victoria Bouloubasis,
Durham, NC.*



“We even talk on weekends for a long time,” Gurdián said, “and really go into the details of life in this community,”

Brache said she measured success, not in clicks, but in the thank-you emails she got from readers in Spanish and the response she got when introducing herself in the community. She led with WFAE, but it wasn’t until she added in Spanish, “y La Noticia,” then people would tell her: “I’ll talk to you.”

Amplifying Community Voices: Enlace Latino NC and Southerly Magazine

One day in early 2020, a Latina homeowner from Robeson County, a rural southern region of North Carolina known for its Lumbee Native American community, stood before a room full of journalists, officials, and organizers.

She told them all about her ruined house.

Since Hurricane Matthew struck North Carolina in 2016, she had been waiting for FEMA to process the paperwork to repair her home. She produced a photo album of damage that showed black water flooding her floors and leaving streaks on the walls that hadn’t been knocked down by the wind. It was the first time she shared her story in a public forum in Spanish.

This was part of a listening session that Paola Jaramillo, the editor of Enlace Latino NC, and Southerly editor Lyndsey Gilpin, devised together in late 2019 to amplify community voices around environmental justice. The session that day, before 40 stakeholders and journalists, led to a collaborative series between the two media outlets about gaps in emergency services that sounded an

alarm. The series was called: “Ignored and Forgotten.”

“What’s happening in North Carolina is happening to so many other places in the South and across the country,” Gilpin said.

These stories, she added, are for people who are “not served by traditional journalism.”

The media is starting to understand how environmental justice issues – from extreme weather events to pollution to public health – intersect with race and class.

The majority of North Carolina’s 100 counties are lodged in rural areas with poor access not only to government services but to the news.

“Immigrants, in general, are seen in this silo and are often talked about in the realm of labor and the work that they are doing, not as human beings impacted by other things happening in their community,” said Gilpin, the editor of the environmentally focused nonprofit, Southerly Magazine, which she founded in 2018. Gilpin wanted to change that by collaborating with a partner organization that reaches people in rural areas, including immigrants.

Gómez. Today, they operate under this guiding principle: **“Don’t weigh in clicks,” she said, “but weigh in conversations.”**

This collaboration between Southerly and Enlace Latino relies on community engagement to inform its reporting and then the outlets go back to the community to follow up on the impact of their articles.

So far, the collaboration has produced 16 stories and counting and won a 2021 Local Independent Online News (LION) award.

But even with the recognition, both small outlets (each has only a handful of staff) are continuously scraping for additional resources; the reality is that producing accountability journalism for and with underserved communities is a fragile enterprise.

Their grant-funded coverage of pandemic issues made essential information accessible to Spanish-speaking communities while centering their personal stories, not their victimhood. Victoria Bouloubasis – one of the authors of this report – worked with both editors on the project.

The reality is that producing accountability journalism for and with underserved communities is a fragile enterprise.

Her mission was perfectly aligned with that of Jaramillo, an immigrant from Colombia and a journalist for two decades in North Carolina. Jaramillo founded Enlace Latino NC also in 2018 along with a fellow immigrant, Walter

This was immigrant-oriented news that went beyond the familiar – and sensational – stories of caravans and deportations.

“We’re able to say, ‘OK, we’re not writing

for bleeding-heart white people,” Gilpin said. **Southerly not only publishes stories uplifting and centering the perspectives of marginalized communities – many of them immigrants – but they include those same community members as expert voices. This is what much of legacy media often fails to do.**

In 2021, Gilpin, Jaramillo, and Bouloubasis received a grant from the Solutions Journalism Network, a nonprofit organization that works with news outlets to reframe stories in marginalized communities around solutions rather than problems. They also hired a part-time community organizer to help create virtual events around each story.

In three panels via Zoom and Facebook Live in Spanish with English interpretation, moderated by Bouloubasis, organizers and immigrant community members talked about housing, climate disasters, and health equity. They also discussed whether the news coverage had changed anything – both in the way of government support and whether the

community felt more empowered.

Jaramillo said that the collaboration meant that farmworkers and poultry-plant workers could read the stories in Spanish and their children could read them in English. Meanwhile, the same articles in English in Southerly reached community healthcare workers, developers, small business owners, and nonprofits who had been providing support where the government or industry officials had not.

“It has allowed us to put the Latino immigrant community at the center,” Jaramillo said.

Producing such an outcome, however, is a precarious process. It depends on adhering to strict grant guidelines and fighting for more funding. Meanwhile, the freelancer assumes all the risk; they have no health care or legal support in case a source or official takes action in response to aggressive accountability reporting.

