

Change the Narrative, Change the World 2022

The Power of Immigrant Representation
on Television



**DEFINE
AMERICAN**

USC
Annenberg
Norman Lear Center

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

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Lori Tan Chinn and Awkwafina in *Awkwafina Is Nora from Queens* (Photo: Comedy Central)



Executive Summary

Define American's third study with the University of Southern California's Norman Lear Center finds immigrant representation on television has shifted in important ways.

Television is a powerful storytelling tool. When the pandemic confined us to our couches, television was a lifeline to the world and also an escape from it. Network and cable television reached 122.4 million¹ U.S. homes in the 2021-2022 season, making up 64% of all time spent on TV, with streaming making up 26%.²

Define American believes that pop culture is a lens through which we see the world. From our body of research, we know that the intimacy of television has the power to create meaningful connection between fictional characters and captive audiences. It can even help viewers understand how to feel about other cultures and people with differing worldviews from their own.

To understand both how often and how well immigrant characters are represented on television and streaming, we analyzed 167 characters across 169 episodes of 79 scripted series that aired between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2022.³ Over the course of four years of research, our findings show shifts – both positive and negative – in immigrant representation on television. Building on our previous research, we also conducted an audience survey to examine the impact of four television series on attitudes toward immigrants and immigration. We surveyed 1,272 U.S. television viewers of: *Bob Hearts Abishola* (CBS), *Never Have I Ever* (Netflix), *Roswell, New Mexico* (The CW), and *The Cleaning Lady* (FOX).

¹ Stoll, J. (2022). [Number of TV households in the U.S. 2000-2022](#). Statista.

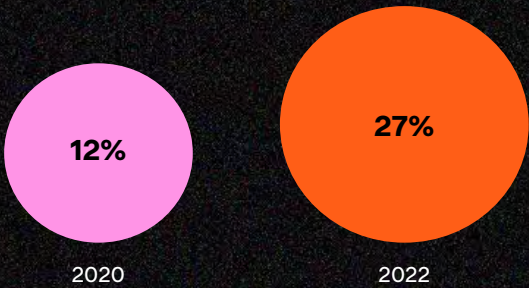
² The Gauge. (2021). [The Gauge shows streaming is taking a seat at the table](#). Nielsen.

³ Because of the small sample size in the 2020-2021 season (largely due to pandemic-related disruptions in production), data are collapsed across the two seasons for all analyses, referred to in this report as the year they were released: 2022. The 2018-2019 season is referred to as the year they were released: 2020. The 2017-2018 season is referred to as the year they were released: 2018

Representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) immigrant characters on television has more than doubled since our 2020 study.

These gains are a step forward for Asian American representation; however, specifically Pacific Islander, or Pasifika, representation is lacking and is often erased from broader AAPI discourse.

AAPI Immigrant Characters



There are twice as many Black immigrant characters on television than there were in 2020.

The growing representation of Black immigrant characters is in large part due to the sitcom *Bob Hearts Abishola*, from creator Gina Yashere. The television landscape also saw the inclusion of three Black undocumented characters, whereas our previous research found no representation.

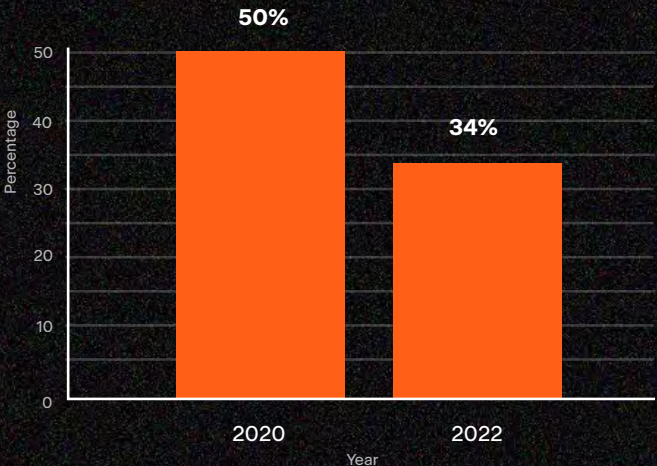
Black Immigrant Characters



Representation of Latine⁴ immigrant characters has plummeted since 2020.

In reality,⁵ Latine immigrants comprise 44% of all U.S. immigrants.

Latine Immigrant Characters



⁴ Also known as Latinx. Define American uses “Latine,” which originated within the Latine genderqueer community, because it’s easier to conjugate in Spanish and due to criticisms of the anglicization of “Latinx.” Like identity, language is constantly evolving, and we look forward to seeing how this conversation continues.

⁵ When we compare on-screen numbers with “reality” in this report, we are specifically referring to the latest available U.S. statistics and projected counts.

We saw slight but notable improvements in representation of communities previously invisible on U.S. television.

In our previous research, many groups within the larger immigrant community were missing from the television landscape. We have seen improvements, but these minor increases are not enough and only the beginning of the road toward meaningful representation.

Immigrant characters with disabilities



3 in 2020



5 in 2022

Undocumented Black immigrant characters



0 in 2020



3 in 2022

Transgender immigrant characters⁶



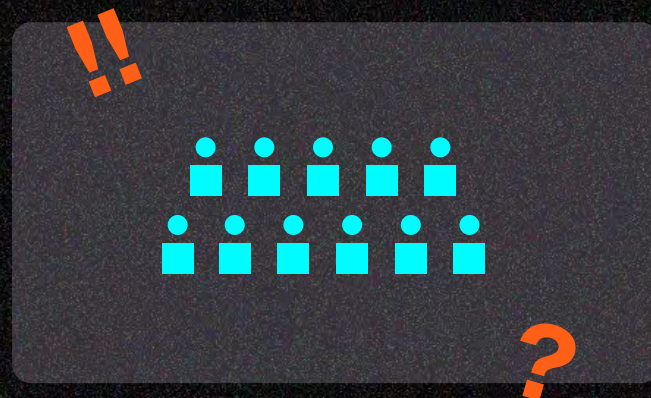
0 in 2020



2 in 2022

Increased representation is not always better.

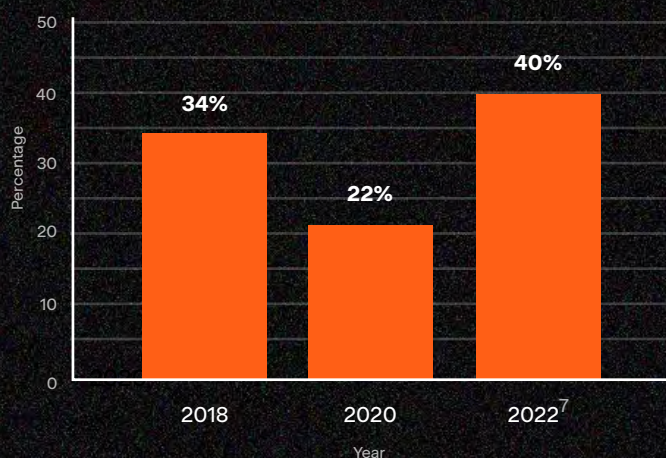
When immigrant characters are largely depicted in reductive or stereotypical ways, audiences could develop inaccurate perceptions of immigrants and their experiences.



Immigrant characters associated with crime is at an all-time high.

We celebrated the dramatic drop in depictions of immigrant characters associated with crimes in 2020. Unfortunately, the trend did not continue. Additionally, six times as many immigrant characters were featured in crime shows and procedurals in 2022 when compared to 2020.

Immigrant Characters Associated with Crime

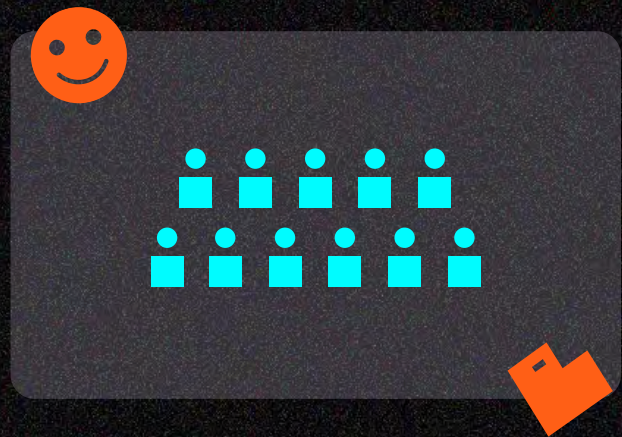


⁶ There was also a transgender, nonbinary, immigrant character in Freeform's *Party of Five*, which premiered in early 2020, falling outside of our study window.

⁷ Because of the small sample size in the 2020-2021 season (largely due to pandemic-related disruptions in production), data are collapsed across the two seasons for all analyses, referred to in this report as the year it was released: 2022. The 2018-2019 season is referred to as the year it was released: 2020.

Viewers of shows that center immigrant experiences had a deeper understanding of real immigrants' lives and more positive attitudes toward immigrants in the U.S.

In particular, a large portion of viewers felt the shows increased their understanding of the sacrifices people make to emigrate.⁸



Compared to regular TV viewers who did not watch these shows...



Viewers of *Bob Hearts Abishola* were more likely to agree that immigrants contribute to American society.

Viewers of *Bob Hearts Abishola* also experienced strong parasocial interaction – a sense of friendship – with Abishola. The more feelings of friendship viewers experienced, the more likely they were to believe immigrants in real life contribute to society and that diversity is a valuable asset.



Viewers of *Never Have I Ever* were more likely to report being comfortable sending their children to a school where the majority of students are immigrants, and support increased immigration.

Comfort with sending their children to a majority immigrant school was driven in part by parasocial interaction with Nalini, mother of Devi. With regard to support for increased immigration, these feelings of friendship with Nalini partially compensated for limited real-life contact with immigrants. Specifically, stronger feelings of friendship were associated with greater support for immigration, primarily among those who have few or no relationships with immigrants in reality.



Viewers of *Roswell, New Mexico* reported greater knowledge of immigration-related issues and were more likely to agree that diversity is a valuable asset to society.

