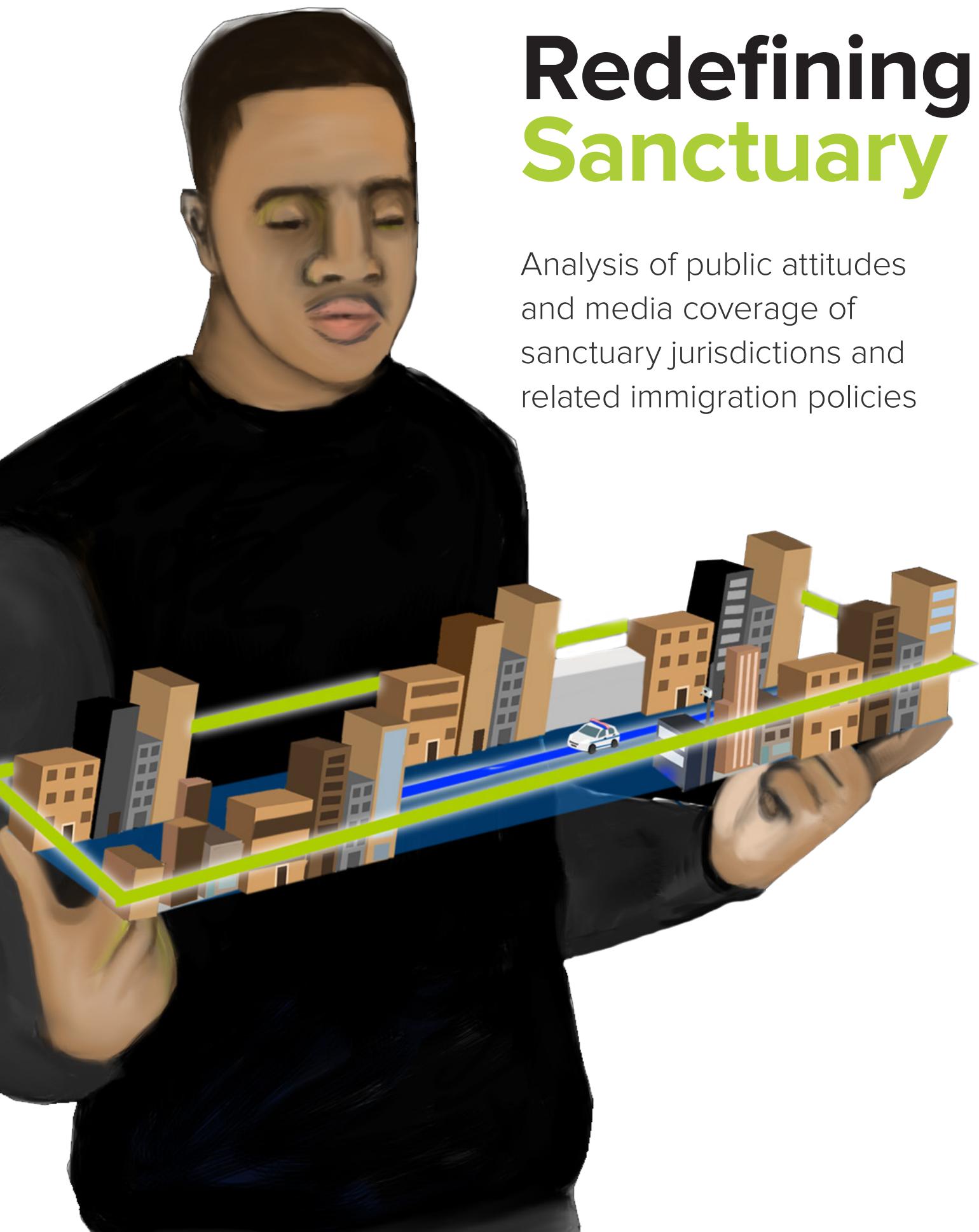




Redefining Sanctuary

Analysis of public attitudes
and media coverage of
sanctuary jurisdictions and
related immigration policies



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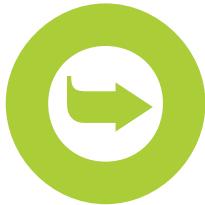
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ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY AGENDA

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2006 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds, and policy over time, the organization works with social justice groups, leaders, and movements to advance solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and corresponding solutions, uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion, and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives.

