



Part 3:  
From Research to Practice

# MOVE THEM OR LOSE THEM

Know Them. Reach Them. Move Them.

DEFINE  
AMERICAN



HARMONY LABS



# Executive Summary

This report examines how immigrant narratives evolve across digital ecosystems and identifies opportunities to reach the “Moveable Middle” — audiences who are moderate on immigration and are open to shifting toward pro-immigrant attitudes. Key recommendations emphasize cultural storytelling through food, comedy, talent, and lifestyle content over adversarial or fear-based frames.

## What the Research Revealed

**What resonates:** Moveable middle audiences connect most with immigrant stories told through food, family, comedy, and educational content.

**What’s missing:** These audiences rarely see immigrant characters just living their lives — working, raising kids, navigating daily routines — without their immigrant identity being the whole point of the story.

**Who is most reachable:** *Taking Responsibility and Doing My Own Thing* audiences are most receptive to immigrant stories. (See p. 7 for more)

**A note of caution:** News hooks and political framing can create backlash among these audiences; economic and human interest angles tend to work better.

**What works:** Humor, caregiving, and achievement stories resonate with audiences regardless of their politics or demographics.



**These findings became the foundation for Define American’s research-to-practice model: audience insights, content creation, and rigorous testing with the field.**





# Our central question: what actually shifts attitudes on immigration?

The Immigrants Belong initiative put that model to the test:

## Step 1:

### Understanding the Audience — Harmony Labs

Define American partnered with Harmony Labs to survey 2,650 participants and map distinct audience segments based on core human values and media consumption. In two rounds of media experiments, we identified which narrative frames, formats, and cultural spaces most effectively moved moderate audiences toward a pro-immigrant stance.

## Step 2:

### Creating the Content — Immigrants Belong Community of Narrative Practice

Define American, in partnership with Tides, brought together 10 advocacy organizations: *La Union Del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)*, *Aliento*, *Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC)*, *Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)*, *Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP)*, *Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)*, *American Business Immigration Coalition (ABIC)*, *Comunidades Indigenas en Liderazgo (CIELO)*, *Asian American Advocacy Fund (AAF)*, and *Justice Action Center (JAC)*. Collectively known as the **Immigrants Belong (I-Belong) Community of Narrative Practice**, they worked with Define American and digital influencers to produce 10 videos rooted in food, family, faith, and everyday life across lifestyle, comedy, education, and visual storytelling formats.

## Step 3:

### Testing the Impact — Grow Progress

Define American partnered with Grow Progress to run randomized controlled tests of the I-Belong videos with 2,500 U.S. adults, benchmarking against a stand-up clip from comedian and former Daily Show host Trevor Noah, found to be the most persuasive existing immigration content tested, and PragerU's video on immigration, found to be persuasively anti-immigrant existing content. 7 out of 10 videos moved Moveable Middle audiences toward pro-immigrant viewpoints, with lifestyle and family-centered content driving the greatest shift. In follow-up tests, top-performing text messages written by the I-Belong community went head-to-head with real anti-immigrant social media posts and AI-generated messages. Framing that emphasized family, caregiving, and everyday life consistently outperformed anti-immigrant narratives across Moveable Middle segments. Messages focused heavily on belonging; however, underperformed against direct opposition, reinforcing the need to pair belonging messages with fairness and responsibility.

## Step 4:

### Step 4: Pushing Further — Play Your Role

Grounded in the same research framework, the Justice Action Center and RALLY built a further segmented audience: “Conflicted Colin.” He is a skeptical but reachable Moveable Middle audience segment, curious but not committed, and largely under-engaged by the immigrant rights movement. To reach him, the I-Belong community ventured into gaming. The Play Your Role campaign unfolded across three activations: a live Grand Theft Auto stream with Stevethegamer55 focused on Know Your Rights scenarios; 10 influencers playing a custom card game live on stream; and an in-game Fortnite meetup in partnership with New Save Collective to build lasting community. The result: immigrant belonging embedded in the logic of play, on the audience’s own turf, in their own language.

## The Impact

**8M+**  
views across  
platforms spanning  
two phases of the  
I-Belong initiative

**70%**  
effectiveness  
at moving  
Moveable Middle  
audiences toward  
pro-immigrant  
attitudes

**11M+**  
subscriber base  
accessed through  
gaming, lifestyle,  
food, family, & faith  
content across  
12+ influencers  
& creators

Opposition  
audiences shifted  
in response to  
family & community  
centered content,  
not just the  
Moveable Middle

Lifestyle driven,  
culturally  
immersive content  
outperformed  
advocacy-forward  
& explainer formats



**The lesson is simple: When immigrant stories center on shared values, family, hard work, community, and belonging, they don’t just reach the Moveable Middle. They move them.**





# Introduction

Television news and YouTube are two of the most influential arenas shaping how Americans think about immigrants. For the Moveable Middle audiences whose views are neither firmly pro- nor anti-immigrant — these platforms serve as key sources of information about immigrants.

Yet too often, the stories told in these spaces reduce immigrants to political abstractions. Define American set out to change that.

In partnership with Tides and the Immigrants Belong Community of Narrative Practice, Define American worked alongside digital creators to produce social media content designed to meet Moveable Middle audiences where they already are: in the spaces they trust, watching the content they love.

This report documents what happened when human stories replaced political ones, shares case studies from each nonprofit-creator collaboration, presents testing results from Grow Progress, and draws on research insights from Harmony Labs that guided the work from the start.

## Audience Framework

Our analysis builds on six audience zones:

Doing My Own Thing

Getting It Done

Taking Responsibility

Following the Plan

Opposition

Base





**Recap: Know Them.  
Reach Them.**



# Recap of Part 1: Knowing the Audience

In [Part 1 of the research series](#), we analyzed insights across news, TV, film, and social media. The findings suggest that immigrant stories resonate with the four Moveable Middle audiences, but they respond better to narratives emphasizing everyday interpersonal connections, order, or achievement, rather than explicit immigration policy or news.