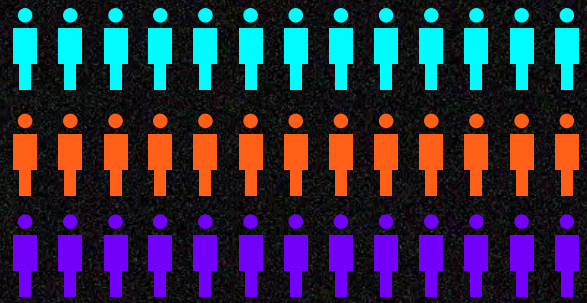
Additionally viewers of *The Cleaning Lady* reported...



The show increased their understanding of what Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.) raids look like and what it's like in an immigration detention center.

⁸ Depending on the show, this proportion ranged from 44% to 61%.

In almost all cases, the impact of exposure to these shows held across audiences of varying political ideologies.



Beyond the four primary shows of interest, we asked viewers whether they watched any of 12 additional shows featuring regular or recurring immigrant characters.

The more of these 12 shows viewers watched, the more they reported:

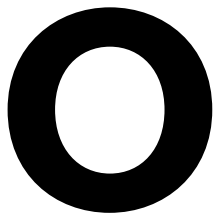
- Believing that diversity is a valuable asset to society
- Knowledge of immigration-related issues
- Taking actions in support of immigrants in the U.S. in the last year



Introduction



Elodie Yung in *The Cleaning Lady* (Photo: Fox)



ur last round of research with the USC Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project culminated in the [*Change the Narrative, Change the World*](#) report⁹ released in 2020, after the

height of forced separation of immigrant children from their families at the U.S.-Mexico border. The television landscape of 2018-2019 reflected this crisis.

Nearly a quarter of all immigrant characters on television during the 2018-2019 season were seen as being imprisoned in detention centers. The most commonly represented immigration issues included: deportation (nearly a third of all storylines), I.C.E., and mentions of the terms “illegal” (22%) and “undocumented” (17%).

And audiences were not passive viewers. As the title of the report suggests, audiences mirrored the passion felt by show creators, reacting strongly to the political injustices of immigrant families they saw on television. We studied the impact of three shows with immigration storylines. For each show, those who saw the immigration storyline were more likely to take actions related to immigration and had more inclusive attitudes toward immigrants than those who did not. Additionally, the more shows with immigration storylines participants saw, the more likely they were to take immigration-related actions.

The repercussions of family separation are very real for the 45 million immigrants who reside in the United States. Television bridged a divide, creating an extra layer of understanding of immigrant lives for general audiences. If politics truly are downstream from culture, Americans spoke through their stories and their actions.

We thought we had seen the worst.

⁹ Rosenthal, E. L., Rogers, A. A., Peterson, E., Watson-Currie, E., & Shin, H. (2020). *Change the narrative, change the world: How immigrant representation on television moves audiences to action*. USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center & Define American.

2018

- Immigrant children separated from their families under “Zero Tolerance” policy

2020

- COVID-19 pandemic
- Title 42 barring entry to U.S. borders
- Murder of George Floyd and countless other Black people in the U.S.
- Rise in anti-Asian hate crimes

2021

- January 6 riot at the Capitol
- Mass shootings in Georgia, Boulder, and throughout the country
- Images of Afghan refugees fleeing after the fall of Kabul, and those left behind
- Inhumane treatment of Haitian and other Black immigrants at the U.S. border

2022

- A war on civilians in Ukraine

Following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and brutality toward countless other Black people in America, the country found itself facing a racial reckoning. In response to demands for social justice, corporate America, including many within the entertainment industry, shared public statements of solidarity with communities of color.

Meanwhile, the rise in hate crimes against the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community continued. With every instance of public outrage in reaction to racial injustice came more corporate statements of solidarity — and the public began to hold the industry accountable by demanding action, not just statements.^{10, 11}

Many in Hollywood, facing this increased pressure and scrutiny, prioritized diverse hiring, acknowledged the industry's complicity in systemic racism, and committed to promoting more inclusive storytelling in television.

Has this newfound accountability in the industry created lasting changes in its content and a long-term commitment to the communities this content represents?

In Define American's 2020 research, we found that, relative to reality, immigrant characters were overcriminalized; AAPI immigrant characters were underrepresented; Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) immigrant characters were frequently stereotyped; and

several communities were not represented at all. Undocumented Black immigrants, immigrants with disabilities, and transgender immigrant characters were largely invisible.

Communications scholars describe the phenomenon of invisibility in media representation as symbolic annihilation,¹² a theory that a lack of representation in popular media erases the existence of communities from society's cultural imagination. Not to be confused with stereotyping, symbolic annihilation specifically refers to the absence of characters and stories.

When characters and communities are underrepresented, it can render their real-life counterparts invisible to society, and limit what they might envision for themselves. And when these characters and communities are overrepresented, it can place their real-life counterparts under unfair pressure and give society a false sense of knowledge about immigrants.

So, two years later, where do we stand?

With the country's racial reckoning, a change in Presidential administration, and continued gridlock on immigration policy, how accurately does television reflect the cultural landscape of our country and the immigrant communities within it?

For this round of research, we built on our previous studies, conducting both our third content analysis examining immigrant characters and immigration-related storylines

¹⁰ Staff. (2021). [How brands and agencies responded to racial injustice in the first month following George Floyd's death](#). Ad Age.

¹¹ Anderson, T. (2020). [Does Hollywood really believe Black lives matter? Social media solidarity isn't enough](#). KCRW.

¹² Means Coleman, R., & Chivers Yochim, E. (2008). The symbolic annihilation of race: A review of the "Blackness" literature. *African American Research Perspectives*, 12, 1-10.

on television; and an audience survey examining the impact of shows with prominent and nuanced immigrant characters on audiences' immigration-related knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

At Define American, we consult with entertainment industry creatives to help develop more humanized immigrant characters. Together, we navigate complex immigration-related storylines, ensuring accurate and authentic portrayals of immigrants on screen, with the goal of creating positive and long-lasting cultural change. To date, we've consulted on over 100 film and television projects across 23 networks, studios, and streaming platforms.

Our research findings guide our consulting practices, and it is our hope that they also provide helpful resources to creatives in

bringing to life complex, compelling, and authentic immigrant stories and characters.

The findings of this report show much to celebrate in recent shifts on television and also much work still ahead to fully capture the details and nuance of our immigrant communities at large.



Maya Erskine and Mutsuko Erskine in *PEN15* (Photo: Hulu)

Folake Olowofoyeku and Billy Gardell in *Bob Hearts Abishola* (Photo: CBS)

Immigrant Representation on Television

Content Analysis

Pandemic-related production disruptions led to a sparse 2020-2021 television season. Due to significantly fewer shows in production during this time, as well as delayed airdates,¹³ we decided to combine the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 television seasons in this analysis. This resulted in a total sample of 167 unique immigrant characters appearing in 169 episodes of 79 television series.

Role Prominence

We built on our previous research by taking a closer look at the prominence of immigrant characters. A positive finding was that **more than two-thirds (69%) of immigrant characters on television were series regulars or recurring characters and consequential to the plot.** Further, the vast majority (84%) of immigrant characters were interconnected with other characters, showing

personal relationships that created more well-rounded characters. This is important because our past research around the character of Mateo on *Superstore* (NBC) and our current research (see “The Impact of Immigrant Characters”) indicates that when audiences become invested in a character and develop a parasocial relationship – a feeling of friendship or kinship – they are more likely to feel comfortable with similar people in real life.

¹³ White, P. (2020). [Coronavirus shutdown will delay 60% of U.S. and global drama as Scripted Hangover set to extend well in 2021, Data Shows](#). Deadline.

Race

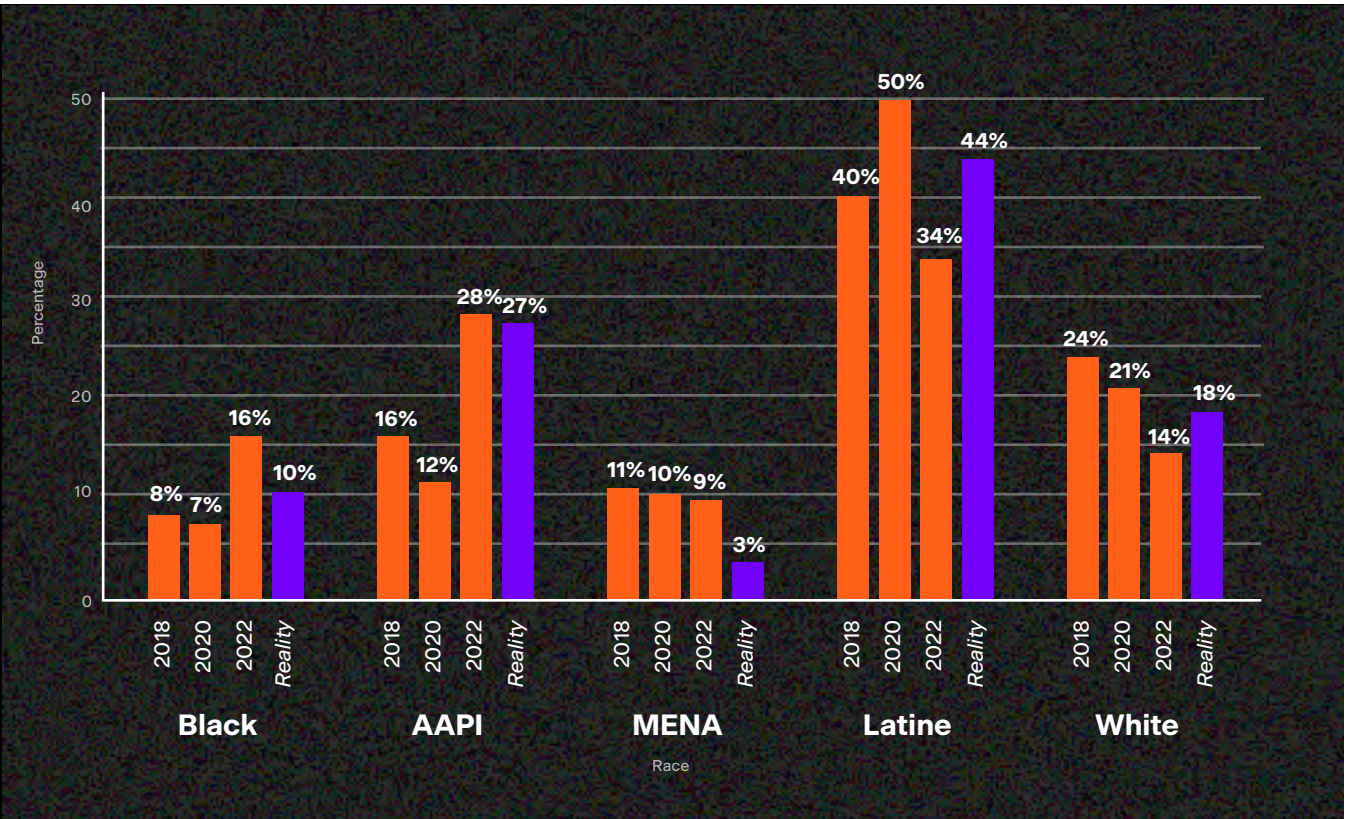
The U.S. federal government has a checkered history of using classification systems that conflate race and ethnicity, erase communities, and dilute the true diversity that defines the United States.¹³ However, to enable comparisons between on-screen representation and real-life statistics, we use census categories to capture characters' race.

