

**A Comparison of Spanish and English Broadcast News: The Portrayal of Immigration  
During the 2020 Presidential Election Cycle**

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Sociology 191V: Immigration and Media

University of California, Los Angeles

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March 25, 2021

## **Introduction**

This paper explores the relationship between U.S. media portrayal of immigrants in the month of October in major English and Spanish news outlets, and the voting outcomes in the November 2020 Presidential election. The aim of this research essay is to: 1) generate comprehensive research analysis of the immigration portrayal in major English and Spanish national news outlets; 2) create a comparison of immigration portrayal in a major national English and Spanish news outlet; and 3) consider the impact on the media's portrayals of immigration and their influence in the voting patterns for Latinx and Americas citizens during the November 2020 election cycle. We expect that the Spanish-language news outlet would have more positive portrayals, as it caters to a largely immigrant audience. We also expect a correlation between the kind of media portrayal (positive, negative) and voting behavior.

Univision News, an American Spanish-Language free-to-air television network, reaches far more U.S. Latinx adults ages 18 through 49 and is the leading Hispanic media company in the U.S. (Business Wire, 2020). ABC News is an American-English-Language network television reaching on average 9 million viewers across the U.S. and topped the 2019-20 in viewership while also being the leader in the most prized demographics.

Research on the portrayal of immigration in these two major news networks can serve as a relatable tool for insight that we later apply to national American and national Latinx voting data from the 2020 Presidential election. The paper will look at voting data from 2020 and analyze October 2020 news pieces from both news networks then we conclude by comparing the data we gathered to draw some implications on media and voting behaviors.

## **Methodology**

We analyzed two national news outlets, one was a Spanish language broadcast news network, Univision, and one was an English language one, ABC news. We chose these because they both are national news outlets that are accessible across the United States in different cities and different regions, as stated earlier. Moreover, by analyzing two national news outlets we would be able to make comparisons between them and the U.S. national voting data. If we chose local news outlets or regional news outlets, we would not be able to use all the voting data from the 2020 Presidential election to compare with our research.

We chose to analyze news pieces from October 2020. Both news outlets have websites where we could access the news posted from that time frame. We chose October 2020 because this is the last month leading to the national elections. Since we were unable to watch the news live in October of 2020, we analyzed the news posted on their website and filtered it to that time frame. We went to both of the news websites, went to the search bar, searched a specific term, filtered to the proper time frame (10/01/2020 - 10/31/2020), gathered all of the articles in one document, and then read and analyzed each one.

We searched the terms Immigration/Immigrant, undocumented, and deportation. According to research, "given the power of images and the press to evoke responses among individuals and shape policy attitudes (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Tversky & Kahneman 1981), we [were seeking] to understand whether the news media accurately portrays immigrants in a way that reflects the demographics of the immigrant population in the U.S." while also comparing it to the voting data (Mohamed & Farris, 2020). Thus, we chose these three terms as they would provide articles that would likely talk about immigration to then analyze whether they were positive, negative, or neutral portrayals of immigration. This was a practical way to analyze the

data available to us to help us generate a comprehensive analysis of the portrayal of immigration in Spanish and English broadcast news and then allow us to look at the implications of these by looking at voting data from the 2020 election.

In order for us to organize the news pieces from both news outlets into positive, negative or neutral, we first read or watched the material and then analyzed the following characteristics of the news media. We looked at the way the article or video placed the terms undocumented, immigrant/immigration, or deportation. Here we would see if the terms were central to the news piece or if the piece came up in the search simply because the search terms were stated once. For example, one of the news pieces that was gathered when searching the term “immigrant” was a multi-page article where in the term was stated one. The piece did not discuss specifically the topic of immigration at all. The story was regarding a Black man, in Boston, MA, calling out ICE for unfair profiling while out jogging. It had nothing to do with the portrayal of immigration and therefore was categorized as neutral.

We analyzed how the term was placed and in what light it was shown. We also looked at the graphics in the articles or other graphics in the video. We then analyzed the tone and framing and priming (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) of the story in order to then categorize it into positive, negative, or neutral. We made sure to gather at least fifteen news segments from each news network in order to have enough news pieces to draw a conclusion on whether the portrayal of immigration from the news network was more positive, negative, or neutral. We collected 15 news pieces from ABC news and seventeen from Univision.

## ABC News Analysis

ABC news is one of the major news outlets in the U.S. for local and national news. We gathered data on the portrayal of immigration from this news outlet via the websites available backlogged news. We collected the news articles from the website using the methods and filtering listed in the methodology section above. ABC news had a plethora of articles in the month of October and after we filtered for the proper terms, we gathered 15 articles and then organized them into positive, negative, or neutral portrayals. The process and characteristics utilized to organize them into these categories are also explained further in the methodology section. There were only news articles available, not videos, and some of these articles also had graphics and photos while some of them did not.

Based on the data gathered from ABC news the overall representation of immigration was not positive or negative. Of the 15 articles examined there were 5 positive, 4 neutral, and 6 negative. Articles in the negative category framed immigrants as criminals and were explicit in identifying Mexican immigrant men when reporting crime, thus also over-representing Latinx men in the media contributing to the Latino threat narrative - not as strongly as Univision and other outlets though (Mohamed & Farris, 2020). We repeatedly saw how framing, priming, and agenda setting (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) changed the narrative when we found positive, negative, and neutral news articles when looking at the results for just one of the three terms.