**Taking Responsibility:** This audience is most receptive to stories that are most receptive to stories highlighting interpersonal drama, family, and fairness. Relatable, light-hearted programs, such as The Kelly Clarkson Show, offer an effective space to showcase immigrant characters in everyday, relatable roles.

**Doing My Own Thing:** With a preference for autonomy and nonconformity, this audience connects with stories of self-determination and individuality. Content that highlights immigrant resilience and independence, portraying immigrants as forging new paths, as seen in Shark Tank, resonates strongly with this group.



**Following the Plan:** This audience values safety, order, and familiar roles, gravitating toward media featuring law enforcement and heroes. Narratives that highlight immigrants as protectors or contributors to community well-being, such as those in Law & Order, are especially effective.

**Getting it Done:** Achievement-oriented, this audience responds to action-driven, gritty narratives that highlight personal growth and family loyalty. Stories portraying immigrants with agency and resilience, such as in Do It Yourself (DIY) or self-made contexts, align closely with these values.





## Recap of Part 2: Strategies for Reaching the Middle

In [Part 2 of the research series](#), we provided a roadmap for crafting stories across mediums that align with the Moveable Middle’s values, fostering meaningful engagement and promoting deeper support of immigrant communities.



**What worked best?** Stories that felt personal, grounded, and hopeful. When immigrants told their own stories, audiences listened. When diverse cast and characters shared the spotlight, audiences saw multiple perspectives and moved beyond one-dimensional portrayals. Allies played a valuable supporting role by amplifying the voices of immigrants rather than speaking on their behalf.



Stories that led with culture proved to be the strongest bridge—food, sports, and comedy helped people connect without triggering political defensiveness.

**Finally, balance mattered:** While explicit references to immigration status drove engagement, subtle integration within broader storylines also resonated with audiences wary of overtly political content. When undocumented stories ended on a positive or hopeful note, they fostered empathy and reduced bias more effectively than neutral or unresolved conclusions.

**Why do these audiences matter for narrative change?** These audiences hold the greatest potential to transform the national conversation on immigration. While strongly pro- or anti-immigrant audiences are less likely to shift their views, the Moveable Middle remains open, curious, and reachable. When they encounter stories that reflect shared values—such as family, fairness, hard work, and humor—they become more likely to see immigrants as neighbors and contributors, rather than outsiders. Reaching them at scale can tip the balance of how the U.S. defines its sense of belonging.



# Move Them: Cross-Cutting Insights





Looking across platforms, several themes emerge that reveal where immigrant-thriving narratives already exist and where opportunities remain.

## Existing strengths

Stories of immigrant thriving are already embedded in widely popular formats, from food and family to comedy and education.

### Food-centered content

often highlights heritage and entrepreneurship, creating an organic space for resilience and creativity.

### Family narratives

place immigrants in roles audiences readily recognize—parents, children, caregivers—bringing everyday humanity into focus.

### Comedy

whether through stand-up or sketches, makes immigrant experiences relatable, disarming tension, and sparking empathy.

### Education-focused content

from TED Talks to CrashCourse, elevates immigrants as trusted experts and thought leaders.

## Gaps

Despite these strengths, depictions of everyday immigrant life remain limited. Media coverage often focuses on crises, border crossings, and exceptional achievements, while daily routines—such as school, work, caregiving, and friendship—rarely appear. **This gap is most noticeable for the Doing My Own Thing audience, who gravitate toward playful, personal, and lifestyle content.**

## Shared affinities

Humor

Caregiving

Achievement

## Most open audiences

Taking Responsibility

Doing My Own Thing





# Exploring Entertainment & Lifestyle Ecosystems

Culture-first spaces—especially those centered on food, family, comedy, and daily routines—offer the strongest openings for immigrant stories. For example, lifestyle and faith-based content reaches values-driven audiences that are often overlooked in traditional cultural storytelling, serving as a bridge to communities less engaged through other formats.

## Aspirational

Food content is one of the most powerful vehicles for immigrant storytelling. Cooking collectives, restaurant features, and recipe-sharing videos weave immigrant experiences into the universal language of taste and memory. Food carries heritage, creativity, and resilience, and its visual appeal makes these stories inviting and emotionally resonant. As a result, food-centered narratives provide a natural way to showcase belonging and highlight the contributions of immigrants across cultures.



### CASE STUDY

Crazy Korean Cooking | AAAP  
Food as Love Language & Cultural Heritage

### How to Read the Results

Each video is marked to show how it performed against our primary goal of moving Moveable Middle audiences toward pro-immigrant viewpoints.



**Moved Moveable Middle audiences:** performed as intended

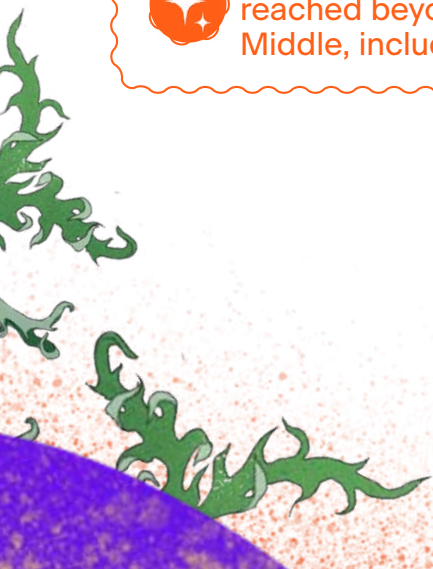


**Moved unexpected audiences:** reached beyond the Moveable Middle, including opposition & base

### CRAZY KOREAN COOKING (AAAP) MOVED:

-  Base
-  Opposition
-  Taking Responsibility
-  Following the Plan
-  Getting It Done

In collaboration with the Asian American Advocacy Fund (AAAF), social media influencer Crazy Korean Cooking created a short cooking video featuring an immigrant chef from The Migrant Kitchen. Together, they prepared family recipes while sharing personal immigration stories, blending food with cultural memory. Viewers described the video as heartwarming, emphasizing that “food is the ultimate love language.”