To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, go to our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.

INTRODUCTION

This past February, as media reports began to circulate detailing a surge in Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) raids in communities across the country, Americans took to social media to offer support and warnings to their neighbors. In the days that followed, as the true scope of the raids became evident, city leaders issued defiant messages critiquing the raids and reaffirming their support of immigrant communities. These efforts on the part of members of the public and elected officials crystallize the providing of refuge and safety at the core of the principle of ‘sanctuary’—a principle that defines the communities across the country, currently providing much needed legal protection to undocumented immigrants and their families.

A sanctuary jurisdiction can be defined as a locality that limits its participation in federal immigration enforcement efforts as a matter of policy. There are an estimated 47 sanctuary jurisdictions in the United States as of December 2016,⁹ which, alongside policies like Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), have enabled tens of thousands of undocumented immigrants to secure better paying jobs, and to pursue otherwise-unavailable education opportunities.¹⁰

Despite the integral role such immigration policies continue to play, the new administration has taken persistent steps to undo them. In recent months, there has been an increase in aggressive immigration enforcement policies, the latest of which includes the ending of DAPA and DACA programs initiated by President Obama.

In the face of these challenges, local governments, immigrant rights’ advocates, and policymakers have reaffirmed their commitment to the protection of immigrant communities. However, central to their continued success will be understanding how key audiences are currently thinking and talking about pro-immigration policies and immigration more broadly, and developing effective strategies to challenge anti-immigrant discourse. What issues and policies currently define the sanctuary jurisdictions debate? How does the current discussion of sanctuary jurisdictions intersect with DACA, and overall discussions of immigration in media coverage, social media discourse, and public opinion? How can pro-immigrant advocates ensure the continued support of immigrants and their families in an increasingly anti-immigrant climate? Finally, how can pro-immigrant advocates continue to uplift the voices and leadership of immigrants in a climate where many may feel reluctant to speak out?

In an effort to answer these critical questions, we embarked on a three-part analysis, which consisted of an examination of existing public opinion research, a content analysis of media coverage, and an analysis of social media discourse since January 2016.

Our analysis of existing public opinion research revealed that when asked specifically about deportation policies and levels of support for programs such as DACA, the majority of Americans support the protection of due process that sanctuary jurisdictions provide and, critically, oppose the types of aggressive deportation efforts promoted by the current administration. Our examination of social media data shows there is currently fertile ground for social justice advocates seeking to protect sanctuary jurisdictions and challenge misinformation that attempts to conflate the protection of undocumented immigrants with the promotion of crime. At the same time, our analysis of media coverage over a 20-month period suggests there is currently a pressing need for more coordinated messaging among pro-immigrant advocates.

This report begins with an overview of our findings from our analysis of social media trends over an 18-month period, followed by findings from our analysis of existing public opinion research, and mainstream media coverage. We conclude with a series of recommendations for messaging and audience engagement through social media outreach.

⁹ Kenna, Ruairi, *Politico*, “Sanctuary cities stand firm against Trump,” December 2016, <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/sanctuary-cities-trump-immigration-232449>

¹⁰ Center for American Progress, “State-by-State Analysis of the Economic Impact of DACA, DAPA, and DACA Expansion,” June 2015, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2015/06/15/114894/state-by-state-analysis-of-the-economic-impact-of-daca-dapa-and-daca-expansion/>. Retrieved June 19, 2017.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Providing a welcoming safe haven to newcomers and those in need is a principle that has defined and continues to define communities throughout the nation. Policies such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and so-called sanctuary policies adopted by municipalities across the country, have enabled millions of individuals to pursue a better life for themselves and their family. Despite the positive role such commonsense immigration policies play in the lives of all Americans, the current Administration has posed numerous threats to welcoming communities and needed programs like DACA—actions that are in direct violation of our values of equal opportunity and dignity.

