

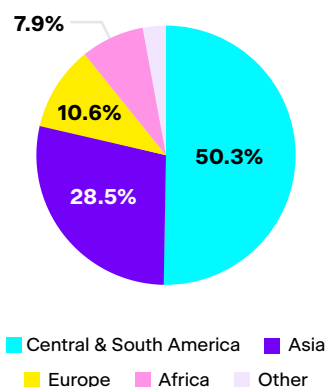
Reimagining Immigration News

North Carolina's Case for the Nation

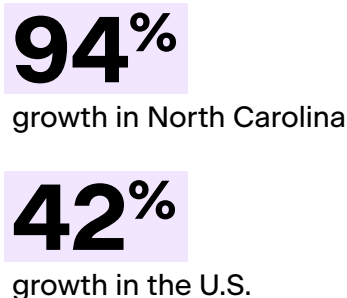
The demographics of the United States are changing amid a rise in xenophobia and misinformation – especially about immigrants. Journalists have a responsibility to cover the diversity of their communities accurately and sensitively. This isn't easy when local news outlets are disappearing or under-resourced. But it's essential.

We studied one state – North Carolina – to observe the challenges inherent in its ecosystem of immigration news and to offer solutions applicable to news leaders throughout the country. Here's what we found:

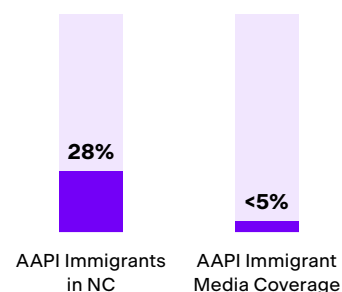
Immigrants to North Carolina are from diverse backgrounds.



Between 2000-2020, North Carolina's immigrant population nearly doubled.



Immigration coverage does not reflect the demographic reality of many immigrants in North Carolina.



Key Findings

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

→ Immigration coverage tends to focus on the Latinx population because it's the largest immigrant community in the state (50.2%). **Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) make up a full 28.5%** of the immigrant community, yet they're included in fewer than 5% of immigration stories.

→ Negative immigration reporting often **reinforces stereotypes**, like immigrants as criminals or victims of crime.

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

→ **Collaborations with bilingual news outlets** can solve coverage gaps or broker trust with marginalized communities.

→ Our survey found that news consumers who believe they know a lot about immigration are actually the **most likely to believe stereotypes**.

→ 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.





Recommendations

For Reporters, Editors, & News Directors

01 Integrate immigration coverage into every beat.

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.

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.

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.

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

04 Activate collaborations to reach underrepresented communities.

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: Environmental issues. Business. 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.

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.

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

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.

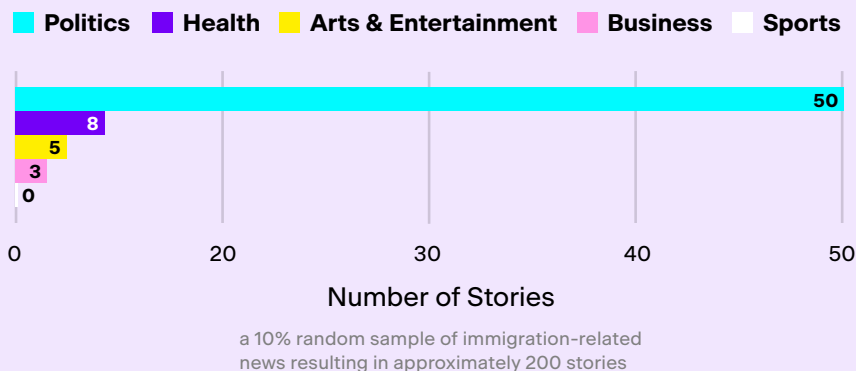
07 Support early-career reporters by providing trauma-informed training and by linking them to other immigration reporters around the country.

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.

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.



Integrate. Collaborate. Educate.

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 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.

About & Contact

Define American

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.

We believe in the power of storytelling and its ability to shape culture and landscape in ways that directly impact American lives.

Journalism Partnerships

Covering immigration is as complex as the laws that govern it. Journalists must grapple with swiftly-changing policies amid a fiercely competitive news climate, and a polarized public distrustful of the media.

Our Journalism Partnerships program works with the media to help them cover stories about immigrants in an accurate, humanizing way. We conduct training sessions for newsrooms on best practices for reporting on – and for – immigrant communities.

Our services help reporters present thoughtful stories with journalistic integrity and compassionate storytelling:

- Toolkit on ethical use of anonymous sources
- Curated source lists
- Topical fact sheets
- Newsroom trainings
- Campus journalism group
Zoom or in-person sessions
- Panel moderating

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