## Talent Competition

Competition formats, especially talent shows, combine entertainment with personal storytelling. Immigrant contestants often share their journeys alongside performances, giving audiences a window into their aspirations and challenges. These stories portray immigrants as multifaceted individuals who strive for recognition and belonging. By framing immigrant narratives in arcs of talent, achievement, and cultural celebration, competition formats normalize the presence of immigrants and align with audiences' values of ambition and success.

## Everyday Creators

Family vloggers, lifestyle influencers, and parenting accounts invite audiences into their routines. When immigrant experiences are featured in content about school, work, or raising children, they reinforce a sense of belonging in the most relatable way. This genre shows immigrant lives as part of the same daily fabric as everyone else's, making inclusion feel natural rather than exceptional.



### CASE STUDY

Mighty McClures | TIRRC  
Parenting Through Discrimination  
Conversation

**220,000+**  
views with two thirds of  
engagement coming from non-  
followers of the McClure family  
social media channels.

### MIGHTY MCCLURES (TIRRC) MOVED:

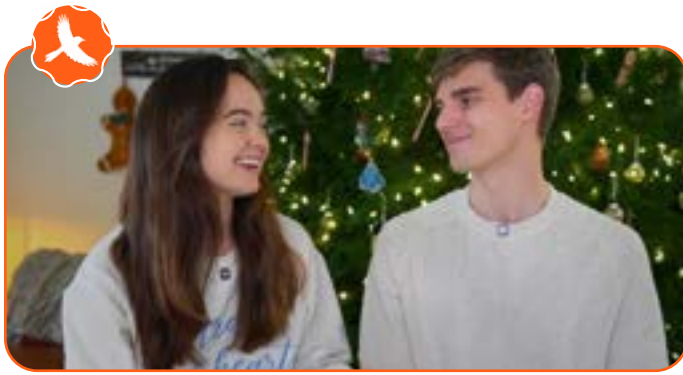
-  **Opposition**
-  **Taking Responsibility**
-  **Following the Plan**
-  **Getting It Done**

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) teamed up with the McClure family, a social-media-famous parenting channel, to address playground discrimination. In the video, the mother, Ami McClure, guided her daughters in a candid conversation about observing a Muslim friend being discriminated against on the playground. The conversation was guided by TIRRC's very own messaging guide, a product of communications lessons from years of door-to-door canvassing in Tennessee.

Audiences praised the content as a "great conversation" and a model of kindness. By embedding immigrant issues within relatable family life, this case study illustrates how parenting influencers can normalize immigrant belonging in everyday contexts, reaching audiences with warmth and accessibility. In further testing with Grow Progress, **this video moved 97% of moveable audiences toward the belief that immigration is creating a better future for the U.S.**

## Educational & Explainer

Audiences look to educational formats—TED Talks, CrashCourse videos, or faith-informed influencers—for credible information and personal growth. When immigrants appear in these spaces as experts, educators, or guides, they shift perceptions away from stereotypes. Instead, they are recognized as knowledge-holders and contributors to collective understanding. This reinforces a sense of belonging through authority and expertise.



## CASE STUDY

Chelsea Hurst | JAC  
Faith and Belonging as a Bridge to  
Immigrant Belonging

**300,000+**  
cross-platform views with 75%  
of reach generated by TikTok's  
algorithmic spread.

### CHELSEA HURST (JAC) MOVED:

-  Taking Responsibility
-  Getting It Done

The Justice Action Center (JAC) partnered with Chelsea Hurst, a faith-based lifestyle influencer known for her Christian content and large YouTube and Instagram followings. In the collaboration, Chelsea interviewed a representative from We Choose Welcome about how her faith informs her support for immigrants and refugees in Greenville, SC.

Audience reactions were deeply personal, thanking Chelsea for “showing how Christians can be loving neighbors.” This case study highlights Chelsea’s unique positioning as a bridge: she lives within lifestyle influencer culture but resonates strongly with values-driven audiences, including the often hard-to-reach Following the Plan audience.

## Looking for Deals

**Budget-conscious content, such as couponing, homemaking tips, and DIY projects, offers another pathway for immigrant stories.** Featuring immigrants as savvy household managers or inventive problem-solvers frames them as resourceful contributors to family and community wellbeing. This framing resonates strongly with audiences motivated by thrift, care, and responsibility, positioning immigrant presence within values they already hold.

## Celebrities

**Celebrity-driven content—such as talk show appearances, social media collaborations, lifestyle features—creates accessible entry points for immigrant narratives.** When celebrities highlight their own immigrant backgrounds or collaborate with immigrant communities, they bring these stories to audiences through admiration and relatability. By situating immigrant-thriving in spaces defined by culture and entertainment rather than politics, this genre lowers barriers and expands reach.





## CASE STUDY

Taboo | CIELO  
Indigenous Identity in Modern Celebrity Culture

**36,000+** viewers, with **86% of views coming from non-followers of Taboo's social media channels—a sign of strong organic resonance.**

### TABOO (CIELO) MOVED:

-  **Opposition**
-  **Taking Responsibility**

Comunidades Indígenas En Liderazgo partnered (CIELO) with Taboo Nawasha of the Black Eyed Peas to highlight the vibrancy of Indigenous migrant communities. Taboo appeared in a creator-led Instagram Reel on the National Day of Mourning, underscoring that Indigenous identity is contemporary, relevant, and central to the immigrant story in the U.S.