In an effort to better understand how members of the public are currently thinking and talking about sanctuary policies and immigration more broadly, and how the mainstream media is currently reporting on the issues, we conducted a three-part analysis of existing public opinion research, media coverage, and social media discourse over an 18-month time frame. Central questions tackled include: What issues and policies currently define the overall immigration debate? How does the current discussion of sanctuary jurisdictions intersect with DACA, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA), and overall discussions of immigration in media coverage, social media discourse, and public opinion? How can pro-immigrant advocates ensure the continued support of immigrants and their families in an increasingly anti-immigrant climate?

Public opinion and social media discourse indicate that a plurality of Americans understand the importance of remaining a welcoming country, while the majority consistently support a pathway to citizenship for immigrants currently in the United States. Despite these positive trends, public opinion and social media data also suggest that many segments of the public's views on immigration are extremely malleable, particularly when immigration is framed in the context of crime and public safety. The conflation between immigration and public safety has come to dominate media coverage of sanctuary jurisdictions in recent months, reflecting the pressing need for coordinated messaging among pro-immigrant advocates and policymakers. In an era where anti-immigrant and openly xenophobic rhetoric is becoming more prominent in political discourse, understanding how to effectively challenge such discourse, and tell compelling and affirmative stories about the integral role immigrants play in our nation, will prove vital.

Our goal is to provide pro-immigrant advocates, policymakers, activists, and media commentators with a clear understanding of the current public discourse across a variety of media, trends over time, and strategies for how to galvanize public support for immigration policies that support all communities.

MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS INCLUDE: SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

References to “sanctuary cities” have increased significantly in social media discourse in recent months:

Between January 2016 and November 2016, references to “sanctuary cities” went from occupying five percent of the total conversation (based on the search terms included in our monitor; See: *Methodology*) to 19 percent of the total conversation.

The language associated with sanctuary jurisdictions and deportation has shifted, with references to Donald Trump and crime seeing a sharp increase in online discussions: Since February 2017, talk of crime and public safety has become even more closely tied to “sanctuary cities”. Specifically, references to “crime,” “criminal,” and “criminals” in relation to “sanctuary cities”, deportation, and the other search terms included in our monitor went from occupying just four percent of posts in January 2017 to occupying eight percent of posts during February 2017.

Online audiences are not connecting anti-sanctuary/immigration policies to the issue of racial profiling: Audiences engaging in online discussions of “sanctuary cities” and related issues are not generally connecting immigration enforcement by police to increased racial profiling. These topics currently occupy distinct clusters within our monitor, indicating that the current conversation of racial profiling (in relation to “sanctuary cities” and deportation) occupies a less prominent space within the overall discourse.

Pro-immigrant voices currently dominate online discussion of sanctuary policies, particularly on Twitter:

Between January 2016 and June 2017, a number of individuals from both the public and private sectors spoke out openly about immigration policy, the most influential of which tended to be progressive, pro-immigrant advocates, elected officials, and policymakers. Alongside individual influencers, a significant portion of the most influential online content originated from immigrant advocate organizations such as the Vera Institute and the ACLU, both organizations that topped the list of the most prolific voices on Twitter based on the volume of tweets, mentions, and potential audience reach.

Texas' SB4 legislation is a major concern of online audiences engaging in discussions related to sanctuary jurisdictions:

Within the last 18 months, Texas-related hashtags are among the top hashtags being used to discuss sanctuary jurisdictions. This is a direct result of the passage of SB4, and #SB4 is the top hashtag in our monitor, generating over 100,000 posts within the period examined. Alongside references to SB4, top hashtags also include #MAGA, #Trump, and #tcot, hashtags that have generated significantly more audience engagement than the pro-immigrant hashtag #HereToStay.