Enlace Latino, according to Jaramillo, relies

People relaxing outside a local market in Charlotte.



almost exclusively on private donations from foundations – 90 percent of its operating budget. In 2022, Enlace also received a Report for America position to help offset costs, and filled it with a mid-career reporter already on staff.

Enlace Latino NC engages audiences with newsletters for farmworkers, along with podcasts and explainers about how to vote. Enlace has been working with a similar immigration-focused nonprofit news outlet in New York – Documented – on developing its WhatsApp text network that fuels the newsletters.

As of Summer 2022, its two newsletters had 12,072 subscribers combined – one for farmworkers, El Jornalero, and the other informing readers on the mechanics of politics and voting, La Tortilla.

Jaramillo said that her audience is mostly U.S. citizens who prefer news in Spanish. Others are immigrant parents of U.S.-born

children who will be voting for the first time, like her son, Juan Felipe.

“Because maybe if you have the information in your language,” she said, “then you can understand and you can help, you can push.”

Jane Elizabeth, the former News & Observer editor who is now an industry consultant, called Enlace Latino’s voter education efforts “a brilliant idea.” Elizabeth added: “I think that’s one area the mainstream media in local markets should get into.”

As an immigrant herself, Jaramillo wants to give her fellow North Carolinians agency.

“We want to create a Latinx community that knows what happens here,” Jaramillo said.

“We want more people in our community to take action.”



Analysis

Persistent Stereotypes

By Sarah E. Lowe, Liz Robbins, and Victoria Bouloubasis.

Original audience research conducted by Jack Barry, Ph.D., Elizabeth “Lissy” Calienes, Ann Searight Christiano, Juliana Fernandes, Ph.D., Rachel Grant, Ph.D., Annie Neimand, Ph.D., Matt Sheehan, T. Frank Waddell, Ph.D., and Kim Walsh-Childers, Ph.D. of the University of Florida’s Center for Public Interest Communications.



North Carolina’s heated local politics are symbolic of the nation’s polarization.

Criminals and Victims

Key Takeaways

- Nearly a third of sampled articles contained problematic narratives.
- The most prevalent of the negative depictions of immigrants represented them as either victims or criminals.

On Jan. 11, 2022, Raleigh police tasered and then fatally shot Daniel Turcios by the side of a city highway following a car accident. Initial news reports focused on the police narrative: the man wielded a knife, and a 911 caller said he appeared drunk.

The autopsy would later refute that.

Turcios, 43, an immigrant from El Salvador, had flipped his car during the crash, with his wife and two children inside. He climbed out but was disoriented. Multiple officers surrounded him. He took out a pocket knife. Turcios had not seemed to understand what the officers were shouting at him in English. One officer said in basic Spanish to sit down. Several officers told him to drop the knife.

When he didn't, a policeman on the scene, Sgt. W.B. Tapscott, tasered him. Turcios fell to the ground, but according to police, he was swinging his knife. Then, officer A.A. Smith shot him five times – fatally. Smith had only been on the force for a year. Tapscott had

been cleared from fatally shooting a suspect in 2020.

Frustrated with the initial police narrative that some of the media repeated, several local advocacy groups connected reporters with the family, which filled in details about Turcios that helped give a more complete picture.

“We went from ‘This man was drunk’ to ‘He was shot like a dog,’” said Iliana Santillán, the executive director of the advocacy group, El Pueblo.

These are the two problematic stereotypes that define immigrants in the media: from criminal to victim. The reality is often more nuanced, where an immigrant – like any human being – exists somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

Our research confirms the dominance of these opposing stereotypes in a sample of North Carolina stories: in 20 percent of all the problematic narratives we searched –

Audience Survey Findings



38% of North Carolinians believe immigrants ‘increase crime in local communities.’

In reality, immigrants commit crimes at much lower rates than native-born citizens.

immigrants were portrayed as either criminals or victims.

How then to explore the complexity of immigration and crime? By reporting the facts from all angles. That’s what the News & Observer in Raleigh did from the start.

Aaron Sánchez-Guerra and Laura Brache, two Spanish-speaking reporters for the News & Observer, reviewed the disturbing body cam footage – 16 videos in total – for words spoken in Spanish. Sánchez-Guerra spoke to Turcios’s family and childhood friends to get their side of what happened.

Including context is crucial, especially around criminal incidents involving immigrants who may be undocumented. Criminal actions could have immigration consequences for family members, too. In North Carolina, and other communities across the country, some local law enforcement, and federal immigration agencies are intertwined.