Audience comments praised the representation of Native culture “in this day and age,” showing how celebrity partnerships can extend immigrant narratives into mainstream entertainment while affirming heritage and belonging.

## Cultural Comedy

Stand-up routines, comedic sketches, and online parodies often draw from immigrant and cross-cultural experiences. By highlighting language mix-ups, generational differences, or navigating multiple cultures, these creators make immigrant stories both approachable and human. Humor lowers defenses and invites connection, allowing audiences to see immigrant perspectives through the lens of shared experiences, such as family conflict or cultural pride.

## Political Comedy

Satirical news shows and sketch comedy incorporate immigration into broader political commentary. While these formats reach wide audiences, their impact is mixed. Humor that exaggerates divisions or mocks opponents can reinforce polarization as easily as it encourages understanding. **For the Moveable Middle, political comedy may entertain but rarely shifts attitudes unless it emphasizes common ground.**





## CASE STUDY

Che Guerrero | LUPE  
Satirical Explainer on Border Militarization

**20,000+**  
viewers in its first week, with 77%  
of Instagram views coming from  
non-followers of Che's social  
media channels.

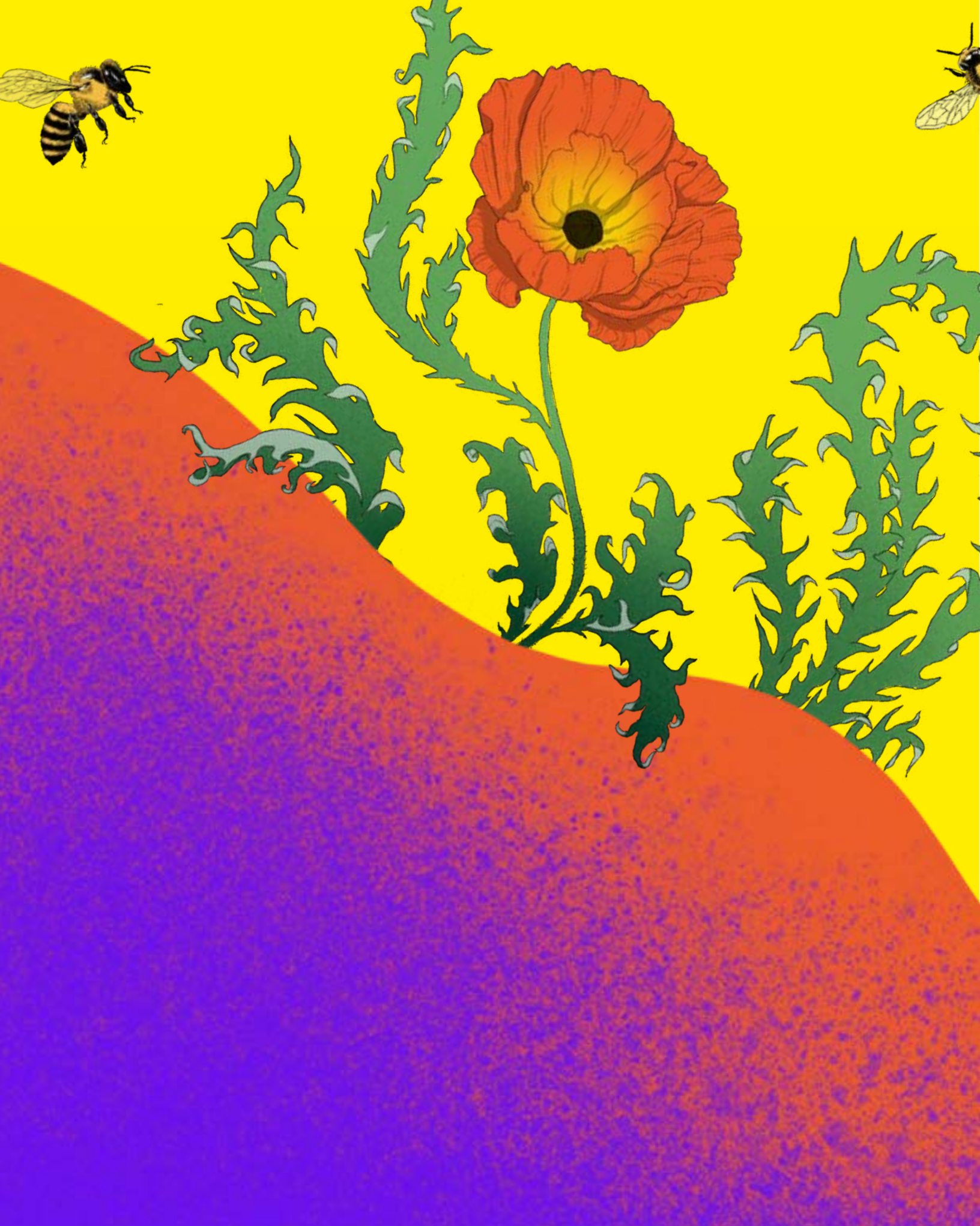
### CHE (LUPE) MOVED:

**\* Did not move Moveable Middle audiences**

La Unión del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) partnered with Che Guerrero, a comedian and independent journalist, to produce a bilingual animated video critiquing the militarization of the Texas border. Using both humor and investigative framing, Che narrated how increased federal funding has directly harmed border communities—before pivoting to what could be possible if those resources were redirected toward schools, healthcare, and local investment. The video was released in English and Spanish across TikTok and Instagram.

Audience responses praised the campaign for “shedding light on real problems” and highlighting solutions rooted in empathy and community wellbeing. Some comments also revealed the divisive nature of the topic, prompting Che to disable Instagram comments to prevent harassment—a reminder of the risks associated with satirical approaches to contested issues.