Since 2020, there have been dramatic shifts in the racial composition of immigrant characters on television. The data show some increases for Black and Asian and Pacific Islander (AAPI)

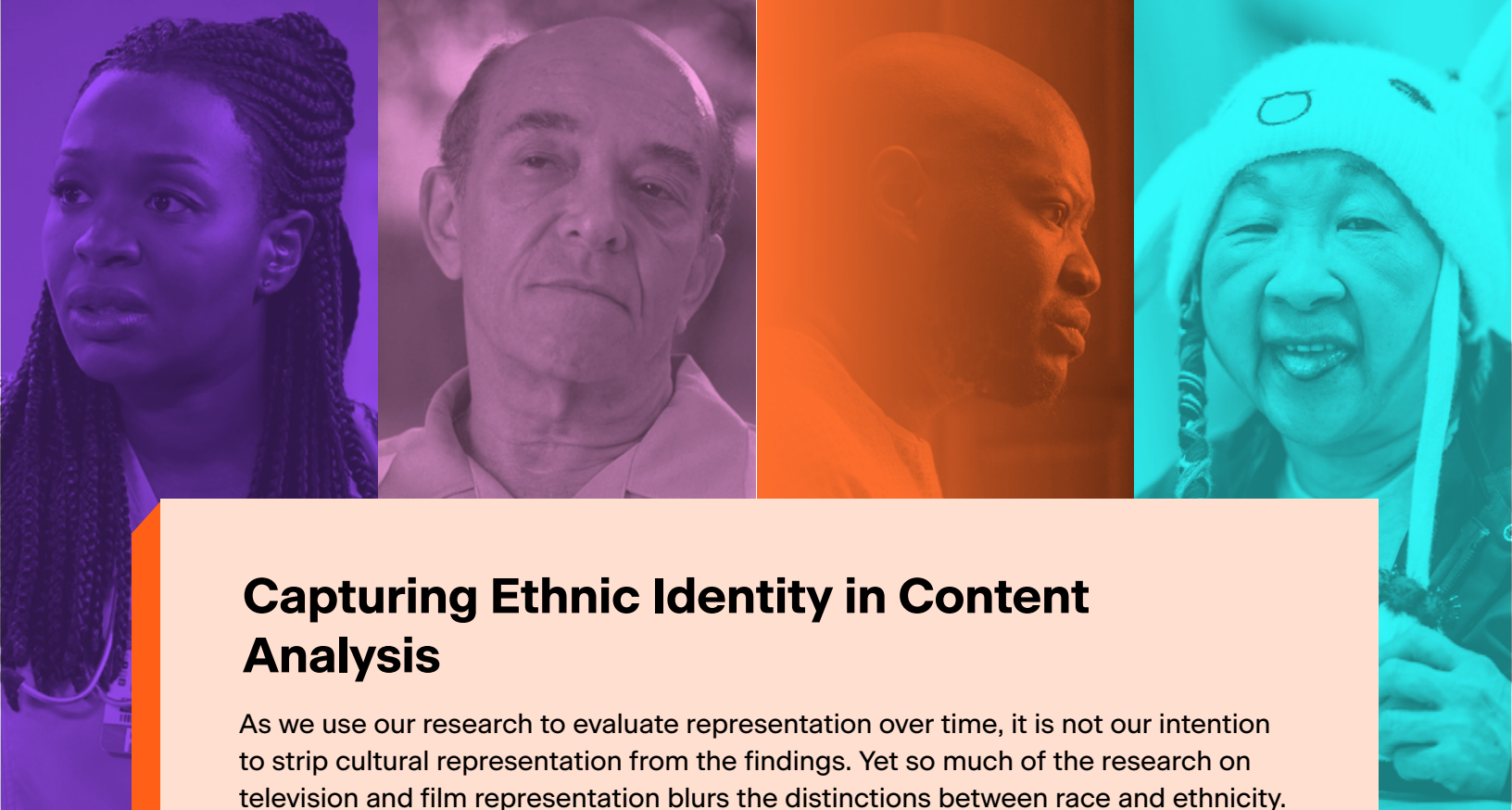
immigrant characters – previously the two most underrepresented groups on screen relative to real life. However, the gap has widened for Latine immigrant characters.

While on-screen representation does not necessarily need to mirror reality, a lack of representation may lead to a lack of understanding of immigrant groups in real life. Therefore, we use reality as a barometer for assessing representation in this research.

Immigrant Representation on Television



¹⁴ Mays V.M., Ponce N.A., Washington, D.L., & Cochran, S.D. (2003). [Classification of race and ethnicity: implications for public health](#). Annu Rev Public Health. 24:83-110.



Capturing Ethnic Identity in Content Analysis

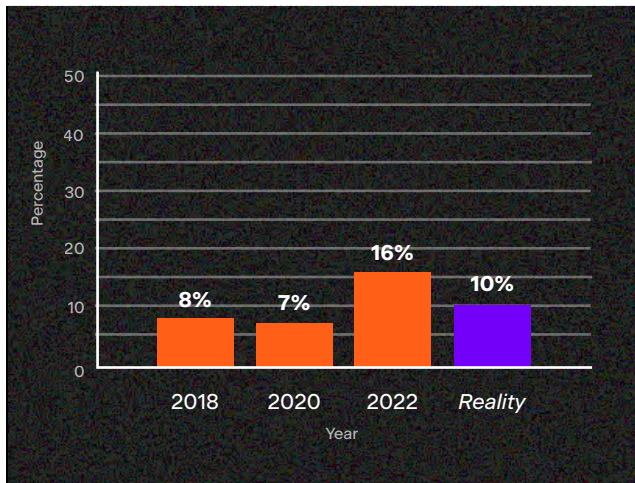
As we use our research to evaluate representation over time, it is not our intention to strip cultural representation from the findings. Yet so much of the research on television and film representation blurs the distinctions between race and ethnicity.

While some evidence of ethnic identity was common in the content we analyzed, explicit references to specific ethnic categories or groups were not always common. For example, we may know the ethnicity of an actor who self-identifies as Afro-Latine, but we cannot conclude that a character they play is also Afro-Latine unless the character explicitly identifies as Afro-Latine. For the purposes of being precise and methodical, and because we acknowledge that ethnic identity can be nuanced and interpreted differently from individual to individual, we do not make any assumptions about ethnicity in our data.

Within each racial category, we note the countries of origin of all characters when explicitly stated. Country of origin is an imperfect proxy for ethnicity, as ethnic identity is far more complex. Ethnicity often weaves in shared language, religion, and other cultural customs, and cannot always be discerned from nationality. However, country of origin is the most readily available indicator by which we can attempt to understand the ethnicity of immigrant characters.

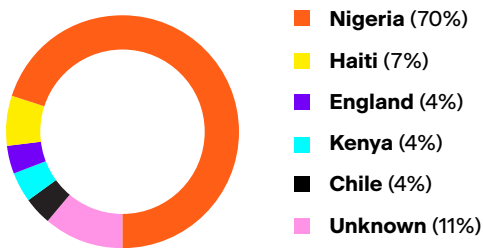
In our work to bring nuance and authenticity to television portrayals of the immigrant experience, we are committed to working towards enriching scholarship in the area of ethnic representation. Our findings just scratch the surface and suggest that much work is still needed to capture the full complexity of ethnicity both on screen and in scholarly research.

Black Immigrant Characters



Country of Origin of Black Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



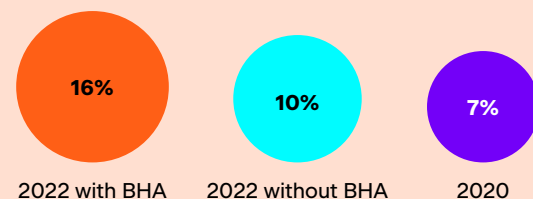
Black Immigrant Characters

The proportion of immigrant characters who were Black more than doubled since 2020 from 7% to 16%. In reality, Black immigrants comprise 10%¹⁵ of the immigrant population and one in 10¹⁶ Black people in the U.S. is an immigrant.

While our previous research found no undocumented Black characters, we identified three such characters in 2022: Esther from *The Cleaning Lady*, Temi from *New Amsterdam* (NBC), and Martine Epps from *A Million Little Things* (ABC).¹⁷

One show, *Bob Hearts Abishola*, accounted for 41% of Black immigrant characters, including the titular Abishola and another 10 Nigerian immigrant characters. Even without this show, Black immigrant characters would still make up 10% of immigrant characters on television.

Percentage of immigrant characters who were Black, with and without *Bob Hearts Abishola*:

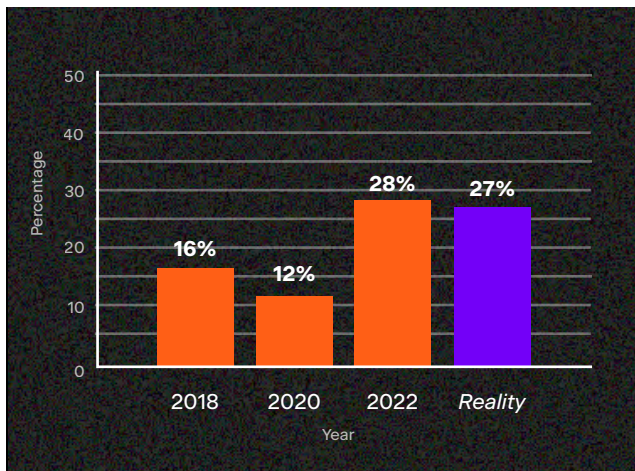


¹⁵ Budiman, A., Tamir, C., Mora, L., & Noe-Bustamante. (2020). [Facts on U.S. immigrants, 2018: Statistical portrait of the foreign-born population in the United States](#). Pew Research Center.