Currently, 15 of 100 counties in North Carolina

cooperate with immigration enforcement officials to detain immigrants who have orders of removal. That is the third highest number of cooperation agreements (known as 287g) in the country behind only Texas and Florida. The debate over whether to cooperate with enforcement agents has been a contentious political issue for sheriff’s races in North Carolina and on the statehouse floor.

North Carolina’s lone immigration court, run by appointees of the Department of Justice, has produced similarly harsh statistics against immigrants; Charlotte has one of the lowest asylum-approval rates in the country.

Audience Perspectives: Ways of Seeing the World

We know that the framing of a story – and the promotion of that narrative on social media – can spread false information and perpetuate stereotypes. We explored why people believe what they do, and this social science component of our research returned some surprising results. The way people think about immigrants or immigration is not just determined by their race, religion, or political party. Instead, it’s even more personal than that – what researchers call “sacred values”¹¹ about how people see the world. In our research, we looked at ways of interpreting immigration news through three worldviews.

Our analysis found that the belief that “race and racism do not play a role in shaping society” is the most consistent and strongest predictor of negative immigration attitudes and actions. This group, who can be said to hold a colorblind ideology, tends to see people’s experiences as a result of their individual choices, rather than influenced by inequalities.

Colombian immigrants attend an event hosted by the Latin American Chamber of Commerce in conjunction with the Colombian Consulate in Charlotte, NC. August 2022.



Audience Survey Findings

Three Ways of Interpreting Immigration News

Three ways of seeing the world emerged as important factors to understanding the way North Carolinians view immigrants: racial worldviews, cultural worldviews, and moral values.

→ Racial Worldviews

What role does the audience think race and racism have in shaping our society? For example: are we all born with the same opportunities and immigrants are trying to cheat the system? Or does systemic racism mean that some people have a harder time moving through the immigration system than others?

→ Cultural Worldviews

How does the audience think about social problems and their solutions? For example: is our immigration system broken and immigrants are trapped in it? Or are immigrants trying to take advantage of a sufficiently functioning system?

→ Moral Values

What informs the audiences' deeply held beliefs of right and wrong? For example: are undocumented immigrants victims who need to be saved? Or are they criminals who need to be punished?



Irisol Gonzalez, a local Latinx artist, paints a mural outside of Compare Foods in Charlotte, NC. May 2021.

On the flip side, we found that a “multicultural” mindset – those that value the contributions of various cultures, races, and ethnicities in the shaping of society – is the most consistent and strongest predictor of positive attitudes toward immigrants and support for immigration policies. Those who value being “multicultural” see the immigration process as being part of a system created by people and needing to evolve as society evolves. They are therefore most likely to support immigration and immigrants.

Understanding how audiences react to story framing can help editors and reporters produce a more accurate representation of immigrants.

News stories framed around the central idea that the system is unjust, particularly in respect to racial justice, will likely reinforce political polarization in the audience. However, stories that explore personal stories to demonstrate the impact of systemic injustice could encourage deeper understanding.

Predictors of Negative Attitudes Toward Immigrants

- Holding the stance that all people are treated equal regardless of race
- Holding the moral belief that respect for authority is more important than values like humanitarianism
- Political leanings
- Trust in the FOX News Channel
- Loyalty to those "like you"

Predictors of Positive Attitudes Toward Immigrants

- + Holding the stance that society is made up of systems created by people and, like people, systems can be flawed and in need of change
- + Holding the moral belief that multiculturalism is more important than values like being loyal to people who are "like you"
- + Having lived experience of the immigration system

¹¹ Argo, N., & Jassin, K. (2021). What immigration issues do Americans hold sacred? A psychological journey into American attitudes toward immigrants. American Immigration Council. https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/what_immigration_issues_do_americans_hold_sacred.pdf

Representation

By Victoria Bouloubasis and Liz Robbins.

Content analysis conducted by Media Ecosystems Analysis Group.



*Speakers at the 2022 Local News
Impact summit in Charlotte, NC.*

Who's Missing

Key Takeaways

- Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrant stories are infrequent, despite AAPI immigrants representing 28.5% of the immigrant population in North Carolina.
- Reporters tend to call immigrant rights advocates in times of emergency, rather than establish trust in quieter moments.
- Advocates and second-generation immigrants often feel betrayed when reporters do not communicate clearly how their stories will be used. They are writing their own media guides and producing podcasts to tell the story the way they want.

When Asian spas were attacked in Atlanta in March 2021, Ricky Leung got multiple calls a day for reporters looking for a local reaction in North Carolina. Leung, the media liaison for North Carolina Asian Americans Together, hired an outside consultant to help field the calls.