Twitter users engaging in conversations about sanctuary jurisdictions have interests that are distinct from the overall population of Twitter:

Overall, both pro-immigrant and anti-immigrant audience segments have interests that are unique from the overall population of Twitter. Within the 18-month examined, anti-immigrant Twitter users who engaged in conversations about sanctuary jurisdictions were 213 times more likely to have a strong interest in Glenn Beck than the general population of Twitter. Glenn Beck tops of the list of interests among anti-immigrant Twitter users included in our audience segment. Pro-immigrant users in comparison, were significantly more likely to have an interest in immigration law, (779 times more likely than the general population of Twitter), 115 times more likely to have a strong interest in gun safety, and 79 times more likely to have a strong interest in the Affordable Care Act compared to the general population of Twitter. Alongside gun safety and the Affordable Care Act, pro-immigrant Twitter users discussing sanctuary policies also had a strong interest in NBC News, NPR, progressive politics, and “celebrity” compared to the general population of Twitter. Pro-immigrant audiences’ shared interest in “celebrity” appears specific to celebrities and entertainers who have been outspoken on social media about social justice issues, including Lin-Manuel Miranda, Ellen DeGeneres, and Christine Teigen.

PUBLIC OPINION ANALYSIS

The public is divided on support for “sanctuary jurisdictions”, particularly when discussed in the context of crime:

Our analysis of existing public opinion research revealed that the context in which sanctuary jurisdictions and policies are discussed has a significant impact on the level of public support for such policies. For instance, when respondents were asked in one survey if they agree or disagree that “cities that arrest illegal immigrants for crimes should be required to turn them over to immigration authorities,” 80 percent of survey participants were in agreement with this statement. However, when a different survey removed references to “crime” and instead presented respondents with the option between two statements—“undocumented immigrants should be deported so there is no reason to have sanctuary cities” or “sanctuary cities are needed to provide services to undocumented immigrants while they are needed”—41 percent of respondents were in agreement with the “no reason” statement, and 50 percent agreed that sanctuary cities are needed.

There is a strong correlation between the perception of safety and the willingness and support of sanctuary jurisdictions/policies:

Survey data also indicates that the perception of crime and safety is currently playing a major role in shaping perceptions of sanctuary jurisdictions. In the same survey, when asked about their perception of the safety of sanctuary cities, 40 percent of all voters believe sanctuary communities are less safe than cities without sanctuary policies, compared to 35 percent of respondents who think the level of safety is about the same, while 17 percent believe that sanctuary communities are safer.³

¹ Harvard Harris Poll, “Inaugural Harvard-Harris Poll,” February 17, 2017

² McClatchy-Marist Poll, August 2015. Retrieved from IROPER database November 1, 2017.

³ Rasmussen Reports, “National Survey of 1,000 U.S. Likely Voters,” March, 2017, http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/immigration/march_2017/35_want_to_live_in_a_sanctuary_community. Retrieved June 16, 2017.

Low income Americans and those with less education are more likely to oppose living in sanctuary jurisdictions: Forty-one percent of individuals earning \$200K+ expressed that they favor living in a sanctuary community, compared to just 25 percent of individuals who earn under \$30,000 annually, and 34 percent of individuals earning between \$50,000-\$100,000 annually. A similar divergence in opinion is seen when examining responses based on education. Only 28 percent of respondents who are high school graduates favor living in a sanctuary city. This compares to 31 percent of individuals who graduated college, and 49 percent of individuals who attended graduate school.⁴

Americans favor a roadmap to citizenship and programs such as DACA over increased deportation efforts as a solution to undocumented immigration: In a November 2016 survey of over 1,000 registered voters, respondents were presented with the following statement: “Donald Trump has said he will repeal a policy that provides deportation relief and work authorization to immigrants who were brought to the country illegally as children....If Trump repeals this policy, these immigrants will be subject to immediate deportation, loss of jobs, and the federal government’s use of their personal information.” With this context in mind, respondents were asked their level of support for repealing the policy. Just 28 percent of respondent’s support Trump’s plans to repeal the program as of November 2016, compared to 58 percent who oppose a repeal.⁵

The majority of Americans oppose the withholding of federal funds from sanctuary jurisdictions: In an executive order issued in January 2017, the Trump administration threatened to withhold federal funding from sanctuary jurisdictions. Survey and polling data shows there is rising opposition to punitive immigration policies since Trump’s presidential victory. As of February 2017, 53 percent of those surveyed indicated they oppose the federal government cutting funds to cities that provide sanctuary for undocumented immigrants, compared to 42 percent who support the measure, and 5 percent who were unsure.⁶