¹⁶ Tamir, C. (January 2022). [Key findings about Black immigrants in the U.S.](#) Pew Research Center.

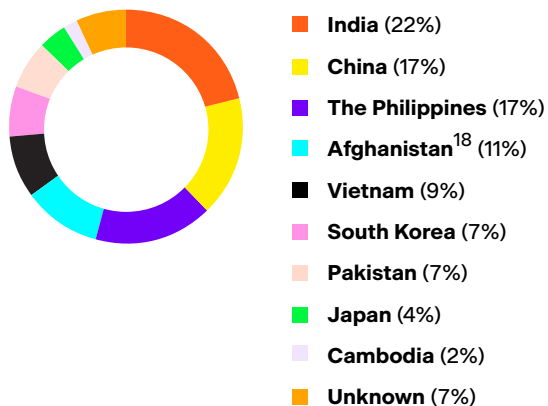
¹⁷ Define American consulted on the storyline around Martine and her son Tyrell on *A Million Little Things*.

AAPI Immigrant Characters



Country of Origin of AAPI Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Immigrant Characters

Representation of Asian American and Pacific Islander immigrant characters more than doubled, from 12% in 2020 to 28% in 2022. This is now consistent with reality: 27% of U.S. immigrants are AAPI.¹⁹ By the year 2055, Asian Americans alone are projected to make up 36% of all immigrants in the U.S., making them the largest immigrant group in the country, even before the inclusion of Pacific Islanders.²⁰

These gains are a step forward for Asian American representation; however, specifically Pacific Islander, or Pasifika, representation is lacking²¹ and is often erased from broader AAPI discourse.²²

¹⁸ We acknowledge that immigrants from Central Asia can often self-identify as AAPI or MENA depending on their specific ethnic origin groups; however, because we could not ascertain this level of detail, we have coded all characters from countries in Asia – including Central Asia – as AAPI.

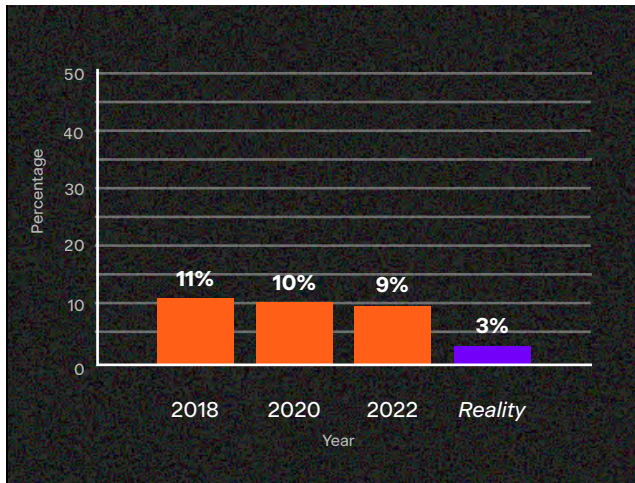
¹⁹ Esterline, C., & Batalova, J. (2022). [Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States](#). Migration Policy Institute.

²⁰ Budiman, A., & Ruiz, N.G. (2022). [Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population](#). Pew Research Center.

²¹ Our methodology excludes all shows that are set in the future. However, we want to recognize that there was a prominent Samoan immigrant character that appeared in several episodes of *Young Rock* (NBC), Lia Maivia — based on Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's real-life grandmother and played by actor Ana Tuisila. Unfortunately, because the show was partially set in the future it was excluded from our analysis.

²² Fanene Schmidt, Kristian. (2022). [Pacific Islanders deserve to be represented on screen, but here's what needs to happen now](#). Huffington Post.

MENA Immigrant Characters

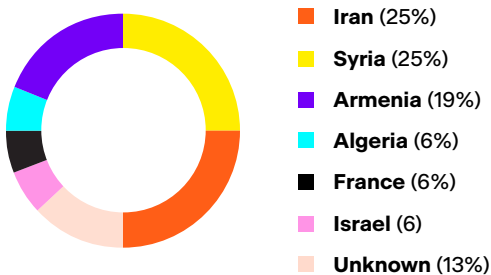


Middle Eastern/ North African (MENA) Immigrant Characters

Nine percent of immigrant characters were Middle Eastern/North African. Unfortunately many of these characters lean into harmful stereotypes. For instance, multiple MENA characters (as well as Afghan immigrant characters that are coded in this report as AAPI) were represented as terrorists and suspected terrorists in the television show *FBI: Most Wanted* (CBS).

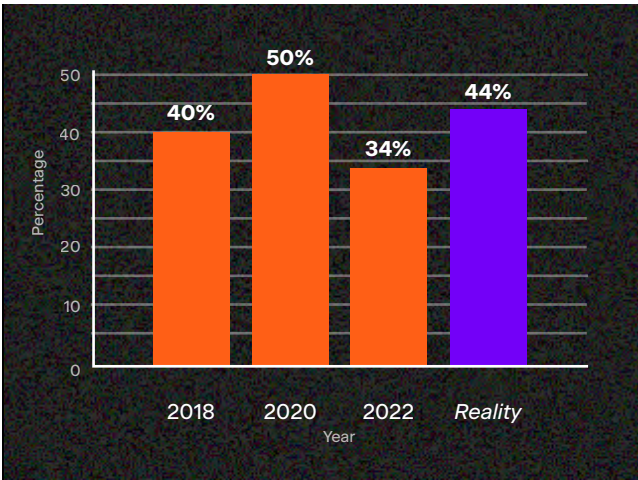
Country of Origin of MENA Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



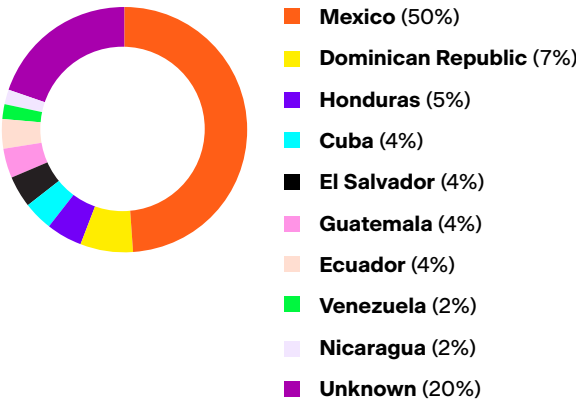
Aisha Dee, Nikohl Boosheri and Katie Stevens in *The Bold Type*
(Photo: Freeform/Panagiotis Pantazidis)

Latine Immigrant Characters



Country of Origin of Latine Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



Latine Immigrant Characters

Latine is not a race but a broad ethnic category that encompasses numerous ethnic identities. It is included here under race to enable comparisons with real-world census data. We provide further context on Latine ethnic identities in the next page.

Latine characters account for the largest proportion of immigrants in our sample (34%), but this still falls below the 44% of U.S. immigrants who are Latine. In our previous research, Latine immigrant characters outpaced the U.S. Latine immigrant population. However, many depictions of Latine immigrants on television are unfortunately stereotypical, involving crime and/or with storylines centered along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Moreover, no characters explicitly identified as Afro-Latine immigrants, and no Latine characters were depicted to be AAPI or Middle Eastern or North African (MENA). Where the Latine immigrant community is rich in ethnic and racial diversity, its representation on television lacks the depth of intersectionality.²³

²³ Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality*. John Wiley & Sons

Why are fan-favorite shows that center Latine diasporas getting canceled?

After years of erasure, misrepresentation, and harmful stereotypes, it finally felt as though we were starting to see a wide range of nuanced, humanized, intersectional depictions of Latine and Latine immigrant characters on screen. But since our last report, many Latine-centered shows have been canceled.

~~*Diary of a Future President* (Disney+)~~

~~*Gentefied* (Netflix)~~

~~*Gordita Chronicles* (HBO Max)~~

~~*Mr. Iglesias* (Netflix)~~

~~*On My Block* (Netflix)~~

~~*One Day at a Time* (Pop, Netflix)~~

~~*Party of Five* (Freeform)~~

~~*Promised Land* (ABC)~~

~~*Roswell, New Mexico* (The CW)~~

~~*The Baker and the Beauty* (ABC)~~

~~*The Expanding Universe of Ashley*~~

~~*Garcia* (Netflix)~~

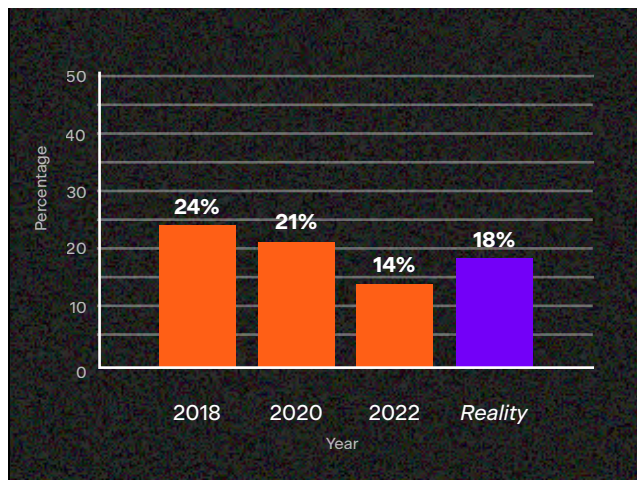
~~*Vida* (Starz)~~

Our findings revealed a drop in Latine immigrant character representation on television since 2020. Unfortunately, this is on par with broader representation of all Latine leads, co-leads, showrunners, directors and executives in television also lagging behind reality.^{24, 25} So why are so many shows being canceled? Research from the Latino Donor Collaborative points to a “consistent lack of representation in-front-of and behind the camera.” Until a commitment to representation is sustained at all levels of the creative development and production hierarchies, with consistency over time, we might continue to see the cancellation of shows that truly matter to how we view Latine communities and how the communities see themselves on television.