Then he developed a media guide for covering Asian Americans that had very clear recommendations, including pronouncing and spelling Asian names properly, putting anti-Asian hate into historical context by quoting diverse sources, and using distinct language to describe a specific community such as Vietnamese American, instead of a general term like AAPI, for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

He is intent on reframing the narrative to reveal the diverse AAPI population in North Carolina, which comprises various economic and legal statuses, along with more than 20 ethnicities and even more languages, including Laotian, Hmong, and Gujarati.

His organization's goal? "Really lifting up our community stories, tearing down the model minority myth and uplifting the need for disaggregated data and the diversity within what is considered Asian American," he said.

Leung is part of a small but growing number of second-generation immigrants who, frustrated by traditional media, have been redefining their underrepresented cultures in their own way. In turn, they are pushing editors

– and themselves – to be more responsible, taking cues from tragic experiences to change the way media go about delivering news.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are North Carolina's fastest-growing ethnic and racial group; the group's immigrant population has increased by 65,000 people from 2006 to 2019. In the last 12 years, North Carolina schools have seen Asian student enrollment increase by 63 percent and Pacific Islander enrollment increase by 103 percent. Yet according to findings from Media Ecosystems, less than 4 percent of North Carolina immigration news covered AAPI communities, even during this national moment of urgency around awareness of anti-Asian hate crimes.

Asian American editors are not a significant presence in North Carolina's newsrooms, although there are some in top positions. Among them: Church, the executive editor of The News & Observer of Raleigh and The Herald-Sun of Durham, The Pham, a visuals editor at The Observer, and Vicky Janowski, the editor of the Greater Wilmington Business Journal.

Sayaka Matsuoka, who is an editor and reporter at the Triad City Beat, an alternative news weekly publication in

Greensboro, admitted how hard it is to cover the many subgroups of the rapidly growing Asian immigrant population.

"We have a really large, diverse community in Greensboro and in particular the Montagnard community is the largest outside of Vietnam," she said. "I don't think that in this area, including the Triad City Beat, we've done a good enough job covering these specific communities."

She added that the coverage often happens in response to a tragedy. "So much of the way that news has been handled and the way that I was also taught to do news was to point your camera, point your notebook at the thing that's on fire," said Matsuoka, who has worked at Triad City Beat since graduating college in 2014. "Oftentimes when we're doing the reporting, it's like, 'OK, a family of refugees just died in a fire because their house was in horrible conditions. So let's report about that and look at the systemic issues.'"

The University of North Carolina's Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media is conducting a 2022 Diversity Audit, along with the NC Local News Workshop from Elon University, to ascertain demographics on the ethnicity and/or nationality in newsrooms throughout the state in an



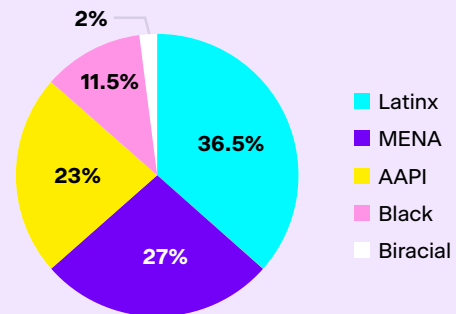


Content Analysis Findings

Race/Ethnicity of Quoted Sources*

Of the sources for which this information is available, Latinx was the most prevalent group of quoted sources.

* White/Caucasian is likely the most prevalent, as 88% of sources were coded as “Unknown,” and individuals in this group are generally not racially identified in news reporting.



anonymous survey. The goal according to the NC Local News Workshop: “To guide programming to help newsrooms make progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and provide benchmarking newsrooms can use.”

But journalists of color do not need a survey to know that they are clearly in the minority.

“It’s very apparent who is not in the newsroom: Asian immigrants, African, and Middle Eastern immigrants,” said Sara Pequeño, a columnist at **The News & Observer**, who previously worked at the alt-weekly **Indy Week**. She emphasized she was speaking generally about conditions

throughout the state and not her current employer.

“Because of that, whenever we have an influx in refugees from Afghanistan – or people talking to Burmese refugees in Chapel Hill – we’re often doing so as an exception or an exoticization of these people and identities,” Pequeño said.

Stories on Their Own Terms: Muslims and Media after the Chapel Hill Murders

In February 2015, three young Muslim Arab Americans were shot and killed in their apartment by a white neighbor in Chapel Hill, NC. Early news reports of

People walk past the mural painted by artist Irisol Gonzalez outside Compare Foods in Charlotte, NC. August 2022.

the crime attributed the motive to a parking dispute.