# Exploring News Ecosystems

While news offers scale, it often reinforces polarization. Opportunities exist in alternative and economic framings, where narratives of contribution, fairness, and shared experience can resonate with the Moveable Middle.

## Partisan News

Immigration is treated as a wedge issue across both left-leaning and right-leaning outlets. Politicians and political commentators dominate coverage, sidelining immigrants' lived experiences. **This approach mobilizes partisan bases but does little to shift the Moveable Middle, who often feel fatigued by constant sparring rather than persuaded.**



## Business News

Economic framing provides an effective entry point. Coverage that highlights immigrants as essential workers, entrepreneurs, and contributors to prosperity connects with audiences concerned about stability, growth, and fairness. By focusing on shared economic interests, these stories offer a path forward without triggering culture-war dynamics.

### CASE STUDY

Farm Babe | ABIC  
Immigrant Labor as the Backbone of U.S. Agriculture

### FARM BABE (ABIC) MOVED:

-  **Opposition**
-  **Taking Responsibility**

The American Business Immigration Coalition (ABIC) partnered with Michelle Miller, an agriculture educator known as “Farm Babe,” to produce an explainer video highlighting the indispensable role of immigrant labor in sustaining the U.S. agricultural industry. By spotlighting both economic contribution and the risks of labor shortages, Miller’s content reframed immigrants as integral to the nation’s food security and prosperity.



# Alternative & Skeptical Takes

Independent outlets and creators often cover the stories that mainstream news misses. By centering everyday people and systemic issues, they bring immigrant experiences into focus with greater nuance, humanizing stories, exposing injustice, and offering perspectives rarely seen in traditional news.



## CASE STUDY

Kahlil Greene | BAJI  
Exposing CBP's Surveillance of Black Communities

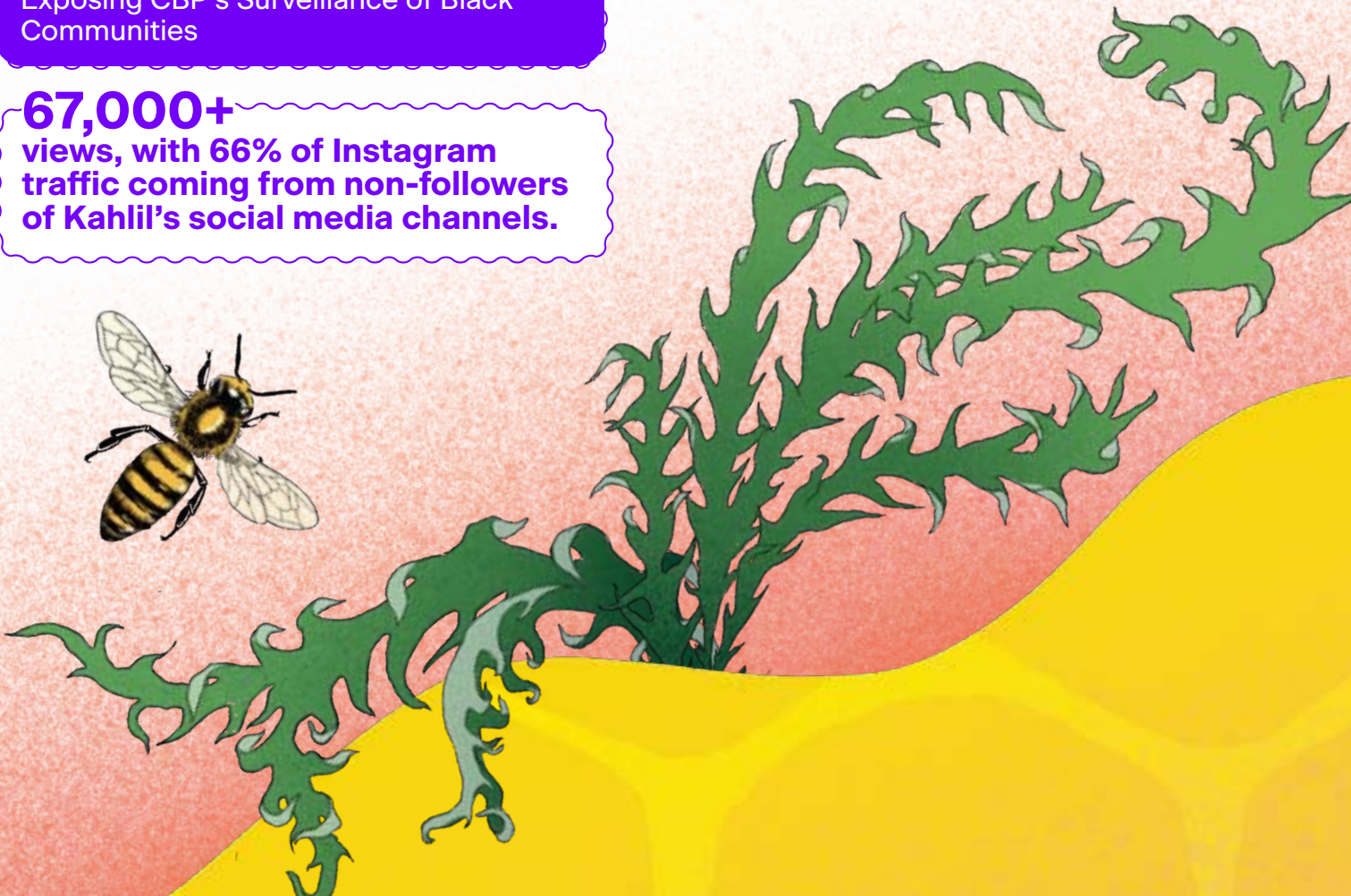
**67,000+**  
views, with 66% of Instagram traffic coming from non-followers of Kahlil's social media channels.