²⁴ United States Government Accountability Office. (2022). [Workforce diversity: Hispanic workers are underrepresented in the media, and more data are needed for federal enforcement efforts.](#)

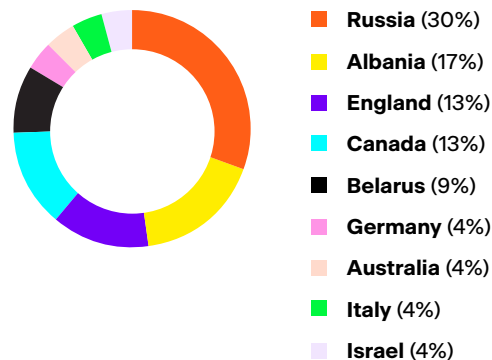
²⁵ Latino Donor Collaborative. (2022). [The LDC Latinos in media report: Put your money where your market is.](#)

White Immigrant Characters



Country of Origin of White Immigrant Characters

Percentages are rounded and might not add up to 100%.



White Immigrant Characters

The representation of white (non-Latine) immigrant characters (14%) is slightly lower than in reality (18%)²⁶ and has dropped since 2020.

Religion

Of the 167 characters we studied, only 14% had an explicitly identified religion. Among these, only Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam were represented. Seven Muslim characters were identified, coming from India, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, and France. Eleven Christian characters were identified, coming from Mexico, Nigeria, and Kenya. Four Hindu characters were identified, coming from India.

Accents and Language

One way in which immigrant characters have been othered and mocked on television is through the contrived use of accents. A majority (71%) of the immigrant characters depicted had accents.

These accents are often inauthentic and tend to blanket the diversity of an entire diaspora.²⁷ While accents alone are not indicative of English proficiency, depicting immigrant characters as always having broken English, caricatured speech, and thick accents can reinforce the stereotypes of immigrants as

²⁶ Budiman, A., Tamir, C., Mora, L., & Noe-Bustamante. (2020). [Facts on U.S. immigrants, 2018: Statistical portrait of the foreign-born population in the United States](#). Pew Research Center.

²⁷ Wang Yuen, N. (2016). *Reel inequality: Hollywood actors and racism*. Rutgers University Press.

“perpetual foreigners” who do not belong.^{28,29} In reality, nearly half of all immigrants living in the U.S. for five years or less³⁰ are proficient in English.

Our analysis found that 48% of immigrant characters spoke a foreign language. Spanish accounted for 33% of the foreign languages spoken.

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression (SOGIE)

The gender gap between depictions of men and women immigrant characters on television is closing, getting closer to representation that mirrors reality. In 2022, 46% of immigrant characters were women, compared to 40% in 2020 and 52% in reality.³¹

No immigrant characters were identified as nonbinary.³² The real number of nonbinary immigrants in the U.S. is difficult to estimate; the question is not included on the common

census surveys. Also there may be reluctance to self-identify as nonbinary or transgender due to risk of violence and discrimination.

Two transgender immigrant characters were featured on two separate shows: *Genera+ion* (HBO Max) and *New Amsterdam* (NBC). This marks the first time in our research that any show we studied has featured a transgender immigrant character.

At 8% overall, representation of LGBTQI+ immigrant characters remains higher than reality, which is approximately 3% of the immigrant population.³³ However, due to the stigmatization of these groups, this is likely an undercount. Researchers project that about 3% of the documented immigrant population and 3% of the undocumented immigrant population likely self-identify as LGBTQI+.

²⁸ Lee, S. J. (2008). The Model Minority and the Perpetual Foreigner: Stereotypes of Asian Americans. In *Asian American Psychology* (pp. 119-134). Psychology Press and Cheryan, S., & Monin, B. (2005). *Where are you really from?: Asian Americans and identity denial*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89(5), 717.

²⁹ Huynh, Q. L., Devos, T., & Smalarz, L. (2011). Perpetual foreigner in one's own land: Potential implications for identity and psychological adjustment. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 30(2), 133–162.

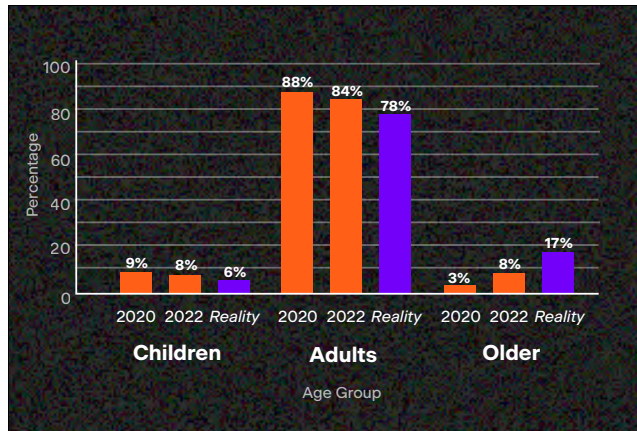
³⁰ Budiman, A. (2020). [Key findings about U.S. immigrants](#). Pew Research Center.

³¹ Esterline, C., & Batalova, J. (2022). [Frequently requested statistics on immigrants and immigration in the United States](#). Migration Policy Institute.

³² There was a transgender, nonbinary immigrant character in a season of Freeform's *Party of Five*, premiering in early 2020, that fell outside of our study window.

³³ Goldberg, S. K. & Conron, K. J. (2021). [LGBT adult immigrants in the United States](#). The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.

All Age Groups



Age

Children and adult immigrant characters closely reflect reality. The gap in representation of older adults (age 65 or older) is closing, from 3% in 2020 to 9% in 2022, but remains below the reality of 17%.

Disabilities

Our analysis found that 3% of immigrant characters were shown as having a disability. Some of the depicted disabilities included blindness, immunodeficiency, and paralysis.

How do these numbers compare to disability representation as a whole? Broadly speaking, 3.5%³⁴ of all television characters in 2020-2021 had a disability compared to 26%³⁵ of Americans who live with a disability in real life. And nearly 50%³⁶ of people with disabilities, regardless of immigration status, feel that they are underrepresented on television.

Data on disability status within the immigrant community remains limited. One study estimated the percentage of immigrants with disabilities at 6%.³⁷ U.S. immigrants with disabilities face what is sometimes referred to as the “double minority challenge” — that is, the obstacles they must overcome are uniquely compounded.³⁸ These groups can be labeled as especially vulnerable, but in fact, they are especially resilient. It is important that their on-screen depictions are portrayed with dignity and do not lean into helpless victim stereotypes.

³⁴ GLAAD Media Institute. (2021). [Where we are on TV 2020-2021](#). GLAAD.

³⁵ National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. (2022). Disability impacts all of us. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

³⁶ Nielsen. (2022). Closing the inclusion gap for people with disabilities. Nielsen.

^{37, 38} Echave, P. & Gonzalez, D. (2022). [Being an immigrant with disabilities: Characteristics of a population facing multiple structural challenges](#). Urban Institute.

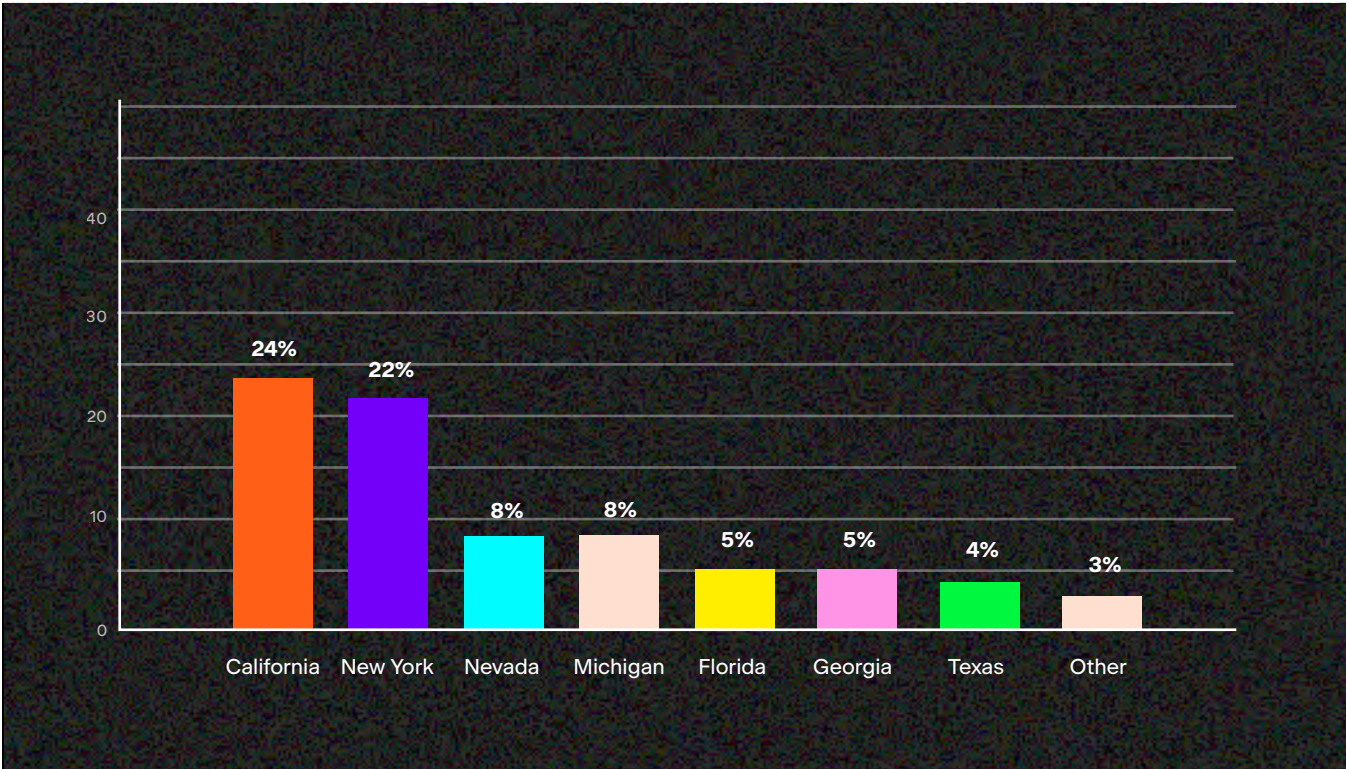
Geographic Setting

Nearly half of all episodes featuring immigrant characters took place in the coastal states of New York and California. In reality, the states with the largest immigrant populations are California, Texas, and Florida. Illinois has the sixth largest immigrant population in the country, yet only five characters lived in this state.³⁹ **Over one third (34%) of all U.S. immigrants live in the South**, about twice as many as immigrant characters depicted on television (17%).