This media narrative wasn't questioned until Suzanne Barakat, sister of one of the victims, spoke up. She called the incident a hate crime. With the support of North Carolina's Muslim community, Barakat quickly established Our Three Winners, an organization that aims to raise awareness about implicit bias as the root cause of prejudice. It was named after the three victims: Deah Shaddy Barakat, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, and Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha.

At the time, Yasmin Bendaas was working toward a master's degree in science journalism at UNC-Chapel Hill – down the road from where the murders happened. She knew the victims personally. The killings profoundly impacted Bendaas's Muslim and Arab American community, especially her millennial peer group, and they sprung into action in various ways.

"For the Black community it was George Floyd," Bendaas said. "For our community, it's 'Our Three Winners.'"

Some Muslim North Carolinians, like current Durham County commissioner Nida Allam, were motivated to run for political office for the first time. Others became activists, speaking at schools and places of worship. Bendaas wanted to rewrite the narrative of the media, which, she says, failed to report on the tragedy with a sensitive lens.

At the time of the 2015 murders, she and her friends were bombarded with media requests. "Do you realize how hard it is to talk about?" Bendaas said.

Eventually, Bendaas started a podcast in 2017 so that Muslims in the South could share stories on their own terms. She began recording in 2018 at WUNC Studios, the NPR affiliate based at UNC-Chapel Hill. But she was still producing it on her own and airing it through her website until 2021 when Bendaas and WUNC signed a production partnership. The show now airs through the station and on its podcast platforms.

That independent start also came with the freedom to reframe traditional journalistic practices with a more considerate approach to sources.

Bendaas, who was born to Iranian and Algerian immigrants, had previously written for a nonprofit news outlet. There she began allowing refugees and other sources to remain anonymous for their safety – and to review their own quotes before a story went to print. Today on "Me and My Muslim Friends," she lets anyone – except a public official – do the same before a story airs.

"It has only made the content more accurate and it has only protected people," Bendaas said. She acknowledged that some editors can be "weird" about sharing content with a source before publication because they think it interferes with neutrality. But for her, it fits

"For the Black community it was George Floyd," Bendaas said. "For our community, it's 'Our Three Winners.'"

the mission of journalism.

“I want to get this right and I want to do no harm,” she said. “This is how you engage with communities who have mistrusted you.”

In June, “Me and My Muslim Friends” won second place in the interview podcast category for the Public Media Journalists Association – competing in the largest public radio division in the country.

Over the course of 11 episodes, Bendaas interviewed friends with various ties to the community on topics such as Muslims in local politics, Afghanistan, and the Census. In one episode, Ahmed Amer, an Egyptian immigrant who grew up in Thomasville and organizes poetry readings, discussed how the U.S. views his family as white on paper, but that hasn’t been their social experience. In another, she interviewed Allam on being the first Muslim woman elected in North Carolina politics.

In July 2022, WUNC approved a third season of “Me and My Muslim Friends.” Bendaas said the audience still skews young-adult (under 25 years old), but the public radio partnership has broadened the age demographic to more listeners over the age of 45.

Bendaas is transparent about the show’s first-person point of view in its online description: “This podcast shares the nuanced experiences of my Muslim friends from the inside out. Ultimately, these are conversations on identity: who we are, in all of our diversity, while growing up against a media backdrop of everything we are not.”



Free Spanish-language newspapers on display inside the Compare Foods supermarket that serves a growing Latinx population in Charlotte.



An Overlooked Story

*Vy Cunningham, NC Nails
Academy, Charlotte, NC.*

A Vietnamese sandwich shop inside a rundown Asian mall northeast of downtown Charlotte has gotten its share of media attention because good food news always sells. But journalists have overlooked a multi-layered story of diversity across the hall: NC Nails Academy.

Women-owned and women-led, NC Nails has emerged stronger since the onset of the pandemic. When nail salons closed, the school offered online classes. That sustained the business and set it up for success: now there are waiting lists extending several months just to take in-person classes.

Inside the bright and chemically buzzing space one recent day, some 40 students were practicing their techniques on each other. Across three locations, NC Nails graduates 200 to 300 manicurists every three months.

Vy Cunningham, 33, the Vietnamese-born owner, is proud to contribute to the diversity of a country that supported her family when they arrived in 2000 with nothing.

“Even though I am Asian, I am Vietnamese, I am female,

I am not only teaching to those demographics,” Cunningham said. “Look around, all of my students are diverse. We have one student – a pastor – who is male and 62. He’s Cambodian. He waited six months to get into my program. I know I can make a difference in one person’s life.”

Charlotte has the largest Vietnamese population in the state. Shopping centers with Vietnamese signs dot the northeast section of the city, and this one happens to have an old South Vietnamese flag flying next to the American flag.