Americans are ambivalent about the introduction of a “merit-based” immigration system: In recent months, Donald Trump has called for the movement toward so-called “merit-based” immigration as opposed to the current family-based system, which enables individuals to sponsor family members for entry into the United States. The “merit-based system” proposed by Trump would instead award points based on high-paying job offers, English-language ability and education—a system which if implemented could threaten the reunification of thousands of families.⁷ Polling responses indicate that Americans are ambivalent when it comes to support or opposition to a merit-based system. In an April 2017 survey, a plurality of those surveyed (44 percent) were in support of moving to a merit-based system, 37 percent favored keeping the existing family-based system, and another 18 percent were not sure about which system they preferred.⁸

MEDIA CONTENT ANALYSIS

There is significant variation in the use and definition of the term “sanctuary cities”: Media coverage between August 2016 and August 2017 exposed significant variations in the use and definition of “sanctuary cities”—a term that has now become a catchall for a variety of policies and legislation. A significant portion of media coverage focused on trying to provide clarification around what “sanctuary cities” entail and the implications of new policies for counties and cities (and to a lesser extent colleges and universities) around the country.

A focus on public safety and “rule of law” dominated media coverage related to sanctuary jurisdictions/policies between August 2016 and August 2017: The majority of coverage within this category featured an anti-immigrant spokesperson (often an elected official/policymaker), voicing concerns that “sanctuary cities” are a threat to public safety and the “rule of law.” More than half of articles within this category made references to undocumented immigrants committing crime, with several articles making specific reference to a single case - the 2015 murder of Kathryn Steinle.

⁴ Rasmussen Reports, “National Survey of 1,000 U.S. Likely Voters,” March, 2017, http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/immigration/march_2017/35_want_to_live_in_a_sanctuary_community. Retrieved June 16, 2017.

⁵ Global Strategy Group, November 2016, http://americasvoice.org/press_releases/new-poll-americans-oppose-repealing-daca-program-dreamers-58-28-margin/. Retrieved June 16, 2017.

⁶ McClatchy-Marist Poll, February 2017, <http://www.pollingreport.com/immigration.htm>. Retrieved June 1, 2017.

⁷ Barros, Aline, “Merit-based Versus Family-based Immigration Explained,” VOANews, October 11, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/merit-based-vs-family-based-immigration/4066982.html>. Retrieved November 1, 2017.

⁸ Ibid.

Anti-immigrant quotes are highly consistent in both message and source of quote: Anti-immigrant voices were extremely consistent in terms of the sources of quote, with the vast majority of quotes from anti-immigrant elected officials coming from Donald Trump and Jeff Session. Anti-immigrant advocate voices were dominated by quotes from the Center of Immigration Studies, a self-identified “independent, non-partisan” research organization that has been listed by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a hate group.

Reaction to Trump’s executive order and other anti-immigrant policies feature heavily in media coverage: The vast majority of coverage since the release of the executive order has focused on the implications the order presents for cities and counties around the country. This includes stories detailing the reaction of elected officials to the content of the executive order, and the potential loss of federal funding faced by many jurisdictions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings present several important implications for messaging and audience engagement around sanctuary cities, deportation, and related immigration policies.

NARRATIVE, MESSAGING & STORYTELLING RECOMMENDATIONS

Frame sanctuary jurisdictions in terms of Strong, Safe, and Connected Communities, while avoiding associations with crime and violence: Both public opinion research and social media data indicate that the administration’s conflation of immigration with issues of crime and public safety has gained traction in recent months, particularly following the introduction of SB4 by Texas Governor Greg Abbott. It is important to challenge and reframe the discussion, and refocus public attention on commonsense policies that already have high levels of public support. It is also necessary for immigrant rights advocates to educate persuadable audiences about pathways to citizenship, uplifting the many successes of programs like DACA. At the same time advocates should avoid myth-busting, which may simply reinforce the connection between crime and sanctuary policies in people’s minds. There are subtler ways to reframe, such as focusing on what happens when immigrants can more fully participate and contribute. This requires talking about immigrants as more than just “immigrants,” but as parents, students, neighbors, etc., in order to give an alternative idea to move to.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE INCLUDES:

VALUE: Our country is changing, getting more and more diverse. It might make some of us uncomfortable, but it is our reality, and a constant throughout our history.