States with the Highest Immigrant Populations:⁴⁰

- California
- Texas
- New York
- Florida
- New Jersey
- Illinois
- Massachusetts

Immigrant Characters by State



³⁹ Budiman, A. (2020). [Key Findings about U.S. immigrants](#). Pew Research Center.

⁴⁰ Radford, J., & Budiman, A. (2018). [2016. Foreign-Born Population in the United States Statistical Portrait: Statistical portrait of the foreign-born population in the United States](#). Pew Research Center.

Employment and Education

In our 2020 research, nearly a quarter of all immigrant characters for whom employment status was evident were unemployed. Representation in this area has improved. Now only 5% are identified as unemployed, consistent with the reality of 4%.⁴¹

Immigrant characters continue to be depicted as overeducated, relative to the U.S. immigrant population. Of those adult characters for whom education was apparent, 36% held a bachelor's degree and 46% held a postgraduate degree (Ph.D./M.D./J.D./M.A.). In reality, 21% of immigrants have bachelor's degrees and 12% have postgraduate degrees.⁴² That said, when characters go out of their way to talk about education, they are more likely to be talking about their credentials than their lack of formal education.

On the surface, overrepresentation of highly educated immigrants might appear to be a positive trend for the immigrant community. However, this may lead people to overestimate the number of immigrants who are eligible for specialty visas, such as H-1B, that are reserved for the highly educated or skilled. Even H-1B visas are selected as part of a lottery system. No “exceptional” immigrants have a clear pathway to citizenship.

Immigration Status

Immigration status was explicitly stated for over half of all immigrant characters. Of these, 43% were undocumented immigrants or asylum-seekers. These findings are consistent with our last report which found undocumented characters were significantly overrepresented on television. In reality, undocumented immigrants are estimated to make up less than a quarter of the immigrant population as a whole.⁴³

Is it a positive sign that undocumented characters are overrepresented? While it might seem like more representation is better, such depictions can foster inaccurate perceptions of the immigrant experience and even perpetuate harmful ideologies.

^{41, 42} U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). [Selected characteristics of the native and foreign-born populations](#).

⁴³ Capps, R., Gelatt, J., Ruiz Soto, A.G., & Van Hook, J. (2020). [Unauthorized immigrants in the United States: Stable numbers, changing origins](#). Migration Policy Institute.

Crime and Incarceration

With the release of our previous report in 2020, we celebrated a dramatic drop in the association⁴⁴ of immigrant characters with crime, from 34% to 22%. Unfortunately, the trend did not continue, and now crime involvement is at its highest point since we began this research.

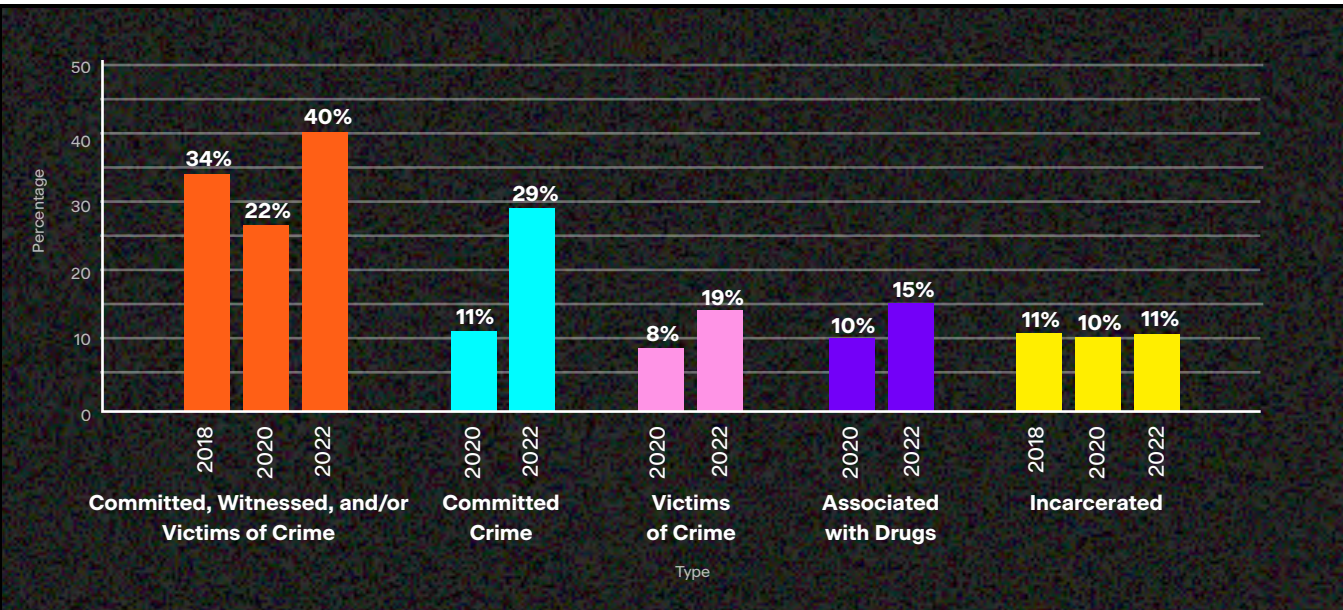
42% of all immigrant characters appeared in crime shows, a six-fold increase over 2020.

Portrayals of immigrants as criminals can foster inaccurate perceptions of immigrants in real life, ultimately influencing how we treat immigrant communities, our feelings about what it means to be an American, and our policy stances on immigration issues. The myth that new immigrants commit

a disproportionate amount of crime persists and informs political debates, despite consistent research over decades showing that native-born citizens commit violent and non-violent crimes at much higher rates than immigrants.⁴⁵ For example, in reality, only 0.37% of immigrants are in correctional facilities, compared to 0.70% of native-born Americans.⁴⁶ Our research found that 11% of immigrant characters on screen were incarcerated in the past or presently, which is consistent with what we saw in 2020.⁴⁷

In our consulting work, we have also seen well-meaning showrunners and writers depict immigrants as victims of crime because they believe this is the way to foster audience empathy. However, consistently showing immigrants as victims without agency also perpetuates a harmful and dehumanizing stereotype. Immigrants, like anyone else, can and do advocate for themselves.

Immigrant Characters Associated With Crime



⁴⁴ Association with crime means that the character either committed, witnessed, or was victimized by crime.

⁴⁵ Ingraham, C. (2018). [Two charts demolish the notion that immigrants here illegally commit more crime](#), Washington Post.

⁴⁶ United States Census Bureau. (2020). [American Community Survey: 62602 | Characteristics of the group quarters population by group quarters type \(3 types\)](#).

⁴⁷ This item had 88% agreement among coders but marginal reliability ($k = .59$). Thus, this item should be interpreted with caution. See [appendices](#) for more information about items and reliability.

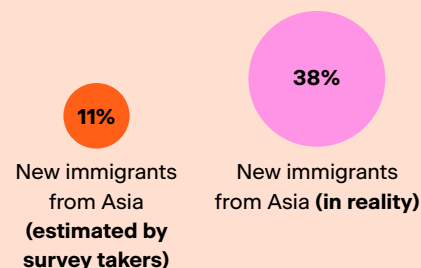
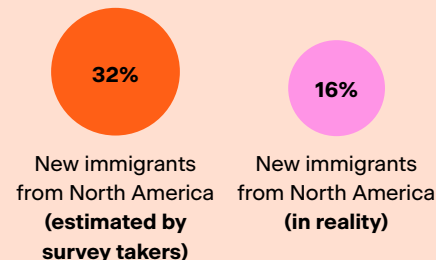
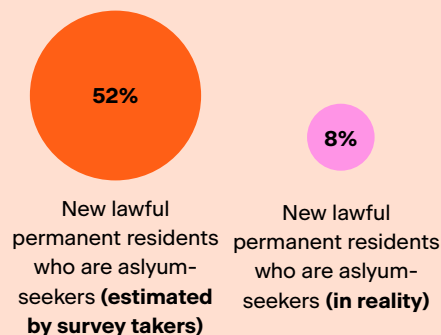
Audiences hold inaccurate perceptions of immigrants.

We recruited 1,272 regular television viewers to take an online survey in which we asked them to estimate the percentage of new immigrants who are asylum-seekers.⁴⁸

- Survey takers **vastly overestimated** the proportion of new immigrants who are asylum-seekers, at 52%. In reality, asylum seekers made up only 8% of new lawful permanent residents in 2022.⁴⁹

We also asked survey participants to estimate the proportions of new U.S. immigrants who come from various regions of the world.

- They **overestimated** the proportion of immigrants from Central America, North America, and South America. Participants attributed 32% of new immigrants to North America – including Mexico and Canada – **double the reality of 16%**.⁵⁰
- At the same time, they **underestimated** the percentage of U.S. immigrants from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. They estimated that only 11% of new immigrants come from Asian countries. In reality, immigrants from Asia comprise 38% of recent immigrants.⁵¹



⁴⁸ According to the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (2022): An asylum-seeker is someone who is seeking sanctuary in another country, usually due to human rights violations, but is yet to be processed.

⁴⁹ Gibson, I. (2021). [Fiscal year 2021 U.S. lawful permanent residents annual flow report](#). U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

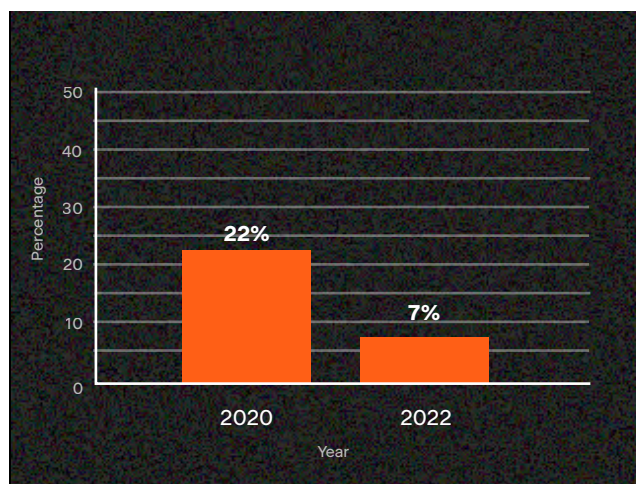
^{50, 51} Gibson, I. (2021). [FY 2021 U.S. lawful permanent residents annual flow report - DHS](#). Office of Immigration Statistics.