Cunningham has run the school since 2017, when her older sister, Khanh Mai, the original owner, expanded into Greensboro. Now Cunningham teaches with her sister-in-law, Anita Mai, and Kim Kendrick, a Black woman who moved from Stamford, Connecticut.

Cunningham used to work in corporate finance and gave up that lifestyle because she thinks this profession will be more lucrative for the next generation. “If you are building empires for your kids,” Cunningham said, “the beauty industry is where it is going to be.”

One local television cable news show featured NC Nails Academy in its March 22, 2022 morning show. Lauren McDonald, in her “Do My Job” segment, gleefully learned to be a manicurist for a day. But despite interviewing Cunningham, the news report never gave the owner’s name or title in the lower thirds.

NC Nails Academy is a business story, a shifting demographics story, and an immigration story. By featuring Cunningham and her family, a reporter could provide context and nuance for audiences to relate to the communities around them.

Conclusion

*NC capitol building,
Raleigh, NC.*



If journalism is a public trust, then legacy news leaders have failed the public in covering immigration locally.

We understand that legacy newsrooms are short-staffed and stifled by a lack of resources. At the same time, we also see that they are trying to do engaging, ethical, and important work just when the industry is unraveling and redefining norms. But they see coverage of immigrant communities as dispensable, only possible when supported by short-term grants or other outside funding.

We believe that the immigration beat, or one that highlights immigrant communities as part of equity reporting, should be a permanent fixture in news organizations. The need, dictated by demography, is there. But if the means are not there, then we urge news leaders to integrate immigration coverage into all sections of their organization.

From our organization's work across multiple media platforms, we know the power that storytelling carries. Stories that cut across common topics such as sports, business, education, and culture, humanize immigrants rather than paint them as the "other."

The stories written and broadcast today will become the framework for how Americans see each other for decades to come. We offer our findings and recommendations so that news leaders can understand why immigration coverage matters. We hope they see the urgency for better representation of immigrant communities – as both a responsibility and a model for preserving democracy.

Recommendations



Recommendations for Reporters and Editors

01 Integrate immigration coverage into every beat.

Covering immigrants is not only the job of the immigration reporter. It's the job of every reporter. Seek to integrate representative coverage of immigrant communities into other subjects, such as sports, education, health, and business. This will amplify DEI efforts and broaden audiences, which can lead to more paid subscribers and increase revenue.

What you can do: Provide training for all staff on shifting local demographics, immigration history and laws, terminology, and history of immigration – specifically in the context of your state. Define American can provide virtual or in-person training sessions, along with toolkits.

02 Ensure reporting on immigrants encapsulates the full spectrum of foreign-born residents.

That includes Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrants, as well as recent immigrants from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Immigration coverage skews toward stereotypes of only being Latinx. AAPI immigrants, in particular, are often left out.

What you can do: Diversify your roster of community sources. Connect with leaders and advocates to find new stories. Contract with a local translator to accompany you to different neighborhoods.

03 Report on immigrants as people with agency, not just as victims or criminals.

Coverage of immigrant communities frequently happens in response to tragedies or crime stories, perpetuating harmful narratives.

What you can do: Cultivate community sources to be prepared for any event. Reach out to immigration lawyers, professors, or former immigration judges to understand the intersection of criminal and immigration law.

04 Activate collaborations to reach underrepresented communities.

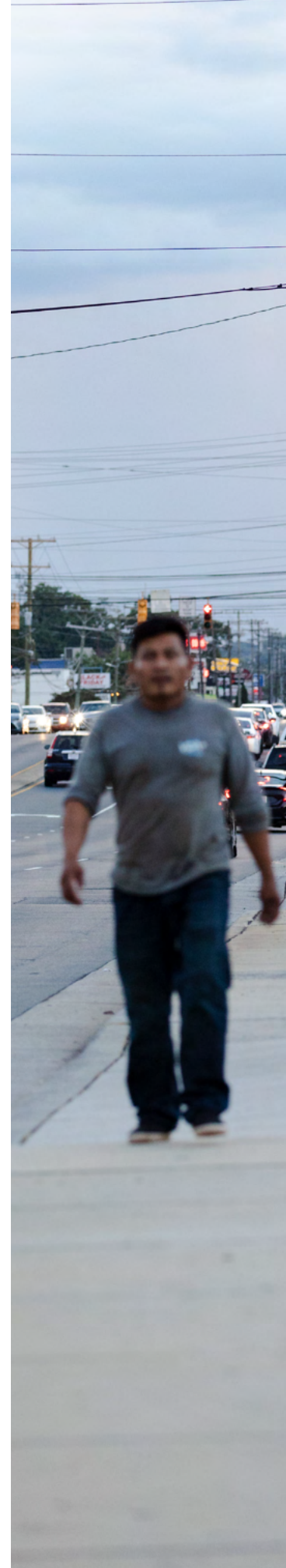
Legacy commercial outlets don't always have the staff, language, or cultural competency to cover marginalized communities. Nonprofits don't always have the staffing or audiences to support and disseminate this public service journalism. Collaboration is key.