PROBLEM: Politicians play on this fear, trying to divide us. They push unwise and divisive ideas like ending deferred action, defunding states which provide legal protection to undocumented immigrants, or singling out Muslim Americans because of their religion.

SOLUTION: If we take the bait on these issues, it makes our country weaker, not stronger. Our nation is stronger when every one of us can contribute and share ideas, and when everyone’s basic rights and dignity are respected. Sanctuary jurisdictions are central to protecting the rights and dignity of all members of our community, while also safeguarding against the racial profiling of people of color that laws such as Arizona’s SB 1070 invite.

ACTION: We need to embrace ideas that unify us as a diverse people and make our country stronger, and policies that ensure the safety of all Americans.

Define for your audience what sanctuary policies are and do: In order to effectively communicate the importance of sanctuary jurisdictions, we must define what such communities are, and what they provide for their residents. Sanctuaries are the last refuge of the hunted. While we want to be careful about evoking that, the connection to that place of safety when a person is hunted and exhausted is an emotionally powerful one. Drawing on these themes of safety and refuge can help audiences better understand the critical role sanctuary jurisdictions play.

Use other descriptors to describe sanctuary policies: “Sanctuary cities” has become something of a buzzword in media coverage and political discourse that often goes undefined and does not speak to the variety of ways that sanctuary policies are implemented in communities and institutions across the country. Findings from our public opinion analysis also indicate that members of the public are more likely to support policies like DACA, DAPA, and pathway to citizenship when the services the programs provide are clearly defined. Advocates should use sanctuary with other descriptors that add on to that word, like “places where everyone, including our immigrant neighbors, can contribute and participate.”

Explain how sanctuary policies benefit all residents: Our analysis of public opinion data shows strong public support for pro-immigration policies such as DACA, and opposition to widespread deportation. However, public opinion data also reveals that low-income Americans are less likely to want to reside in sanctuary jurisdictions than their higher income counterparts. This disparity is likely a product of anxieties related to competition for jobs—a source of anxiety that the new Administration has leveraged to sow fear and distrust. It is necessary to address these concerns, while also not perpetuating stereotypes about the types of jobs undocumented immigrants usually occupy. Advocates should talk about the importance of communities sticking together and not letting corporate interests and politicians divide us.

Promote sanctuary policies with other solutions that expand opportunity for all: In the survey research examined, respondents were significantly more likely to support an immigration policy when they were given the details about what the program would provide, or examples of the real-world impact on immigrant communities. Explaining in plain terms what a policy entails is a vital part of telling an affirmative story that is specific, but also a systemic.

Connect sanctuary policies to policies your audience support: A number of pro-immigrant policies receive high levels of support from the public. Lifting up these popular solutions while explaining and promoting more complex or less popular ones can help to build broader and more lasting support. Solutions with the greatest support include:

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

Pathway for citizenship for undocumented immigrants already in the country.

Include racial profiling among the problems that sanctuary policies are designed to address: Audiences engaging in online discussions about sanctuary jurisdictions and related issues are not generally connecting immigration enforcement by police to increased racial profiling. These topics currently occupy distinct clusters within our monitor, indicating that the current conversation of racial profiling (in relation to sanctuary cities and deportation) occupies a less prominent space within the overall discourse. In addition, our analysis of media coverage revealed that reporting on racial profiling in relation to anti-immigration legislation only occupied a fraction of media reports. In order to better educate the public on the dangers of legislation such as Texas SB4, it is necessary to connect the dots for engaged audiences and detail the intersection between heightened policing of immigrant communities and racial profiling.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE:

Racial profiling harms all Americans: It violates the American value of equal justice that we all depend on. It disrespects and discriminates against millions of young people and others around the country. It threatens public safety and can ruin people’s lives. It is time to end racial profiling and focus law enforcement on evidence and public safety.