## KHALIL GREENE (BAJI) MOVED:

### Following the Plan

The Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) collaborated with Gen Z historian and influencer Kahlil Greene to share findings from the report, "Beyond the Border: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Presence at Racial Justice Protests in Summer 2020." Greene created short-form videos unpacking how CBP overreach disproportionately impacts Black Americans and Black immigrants.

Comments reflected surprise and gratitude—"Wow. I had no idea!"—showing how educational explainers can reach audiences unaware of these dynamics. This case illustrates how alternative creators can blend history, data, and lived experience to expand immigrant narratives beyond traditional frames.





## Photography & Art

Two partner organizations explored creative storytelling through art and photography. Though not part of the original Harmony Labs research findings, these projects provide practice-based insights. Both collaborations demonstrate how visual storytelling can humanize immigrant experiences, foster pride and solidarity, and create lasting symbols of belonging within communities.

### CASE STUDY

Conscious Lee | FLIC  
Profiling, Policing, and Trust Gaps

**150,000+**  
viewers, with strong  
engagement on the recap reel  
(11,000+ interactions).

### CONSCIOUS LEE (FLIC) MOVED:

\* Did not move Moveable Middle audiences

The Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC) partnered with Conscious Lee, a millennial educator and influencer, to host an Instagram Live conversation with a former law enforcement officer about racial profiling. A follow-up video distilled the conversation into key takeaways, connecting the dots between the experiences of immigrants and African Americans, highlighting the issue of over-policing.

Audience comments emphasized solidarity across communities: “Black and Brown need to unite.” By framing immigrant justice alongside broader struggles against profiling, this case study shows how alternative creators can build bridges between immigrant narratives and other justice movements.



### CASE STUDY

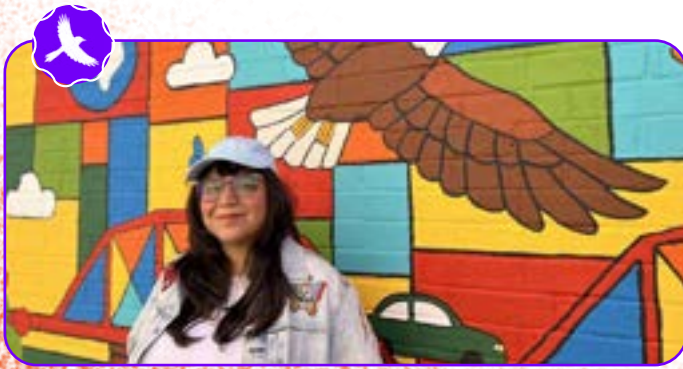
Adriana Zehbrauskas | Aliento  
Humanizing Arizona Families Under Anti-Immigrant Policy

### ADRIANA (ALIENTO) MOVED:

-  Base
-  Following the Plan

Aliento partnered with Brazilian photojournalist Adriana Zehbrauskas to create a series of Instagram carousels and Reels featuring immigrant families in recognizable Arizona landscapes. The content highlighted how anti-immigrant ballot propositions would harm real families, connecting policy decisions to human impact.

Audience feedback—“Beautiful” and “So proud of these girls”—underscored the emotional resonance of visual storytelling. This case study demonstrates how powerful photography can counter dehumanizing narratives and mobilize audiences toward concrete political engagement.



## CASE STUDY

Yocelyn Riojas | TCRP  
Illustrating Care and Collective Resistance  
in Texas

### YOCELYN (TCRP) MOVED:

#### Following the Plan

The Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) collaborated with artist Yocelyn Riojas to create six illustrations representing archetypes of immigrant community life—careworkers, activists, artists, students, elders, and essential workers. Shared on Instagram through carousels and a Reel, the campaign carried the theme “Tu Lucha, Nuestra Lucha” (Your Struggle, Our Struggle).

Audience responses included requests for posters and widespread enthusiasm for using the art in local organizing. This case study highlights how creative, visually driven storytelling can inspire pride, solidarity, and visible signals of immigrant belonging, particularly in border state contexts.



# In Practice



Across tests, Grow Progress results showed that the I-Belong collaborations resonated strongly with the Moveable Middle—often outperforming benchmark content from PragerU, which is known for its anti-immigrant content. Several even exceeded the performance of a Trevor Noah benchmark video, underscoring that immigrant-centered storytelling can not only compete with but surpass mainstream culture-first content.

The clearest trend? Lifestyle-driven storytelling consistently outperformed explainer-style formats, aligning with earlier insights from Harmony Labs. When immigrant thriving centered on food, family, faith, or daily life, audiences were more inclined to see immigration as a benefit to the country and vital to a stronger future.



## Who was moved most?

**Women** responded strongly across FLIC, JAC, and TCRP content, demonstrating meaningful persuasion on the idea that immigration helps build a better future.

**Older audiences (55+)** shifted significantly in several campaigns, especially AAAF and TIRRC, coming away more convinced that immigration strengthens the country.

**Younger audiences (18–34)** also moved in the FLIC and TIRRC tests, particularly within the Doing My Own Thing and Following the Plan audiences.

**Politically moderate audiences within Taking Responsibility and Getting It Done** showed openness in the JAC and TIRRC tests, indicating that content grounded in fairness, family, and faith can reach beyond base supporters.

**Opposition audiences** significantly shifted in response to several lifestyle-centered videos—TIRRC, AAAF, and CIELO—showing that values of family and community can resonate beyond the Moveable Middle.



## How did the videos perform?



**AAAF's Crazy Korean Cooking** was the single strongest message tested, ranking in the top quartile of all Grow Progress tests and persuading older and racially diverse audiences alike.



**TCRP's Yocelyn Riojas** collaboration was another top-quartile finisher, persuading both men and women across multiple age groups.