Immigration Enforcement and Related Storylines

In 2018 and 2019, the U.S. was grappling with the forced separation of immigrant children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border. It is no surprise that immigrant detention and raids by immigration authorities in the lives of immigrants were featured prominently in storylines from the 2018-2019 season. In our most recent round of research, these situations were depicted much less frequently.

The term “undocumented” was used far more often than “illegal(s)”: 50 times in 30 episodes, compared to 11 times in 8 episodes, respectively. The term “unauthorized” was not found in our sample.

Detained by Immigration Authorities



Words Matter

There has been a substantial decrease in the use of the term “illegal” when referring to undocumented immigrant characters, from 22% of all episodes in our 2020 research to 5% in 2022. This is progress, but we look forward to the day when this number is zero. The bottom line is that the term “illegal” is dehumanizing and replaces complex legal circumstances with an assumption of guilt. The preferred terms are “undocumented” or “unauthorized,” which offer options for neutral terminology.



Joaquín Cosío in *Gentefied* (Photo: Netflix)

The “Good Immigrant” Narrative

There is a common narrative in American culture which suggests that only “good” or “deserving” immigrants are worthy of living in the United States.⁵² In addition to our systematic content analysis, we looked for qualitative evidence of this more nuanced narrative in our sample.

One episode of *Blue Bloods* (CBS) particularly **reinforced** this idea. In it, a woman faced deportation because her adoptive parents failed to file important paperwork. Characters in the episode routinely made the case that she was an honest and hardworking person. This makes the audience sympathize with her plight, and arguably implies that she doesn’t deserve to get deported because of her upstanding character. The episode suggests that the immigration system should be **reformed** to accommodate exceptional cases like hers: “Christine is a very responsible mom. Now she’s gonna be deported. Sounds like our immigration laws could use a little updating.”

Meanwhile, an episode of *Gentefied* (Netflix) explicitly **challenged** this narrative. In an interview on national television, the character “Casimiro ‘Pop’ Morales” pushed back against the idea that he had to be “perfect” in order to deserve citizenship: “I have done good things. I have done bad things like everyone. I’m not a perfect immigrant. But...this is my home. This is where I belong, whether you like it or not.”

⁵² See Nagel, C., & Ehrkamp, P. (2016). Deserving welcome? Immigrants, Christian faith communities, and the contentious politics of belonging in the US South. *Antipode*, 48(4), 1040-1058.

Maitreyi Ramakrishnan and Poorna Jagannathan in *Never Have I Ever* (Photo: Netflix)

The Impact of Immigrant Characters

Audience Survey

After observing the shifts in immigrant representation on television, we wanted to know how these more nuanced representations might affect viewers' knowledge and attitudes about immigrants and immigration.

Building on our previous research with the Norman Lear Center's Media Impact Project, we conducted a survey to examine the audience impact of the 2021-2022 season of each of four television series:

- *Bob Hearts Abishola* (CBS)
- *Never Have I Ever* (Netflix)
- *Roswell, NM* (CW)
- *The Cleaning Lady* (FOX)

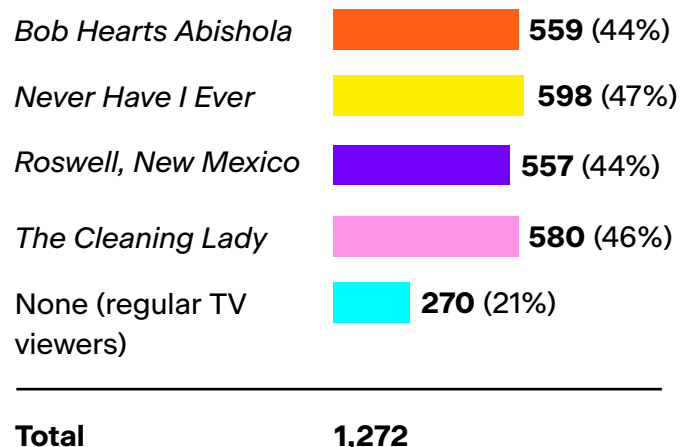
These shows, which were also included in our content analysis, were selected because they have relatively high viewership and feature immigrant characters from diverse backgrounds in prominent roles.

We recruited 1,272 regular television viewers through Lucid, a market research recruitment platform, to take an online survey between July 8 and August 3, 2022. "Regular television viewing" was defined as watching at least one to two hours of television on an average day. We recruited over 500 viewers of each of the four target shows, defined as having watched at least one episode from the 2021-2022 season. There was substantial overlap among viewers of the four shows. We also recruited a group of regular television viewers who had not seen any of the four shows.

All survey respondents, regardless of their exposure to the four shows of interest, answered questions about their attitudes toward immigrants, beliefs on immigration policy issues, and actions they may have taken in support of immigration. Viewers of at least one of the four shows answered additional questions about their responses to that show. Those who watched more than one of the four shows were randomly assigned to one show for this set of questions.

Participants

We surveyed viewers of:



Participant Characteristics

Across each of the four shows, there was substantial ideological, geographic, and racial diversity among survey participants.

Ideology

Participants tended toward a moderate (ranging from 32-44% depending on show) or liberal (33-36%) ideology, but there were still substantial proportions of conservative viewers (23-32%). For three of the four shows of interest, moderates accounted for the largest proportion of viewers.

Political Party

Democratic voters accounted for 33-48% of respondents, followed by 28-31% who identified as Republicans. Those who identified as Independent comprised 16-28% of participants.

Geography

A majority of participants indicated that they live in a small city/suburban area (38-47%) or an urban area (30-38%). A smaller group indicated that they live in a rural area (19-25%).

Race

While most participants were white (72-87%), substantial proportions identified as Black (9-18%) or Latine (7-16%). A smaller number identified as AAPI (2-4%), Indigenous (0-2%), or Middle Eastern (<1%). Participants could select multiple races/ethnicities when answering this question.

Only 4% of participants indicated that they were immigrants themselves.



Nava Mau from *Genera+ion* (Photo: HBO Max)

Impact of Prominent Immigrant Characters

Representation matters to the communities represented and, as our findings show, stories built around nuanced immigrant characters can have broad appeal to any audience. Viewing any of the four shows was associated with more positive real-world beliefs about diversity and greater understanding of the sacrifices and challenges that immigrants face.

In our consulting work in television writers' rooms, we work with industry professionals to create accurate and humanized depictions of immigrant characters. Define American believes more nuanced and humanized depictions of immigrants will make audiences more understanding and able to relate to people and communities outside their own bubble. We were inspired to see that the research findings backed our hypothesis.

Across all shows, viewers felt that their understanding of immigrants' experiences increased as a result of watching the show. For three of the four shows, viewers were also more likely than non-viewers to say that diversity is a valuable asset to society.

These findings were consistent across the ideological spectrum, with the exception of one outcome among *Bob Hearts Abishola* viewers concerning immigrant contributions to society.

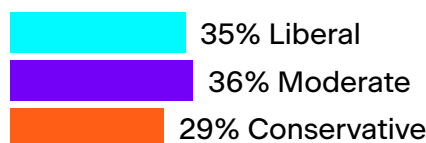
Bob Hearts Abishola (CBS)



Folake Olowofoyeku and Billy Gardell in *Bob Hearts Abishola* (Photo: CBS)

Cardiac nurse Abishola lives with her son, aunt, and uncle in Detroit after emigrating from Nigeria. She unexpectedly falls in love with her patient Bob, a middle-aged compression sock salesman, in a romantic comedy centered on immigrant life in the Midwest.⁵³

Who's watching?



Compared to TV viewers who did not see this show, viewers of *Bob Hearts Abishola* were more likely to:

- Agree that diversity is a valuable asset to society
- Believe immigrants contribute to American society⁵⁴

Among *Bob Hearts Abishola* viewers:

34%

said the show **increased their understanding** of immigrant experiences

29%

said it **increased their comfort** around meeting a recent immigrant to the U.S.

44%

said it **increased their understanding of the sacrifices** people must make to emigrate

⁵³ Lorre, C., Yashere, G., Higgins, A., & Gorodetsky, E. (Executive Producers). (2019). *Bob Hearts Abishola*. Chuck Lorre Productions; Warner Bros. Television. <https://www.cbs.com/shows/bob-hearts-abishola/about/>

⁵⁴ However, this was only the case among viewers of the show with moderate or liberal ideologies. This was the only finding across all four shows that differed by political ideology.

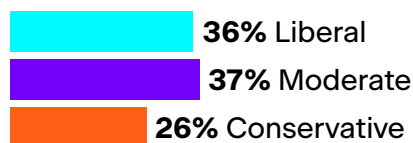


Richa Moorjani and Maitreyi Ramakrishnan in *Never Have I Ever* (Photo: Netflix)

Never Have I Ever (Netflix)

Inspired by creator Mindy Kaling's childhood, *Never Have I Ever* is a coming-of-age comedy-drama about the complicated life of a first-generation Indian American teenage girl, Devi. Her mother, Dr. Nalini Vishwakumar, is opinionated and strict, and, as a result, is often at odds with Devi. They settle in California's San Fernando Valley after Devi's father passes away.⁵⁵

Who's watching?



Compared to TV viewers who did not see this show, viewers of *Never Have I Ever* were more likely to:

- Agree that diversity is a valuable asset to society
- Express comfort sending their children to a school where the majority of students are immigrants
- Support an increase in immigration to the U.S.

The first two outcomes were driven in part by parasocial interaction – a sense of friendship – with Nalini.

For the “support for increased immigration to the U.S.” outcome, feelings of friendship with Nalini partially compensated for limited real-life contact with immigrants. Specifically, stronger feelings of friendship were associated with greater support for immigration, primarily among those who have few or no relationships with immigrants in reality.

Among *Never Have I Ever* viewers:

39%

said the show **increased their understanding** of immigrant experiences

42%

said the show **increased their comfort** around meeting a recent immigrant to the U.S.