We need to be clear: it is unacceptable for those who enforce our laws to stereotype people based on the color of their skin, religion, or nation of origin. Law enforcement should act on facts and evidence, not racial bias. If one group can be singled out based on race or ethnicity or religion, none of us will be safe to enjoy the rights that the United States stands for. The administration’s attacks on counties and cities that provide support to undocumented immigrants and their families, and policies such as Texas’ SB4, threaten the freedom of all of us.

We are stronger when we find ways to encourage participation and contribution, not ways to divide, exclude and discriminate. We have to condemn, in the strongest terms, those who engage in and encourage racist tactics.

Is it right for a military veteran to be asked for his papers just because he is of Mexican heritage? Is it right for a mother of Asian or Latino background who speaks with an accent to get asked for her papers—right in front of her children—when her white friend next to her does not? Is it right that immigrants who work hard and aspire to be citizens live in daily fear of being stopped, arrested, and deported away from their loved ones? Is it right to create a culture of suspicion in an America that becomes more diverse every day? No. Anyone who engages in or encourages discrimination is flat out wrong. That is not who we are as a country.

SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVE AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Lead with values: Identify the core values of: diversity, dignity, community, and family. Starting social media posts with a values-based message reaches persuadable audiences and crosses over into their interests.

Use values-based and action-oriented hashtags: Draw social media audiences in with a values-based hashtag to alert them as to why they should care about the issue. One example of a popular and effective values-based hashtag is #RefugeesWelcome. Action-oriented hashtags create a sense of urgency and purpose. Making actions clear and concise on social media allow users to actively participate in the cause. Action-oriented hashtags can also provide context for who is accountable for the problem and what is at stake. For example, #StopICECold sends a clear message about ICE detention and bringing an end to ICE raids.

Avoid myth-busting: In an era of social media trolls and bots, falling into the trap of a back and forth debate on social media distracts from the message. Avoid using hashtags that reinforce the opposition's narrative. As a rule of thumb, hashtags that include the words "No" and "Not" often myth bust.

Use (and create) hashtags that evoke a narrative: The #BlackLivesMatter movement has shown us that values-based hashtags amplify movements throughout and even beyond social media. Black Lives Matter tells a full story and is a complete sentence. It reinforces the narrative that Black lives do matter, although Black people have not been treated with respect since being brought to the country as slaves. Immigration hashtags that evoke similar stories are: #HereToStay, #KeepFamiliesTogether, #RefugeesWelcome, and #UndocumentedAndUnafraid.

Promote popular hashtags: The #HereToStay hashtag has grown in popularity in recent months, due in large part to the efforts of pro-immigrant advocacy organizations. Leveraging this existing popularity could help those seeking to reach new online audiences already engaged in the discussions concerning immigration and sanctuary jurisdictions.

Humanize the issue by creating multimedia: Empathy is valuable currency on social media as it creates a personal connection to the issue. Photo and video are successful ways to portray the humanity of immigrants. Define American's Undocujoy series is a prime example of how showing immigrants in their day to day lives makes a powerful impact.

ENGAGING STRATEGIC AUDIENCES

Key to building wider public support for pro-immigration policies is activating the base of existing supporters while persuading undecided groups over time. That, in turn, requires prioritizing strategic audiences by:

Activating the base: Our analysis of existing public opinion research indicates that Latinx Americans, Black Americans, and self-identified Democrats are highly supportive of the continuation of policies intended to protect undocumented immigrant communities, as well as efforts to challenge the Trump's anti-immigrant actions. These audiences should be prioritized in outreach.

Incorporating the perspectives of faith communities: Faith leaders/communities have emerged as an important pro-immigrant voice in both news media and social media discourse. Drawing on the religious roots of the concept of sanctuary and highlighting the important role faith-based communities continue to play in providing safety and refuge to immigrant communities is a strategy to reach new audiences within faith communities.