What you can do: Designate a liaison to facilitate source-sharing and story ideas between partners. Find a topic that cuts across verticals and makes for natural collaboration like the environment, business, or sports. Adapt your approaches to different communities. Be flexible to change up a partnership if it isn't working.

05 Build trust by prioritizing humanizing and accurate language about immigration in your stories, photos, and videos.

Many outlets consciously or unconsciously use “othering” language (like the word “illegal”) in news coverage, which burns trust with community sources.

What you can do: Editors and reporters must communicate about the language they use around undocumented sources, and why the risks are real. Define American has a [toolkit](#) for that.





*South Boulevard
in Charlotte,
has some of
the highest
concentration of
immigrant-owned
businesses in the
city. August 2022.*

06 Engage your audience at the outset to help shape the story and to follow up after the story runs.

Often immigration reporting is extractive and does not benefit or respond to the needs of the subjects of the stories. Community-engaged reporting can ensure that stories respond to local needs - and brings the information back to those who need it. The process works best when it is a through-line: at the beginning, to guide the reporting project, and then after, to follow up on solutions.

What you can do: Conduct forums, surveys, and focus groups as part of the story-gathering process. Translate stories and publish in accessible formats to ensure the findings reach the community that is the subject of the reporting.

07 Support early-career reporters by providing trauma-informed training and by linking them to other immigration reporters around the country.

Covering immigration, which often involves subjects experiencing violence and facing desperate situations, can be isolating and demanding. It's also complex. There is frequent turnover in this beat. Young reporters need mentors and support to grow into this important role.

What you can do: Activate an immigration network of local reporters if it doesn't already exist. Connect with the [Dart Center](#) for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University or other organizations working on trauma training for both reporters and their editors to ensure they are prepared.

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Liz Robbins, Sarah E. Lowe, and Victoria Bouloubasis and edited by Daniela Gerson.

Define American is led by its founder, Jose Antonio Vargas, and managing director, Jenn Bender.

Define American's research is led by Sarah E. Lowe and managed by Juno Maldonado.

Define American's Journalism Partnerships program is led by Liz Robbins.

Research collaborators:

- Carolina Demography, including Rebecca Tippet, Ph.D., and Elliot N. Kent, Ph.D.
- Media Ecosystems Analysis Group, including Emily Boardman Ndulue and Fernando Bermejo, Ph.D.
- University of Florida's Center for Public Interest Communication, including Jack Barry, Ph.D., Elizabeth "Lissy" Calienes, Ann Searight Christiano, Juliana Fernandes, Ph.D., Rachel Grant, Ph.D., Annie Neimand, Ph.D., Matt Sheehan, T. Frank Waddell, Ph.D., Kim Walsh-Childers, Ph.D.

Photographs: Juan Diego Reyes, Hasham Malik, Elon University School of Communications, Jon Gardiner/UNC-Chapel Hill.

Design by Madeo.

Special thanks to P. Kim Bui, Erin Siegal McIntyre, Ethan Corey, Peter Perl, Nicco Mele, our Board of Directors, and the entire Define American team.

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To learn more about Journalism Partnerships, contact Define American's Director of Journalism Partnerships, Liz Robbins, at lizrobbins@defineamerican.com.

Define American is a culture change organization that uses the power of narrative to humanize conversations about immigrants. Our advocacy within news, entertainment and digital media is creating an America where everyone belongs.

Methodologies

Content Analysis

By Media Ecosystems Analysis Group

Media Ecosystems Analysis Group utilized a mixed-methods approach. Keyword queries were used to quantify attention to subtopics and entities. To assess narratives and more detailed article-level data, a 10% random sample of articles was manually coded and independently reviewed.

The digitally published articles from the 22 selected media sources were collected via Media Cloud (mediacloud.org) using sitemap scraping and RSS feed ingest, and via the NewsBank archive, and the publishers' websites. Articles were then scoped for those published between January 20, 2021 and January 20, 2022, the first year of the Biden-Harris administration, resulting in more than 100,000 articles. A complex keyword query was applied to filter for articles focused on immigration; articles needed to have at least three instances of one of the relevant keywords or keyword phrases to be included. This filtering narrowed the corpus to 2,007 articles. Several metrics of analysis were completed on the entire corpus. A 10% random sample was taken of the immigration stories' corpus (resulting in approximately 200 articles); the sampled articles were coded manually to complete other, more in-depth metrics of analysis.