**JAC's Chelsea Hurst** collaboration also landed in the top 25%, ranking more persuasive than 89% of other immigration messages tested.



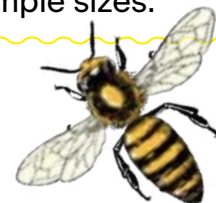
**FLIC's Conscious Lee** video performed well overall, but was notably persuasive with young women (18–35.)



**TIRRC's Mighty McClures** video also performed in the top tier I, with both younger women and older men showing strong positive shifts.



**BAJI's Khalil Greene** video showed moderate movement, especially among White women over 55, though with smaller sample sizes.



### Video Insights:

The results demonstrate that moving the middle is possible when immigrant thriving is framed through lived experience, relatable values, and trusted messengers. Food, family, caregiving, and faith emerged as particularly powerful frames, resonating across lines of age, race, and political identity. Experimental formats, such as satire, can be impactful but require careful handling to mitigate backlash.

### Message Testing: Leveraging AI Tools

Define American partnered with Grow Progress to test I-Belong community-generated text messages through the Persuasion Sandbox tool. These short written messages, co-created with the Immigrants Belong Community of Narrative Practice, were tested with Moveable Middle audiences and then put head-to-head against both real anti-immigrant social media content and AI-generated opposition messages.

### Key findings:

**Family and Responsibility Wins:** Messages emphasizing the importance of caring for family and fair contribution consistently outperformed anti-immigrant narratives.

### Shared Values Resonate:

Messages centered on everyday life and community contribution performed well across the Moveable Middle, even against sharp oppositional content.

**Belonging Remains Risky:** Messages focused heavily on belonging underperformed when directly stacked against opposition, reinforcing the need to balance that frame with fairness and responsibility.

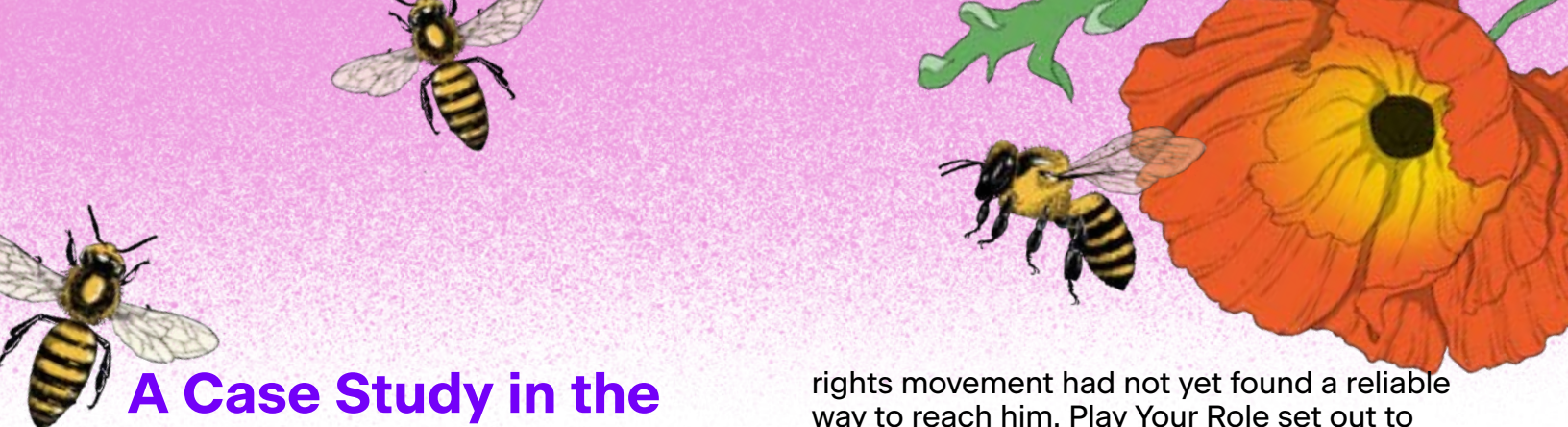
### Messaging Insights:

Even when tested against the toughest oppositional narratives, values-driven, culture-first messages proved resilient—and in some cases, outright successful. This underscores that family, caregiving, fairness, and ordinary life remain the most powerful frames for moving the middle.



# The Play Your Role Campaign





## A Case Study in the Immigrants Belong Initiative, Phase Two, 2025.

The findings from *Move Them or Lose Them – Parts 1 and 2* actively shaped Phase One of the *Immigrants Belong* project. In the initiative’s second phase, the *Community of Narrative Practice* took the research-to-practice model a step further, venturing into one of the most unexpected—and most strategically sound—spaces for narrative intervention: gaming.

The resulting campaign, *Play Your Role*, was purpose-built to reach a specific Moveable Middle audience. Developed through research led by the Justice Action Center with RALLY and grounded in Define American and Harmony Lab’s *Move Them or Lose Them* audience framework, the profile of “Conflicted Colin” emerged to capture a skeptical but reachable audience that sits between *Doing My Own Thing* and *Getting It Done*. The “Colins” are curious, not committed, susceptible to anti-immigrant messaging that validates his fears, yet resentful of left-leaning advocacy that dismisses their concerns. The immigrant

rights movement had not yet found a reliable way to reach him. *Play Your Role* set out to change that.

## A New Arena for Narrative Change

Gaming represented both a departure and a logical extension of the research. Part 2 of *Move Them or Lose Them* identified the *Doing My Own Thing* audience as especially open to pro-immigrant narratives delivered through playful, lifestyle-driven, and culturally immersive formats; these formats felt like entertainment, not advocacy. The *Immigrants Belong* Community of Narrative Practice wanted to collectively create a streamlined initiative aimed to reach those who spend significant time in gaming spaces, where audiences already engage with complex scenarios, have established community norms, and immerse themselves in identity and belonging through play.