⁵⁵ Kaling, M., Fisher, L., Klein, H., Milner, D., & Shapeero, T. (Executive Producers). (2020). *Never have I ever*. Kaling International, Inc.; Original Langster; 3 Arts Entertainment; Universal Television. <https://www.netflix.com/title/80179190>

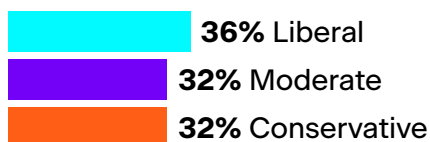
Roswell, New Mexico (The CW)



Carlos Compean and Jeanine Mason in *Roswell, New Mexico* (Photo: The CW)

Arturo Ortecho runs a diner in the alien-obsessed tourist town of Roswell, New Mexico. When his health fails him, his daughter Liz returns home to help. But she faces challenges both real and supernatural, including her father's undocumented status that he has been hiding for nearly 30 years.⁵⁶

Who's watching?



Compared to TV viewers who did not see this show, viewers of *Roswell, New Mexico* were more likely to:

- Report greater knowledge of immigration-related issues
- Agree that diversity is a valuable asset to society

Among *Roswell, New Mexico* viewers:

45%

said the show **increased their understanding** of immigrant experiences

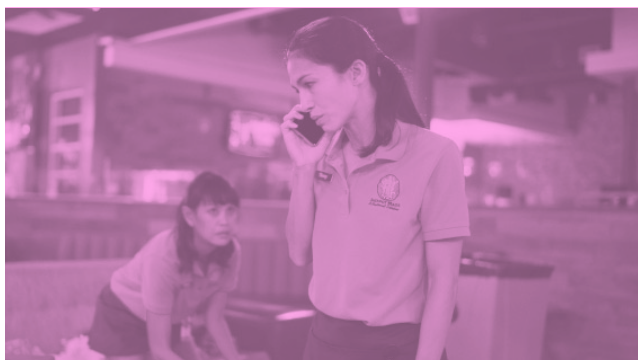
41%

said it **increased their comfort** around meeting a recent immigrant to the U.S.

54%

said it **increased their understanding of the sacrifices** people must make to emigrate

⁵⁶ MacKenzie, A., Brown, K., Falvey, J., Frank, D., Bender, L., & Plec, J. (Executive Producers). (2019). *Roswell, New Mexico*. Amblin Television; My So-Called Company; Bender Brown Productions; CBS Studios; Warner Bros. Television. <https://www.warnerbros.com/tv/roswell-new-mexico>

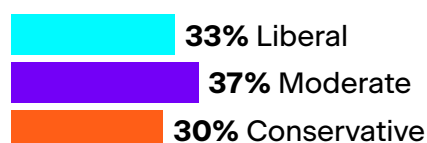


Martha Millan and Elodie Yung in *The Cleaning Lady*
(Photo: Fox)

The Cleaning Lady (FOX)

Cambodian doctor Thony De La Rosa emigrates to the U.S. from the Philippines for medical treatment to save her son's life. When their visas expire before he can receive medical attention, they are left undocumented, and Thony becomes a cleaner to support them. After witnessing a mob crime, she is offered a job as a doctor and cleaner for an organized crime syndicate.⁵⁷

Who's watching?



Among *The Cleaning Lady* viewers:

54%

said the show **increased their understanding** of immigrant experiences

56%

said it increased their understanding of **what it's like in an immigration detention center**

56%

said it increased their understanding of **what I.C.E. raids look like**

61%

said it increased their understanding of the **sacrifices people must make to emigrate**

41%

said it **increased their comfort** around meeting a recent immigrant

⁵⁷ Vega, M., Suárez, P., Mitchell, S., Portelli, D., Offer, M., Kwok, M., & Carter, M. (Executive Producers) (2022). *The Cleaning Lady*. Shadow Dance Pictures; Amore & Vita Productions, Inc.; Laughing Monkeys; Fox Entertainment; Warner Bros. Television Studios. <https://www.fox.com/the-cleaning-lady/>

Cumulative Impact of Television Shows Featuring Immigrants

In addition to the four primary shows of interest (*Bob Hearts Abishola*, *Never Have I Ever*, *Roswell, New Mexico*, and *The Cleaning Lady*), we asked participants how often they viewed each of 12 other shows featuring regular or recurring immigrant characters.⁵⁸

The more often viewers watched these other shows, the more likely they were to:

- Believe that diversity is a valuable asset to society
- Report greater knowledge of immigration-related issues
- Take actions in support of immigrants in the U.S. in the last year

⁵⁸ For a full list of these shows, see [Appendix A](#).



Carlos Compean in *Roswell, New Mexico* (Photo: The CW)

Parasocial Relationships: Impact of an Authentic, Well-Developed Lead Immigrant Character

Authenticity has been a key element in the creation of *Bob Hearts Abishola*. The daughter of Nigerian immigrants herself, co-creator Gina Yashere insisted on hiring writers and actors who are African and Black. This paid off. In its first season, *Bob Hearts Abishola* was CBS's highest-rated new sitcom, with over five million viewers consistently every week.⁵⁹

“

It's opened doors because now everybody's looking at our show and going, 'Oh, we can do shows like this and they can be successful, and all of America can enjoy the show.' It doesn't have to be just Black people or just Nigerians. Everybody can enjoy the show for what it is, which is a great show.

Gina Yashere (co-creator, *Bob Hearts Abishola*)

Bob Hearts Abishola viewers experienced significantly stronger parasocial interaction – a sense of friendship – with Abishola than viewers of the other storylines with their respective immigrant characters. Why does this matter? Parasocial relationships are one mechanism through which entertainment storylines may influence audience attitudes and beliefs. The more feelings of friendship viewers experienced with an immigrant character (in this case, Abishola), the more likely they were to believe immigrants contribute to society, and that diversity is a valuable asset.

Additionally, viewers of *Never Have I Ever* were more likely to agree that diversity is a valuable asset to society and express comfort in sending their children to a school where the majority of students are immigrants. These outcomes were driven in part by parasocial interaction with the character of Devi's mother, Nalini.

Viewers of *Never Have I Ever* were also more likely to support increased immigration to the U.S. These feelings of friendship with Nalini partially compensated for limited real-life contact with immigrants. Specifically, stronger feelings of friendship were associated with greater support for immigration primarily among those who have few or no relationships with immigrants in reality.

⁵⁹ Jacobs, K. (2021). [Gina Yashere on her Chuck Lorre collaboration, diversifying their writers' room, and bringing Nigerian culture to American primetime.](#) Insider.

Cecilia Suárez and John Ortiz, *Promised Land* (Photo: ABC)



Conclusion

The landscape of immigrant representation on television has changed substantially since we began our longitudinal research in 2018.

While audiences go to television to escape into fictional worlds, it is clear that the television landscape is also a place for confronting the issues of our lives. Our nation saw Black and AAPI communities under attack since our 2020 research report, and our television started to reflect more stories from these communities. But immigrant and marginalized communities should always be valued, not just when they are in crisis. It is imperative to our culture and our world that all communities are represented authentically.

Our findings show that nuanced immigrant characters and storylines engage audiences on deeply psychological levels, create more understanding of immigrant experiences, and foster more positive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration.

Even though we have seen improvements in immigrant representation on television since our last report, there is still much work to be done to tell more of those stories and to do so authentically.

As we have seen with the phenomenon of invisibility in media representation – or “symbolic annihilation” – a lack of representation on screen erases the existence of communities from society’s cultural imagination. But increased representation is not always better. When immigrant characters are largely depicted in reductive or stereotypical ways, audiences may develop inaccurate perceptions of immigrants and their experiences.

In addition to continuing to explore the complexities of race, ethnicity, and nationality, future research may dig deeper into the prevalence of the “good immigrant” narrative and its impact on attitudes toward immigration policy. For example:

- To what extent are certain immigrants framed as worthy or deserving by virtue of following the rules, waiting their turn, working hard, or being exceptional?
- If American viewers are led to believe, from the entertainment they consume, that there is a “correct” way to emigrate, what are the implications for policies that affect the 45 million immigrants in the U.S.?

Based on our findings, we see great hope in the ways our television can more accurately reflect our world. We celebrate the creators striving to bring to the small screen the untold truths and rich details of immigrant lives, including the 10.5 million who are living undocumented in the U.S.

Define American continues to be a resource and thought-partner to creatives, networks, and studios who wish to tell authentic immigrant stories, and persists in moving Hollywood towards humanized and nuanced on-screen depictions. We envision an evolution of the entertainment industry’s storytelling practices — in which fully-human and multidimensional immigrant characters can be the heroes of their stories and television is reflective of the diverse country we live in today — creating a better America for immigrants both on and off screen.

Recommendations

The research described in this report highlights a number of opportunities and strategies for storytellers who seek to change the dominant narrative about immigrants and immigration.

01

Hire more immigrants

A critical step in telling immigrant stories with humanity and nuance is to involve more immigrants in the creative process. Hiring writers, cast, and crew members who are reflective of the material can bring diverse perspectives and authenticity to your project, especially when creating content about communities outside of your own.

02

Reflect the diversity and intersectionality within immigrant communities

Immigrants are multidimensional and come from all walks of life. On-screen depictions should reflect this. Consider groups who continue to be underrepresented and stereotyped: Latine immigrant characters are now underrepresented more than ever, MENA immigrant characters are overrepresented as dangerous stereotypes, and there is still not much visibility for transgender immigrant characters, or immigrant characters with mental or physical disabilities. There have been some improvements in representation of AAPI and Black immigrant characters, but even within these depictions there are still groups that get left behind. Afro-Latine immigrant characters, for example, are underrepresented.

03

Feature more immigrant characters in prominent, recurring roles

Regular and consistent viewing of humanized immigrant characters allows viewers to build relationships with immigrant characters, which, in turn, is associated with more positive feelings toward immigrants in reality. Additionally, shows featuring prominent immigrant characters can increase viewers' understanding of immigrant experiences and foster more positive attitudes toward immigrants in the U.S.

04

Move away from criminal stereotypes

Immigrant characters associated with crime on television is at an all-time high, yet immigrants in the U.S. are less likely than native-born U.S. citizens to commit crimes. When harmful stereotypes like these are overrepresented, audiences may develop inaccurate perceptions of immigrants in reality.

Contact Us

To learn more about the research, contact research@defineamerican.com.

For more information about Define American's TV and film consulting, connect with us at ent@defineamerican.com.

About 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.

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