The search terms used to find content included: complex keyword query relating to immigrants, migrants, and/or refugees. Relevancy search employed, such that articles needed at least three mentions to key terms to be included.

Timeframe of content analyzed: 1 year, content posted or published between 1/20/2021 and 1/20/2022.

The 22 news outlets analyzed were: Asheville Citizen Times, Carolina Public Press, Charlotte Observer, Enlace Latino, Fayetteville Observer, Gaston Gazette, Herald-Sun, Jmpro TV, La Noticia, News & Observer, North Carolina Health News, North Carolina Policy Watch, Que Pasa, Scalawag, Star News, WCNC, WFAE Radio, WGHP TV, Winston-Salem Journal, WUNC Radio, WUVC - Univision 40, WTVD - ABC11.

Audience Survey

By University of Florida's Center for Public Interest Communications

The purpose of the study, conducted by the University of Florida's Center for Public Interest Communication, was to understand the relationship between beliefs and attitudes about immigrants and immigration and their trust in local and national news in North Carolina. Quota sampling was conducted via an online survey of 1,160 participants using Qualtrics to mirror the population of North Carolina. The data were analyzed to examine the relationships between demographic and psychographic factors, trust in local and national news, and attitudes toward and knowledge of immigrants and immigration.

Hierarchical regression was used to test how demographic variables, media trust, institutional trust, moral values, cultural worldview, multicultural ideology, colorblind ideology, and systems thinking predict immigrant attitudes, immigration attitudes, immigration positions, support for immigration increase, and immigrant knowledge. Five total regressions were conducted – one for each outcome variable.

Audience Experiment

By University of Florida's Center for Public Interest Communications

To explore the effectiveness of storytelling on attitudes and beliefs toward immigrants and immigration, the research team also recruited participants using a Qualtrics quota panel of people living in North Carolina. We excluded respondents who had liberal views on immigration as defined in a series of questions adapted from the organization More in Common's report *Speaking to Core Beliefs on Immigration* report. For the in-group theory experiment, 179 participants were recruited. The experiment included too few people to mirror the demographics of the state. For the full experiment the demographics were: 65% female, 31% male, 82% white/Caucasian, 13% Black/African American, 3% Latinx or Hispanic heritage, 2% Asian, 25% age 18-38, 45% age 39-64, and 30% age 65+.

To manipulate various aspects of the in-group theory elements, we used a real story (original condition) published in ABC-11 News (story linked here) and created two versions: a story containing only partial elements of the in-group theory (partial condition) and a story containing just facts (just facts condition). For the partial condition story, any language that mentioned the characters of the story as in-group was removed. Examples of that were American, the NC community. For the condition of the just fact, language was changed to factual information, excluding any mentions of emotions. For the original condition, we maintained the story closely as it was originally published on ABC-11 News.

First, participants were asked to read an informed consent detailing the purpose of the study. After they consented to participate in the study, a series of pre-test questions were asked about their immigration knowledge and attitudes. After answering these questions, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three news stories. They were asked to take a moment to read the story in its entirety as they would be asked questions about it. After reading the story, participants answered a series of questions related to the story. The final block of questions asked about participants' demographics and psychographic variables. Finally, participants were shown a debriefing statement revealing that some elements of the news story they read were modified for this study and a link that they could follow to read the original story.

Demographic Analysis

By Carolina Demography

Carolina Demography created a databook containing data tables of the below indicators, including documentation on data definitions and sources:

- Foreign-born, by nationality, statewide and by NC county, 2016-2020
- Ethnicity, by ancestry reporting and/or by race reporting, 2016-2020
- Languages spoken at home by ability to speak English (Population 5 Years and Over) by NC county, 2016-2020
- Average ages of ethnic populations by reported race and ethnicity, by PUMA level
- Foreign born Latinx vs. Second generation Latinx, change from 2010, by PUMA level
- Asian foreign born vs. second generation, change from 2010, by PUMA level
- Heritages of students in schools, including:
 - Pupils in Membership by Race and Sex at LEA level
 - Pupils in Membership by Race and Sex (at School Level)
 - Pupils in Membership by Race and Sex (Charter Schools)
 - Statewide history of pupil membership by race (includes both LEA and charter totals)
 - First-generation college students*
- Farmworkers in state

* When publicly available.

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Uncovering the tactics of anti-immigration messaging
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representation on television moves audiences to action

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