The campaign’s central premise was that the roles we play online shape the worlds we build together. *Play Your Role* then translated a core narrative change goal into the language of gaming: agency, character, consequence, and community. The campaign aimed to increase awareness of *Know Your Rights* principles and counter fear-based narratives around Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).





# How the Campaign Was Built

Play Your Role unfolded in three interconnected activations, each designed to build on the last.



## The Grand Theft Auto (GTA) Stream

In November 2025, Define American partnered with Stevethegamer55—a YouTube creator with over 4.7 million subscribers and a predominantly “Conflicted Colin” audience—for a three-hour live stream of gameplay in **Grand Theft Auto**. Working from Know Your Rights scenarios co-constructed with the Immigrants Belong Community of Narrative Practice, Stevethegamer55 played out structured but organic vignettes depicting interactions between immigrant communities and ICE. Immigrants Belong community members participated as chat moderators, creating a scaffold of safety and context around a conversation that, in other spaces, often devolves into hostility.

## The Amplification

Throughout October and November 2025, a network of 10 influencers with “Conflicted Colin” audiences extended the campaign’s reach. Each received a Play Your Role merch kit made of Play Your Role branded swag alongside a messaging guide reimagined as a card game. Shaped by insights from a gamer focus group, and informed by the Immigrants Belong Community of Narrative Practice, the card game prompted streamers to choose a character archetype and then navigate scenarios where anti-immigrant narratives arise. The game was played live on stream, with merch visible throughout and [available for public purchase via a Redbubble page](#). Amplification partners were also asked to reshare Stevethegamer’s original stream, sustaining momentum across the network.



## Sustainability

Recognizing that a single campaign moment rarely shifts culture on its own, the initiative built in a sustainability layer from the start. In partnership with The Kairos Foundation's New Save Collective, an emerging digital activist community creating healthy organizing spaces for gamers, the campaign culminated in a late November in-game meetup on Fortnite. This event brought Play Your Role participants into an ongoing community with one another and connected them to a larger effort to build safety and belonging within gaming spaces over time.

## What This Represents in the Larger Arc

Play Your Role is both a campaign and a proof of concept. It demonstrates that the research-to-practice model developed through the Immigrants Belong initiative is not limited to any single format, platform, or audience zone. The same framework can travel into new territory when a coalition is willing to follow the research.

The campaign also reflects a key lesson from Phase One testing: that lifestyle-driven, culturally immersive storytelling consistently works with Moveable Middle audiences. By embedding immigrant belonging into the logic of gaming, Play Your Role invited the audience to discover and learn through play on their own terms and turf.

What is clear is that a demonstrated, repeatable methodology has emerged: ground the work in community, let research shape the strategy, and trust that immigrant thriving—told through the right voices, in the right spaces—can move people across lines of politics and identity to greater unity and understanding.



# Recommendations



## Prioritize Entertainment & Lifestyle Ecosystems

### Invest

in food, family, comedy, talent, and everyday-life formats where immigrant thriving can be woven naturally and without political baggage.

### Partner

with content creators who already reach Doing My Own Thing and Taking Responsibility audiences.

## Double Down on Values of Family, Fairness, & Caregiving

### Frame

immigrant-thriving through responsibility, contribution, and shared values that resonate across audience zones.

### Use

faith-informed and family-centered messengers as bridges to hard-to-engage groups.

## Leverage Economic & Alternative News Openings

### Highlight

immigrants as essential contributors to stability and prosperity (e.g., agriculture, small business, caregiving).

### Collaborate

with alternative creators to humanize immigrant stories and connect with audiences fatigued by partisan conflict.

## Use Satire & Belonging Language with Care

Satirical and belonging-heavy frames can spark engagement but also risk backlash. Deploy selectively, paired with grounding in fairness or everyday contribution.



# Conclusion

**The Move Them or Lose Them research findings, paired with the I-Belong initiative, show that moving the middle on immigration is possible and is already happening.**

By linking research to practice, in collaboration with our partners, we have tested what resonates, learned from what does not, and developed content that reaches the audiences most critical to shaping the future. The strongest results came from stories rooted in family, caregiving, fairness, and everyday contribution—frames that transcend divides and invite audiences to view immigrant thriving as part of shared life.

This work represents one step in a longer journey. The testing underscores that cultural change requires consistent collaboration: researchers, practitioners, creators, and communities working together over time. Scaling these efforts—through deeper research, sharper practice, broader distribution, and reach—will be key to shifting pro-immigrant values from contested debate to common sense.

**These lessons highlight a shared opportunity: to build a culture where belonging is not questioned, but embraced as central to who we are as a nation.**



DEFINE

AMERICAN



## About Define American

Define American is an award-winning media advocacy organization and go-to resource for storytelling on immigrant experiences across film, TV, theater, publishing, and digital media. Define American engages storytellers and equips them with research and resources to combat harmful narratives and tell nuanced, authentic immigrant stories. Founded in 2011 by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and Tony and Emmy-nominated producer Jose Antonio Vargas, Define American continues to redefine the conversation around immigration and identity, fostering a greater sense of belonging for immigrants in the U.S.



## About Tides

Tides is a philanthropic organization that supports charitable, community-based initiatives. Its involvement in the Immigrants Belong initiative is nonpartisan and focused on strengthening capacity for community storytelling and countering disinformation.

# HARMONY LABS

## About Harmony Labs

Harmony Labs is a media research lab, using science, data, and creativity to research and reshape society's relationship with media. For more than a decade, their work has helped storytellers and strategist, decision makers, and dreamers, harness the immense power of media to shape a positive, pluralistic future. Learn more at: [harmonylabs.org](https://harmonylabs.org)

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