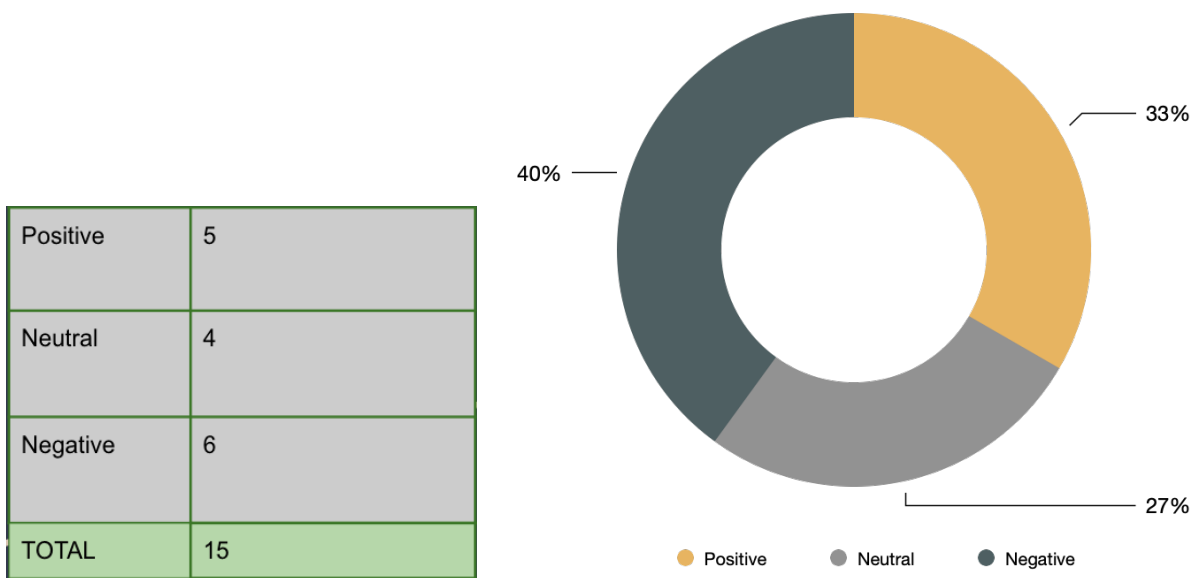
In the pieces that were in the positive category, it was common to see the “human interest” frame utilized as immigrants were portrayed as victims of violent hate-crimes and mistreatment by ICE nearing the November 2020 election. Valkenburg et al. argue that “the human-interest media frame ‘brings an individual’s story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem (1999, p. 551). By doing so, a human-interest frame

describes the news in terms that “personalize, dramatize, and emotionalize the news” (Abdelhady, 2019). This is the same framework which is used in the depiction of refugees wherein the goal is to gain empathy or sympathy from the audiences.

We found that the articles in the neutral category were not specifically about immigration nor did they talk about it in depth that would enable us to decipher whether it was positive or negative. These articles often discussed topics relating to immigration as a sidebar, such that the sentence or sentences that mentioned one of the three terms searched were not important to the main story or they were brought up for statistical purposes that were not biased.

**Figure 1**

*Illustration of the Number of ABC News Pieces per category*



### Univision News Analysis

Univision News, a leading Hispanic media company in the U.S., allowed for semi-appropriate Spanish news immigration portrayal analysis by gathering data from two forms of media: articles and news clips in the month of October 2020. Similar to ABC News data

collection, the forms of media were placed into three categories: positive, neutral, and negative. The Univision data graph illustrates the number of media sources gathered for this analysis which are 2 positive, 3 neutral, and 12 negative a total of 17 media sources which were 6 news clips and 12 news articles that included images and short news clips. Univision News used images and news clips in articles that overrepresented Latinx people as immigrants which associates immigrants to Latinx. This observation leads to the negative terminology used by Univision News' reporting on immigration, using words such as "criminals", "illegal aliens", "criminal aliens", "illegal immigration", "criminal and delinquent foreigners" "deportable", and "inadmissible" which ascribes illegality and criminality, specifically, to Latinx immigrants by an assortment of laws, immigration-enforcement mechanisms, and leading to the myth of the "criminal immigrant" (Ewing et al., 2015).

Ultimately, this is pushed by the Latino threat narrative (Díaz McConnell, 2014). Univision News, as seen in the data, quoted right-wing individuals and organizations, such as Chad Wolf, ICE temporary secretary under Trump's presidency, that used negative and derogatory terms to support his argument that ICE deportations were to "secure dangerous criminal aliens" because they showed "recidivist behavior", "reoffend" and "revictimized" (Univision Noticias, 2020). As well as stating that ICE is "protecting" communities by taking out delinquent foreigners (Univision Noticias, 2020). Though Univision News simply quoted right-wing or President Trump supporters and organizations, it failed to contextualize the quoted information which led to the portrayal of immigrants and immigration as one of criminalization. This type of framing is referred to as the "security frame" which is widely used in portraying migrants negatively: ...which is an important part of the media construction of the enemy

(Palidda, 2011) and is expressed in the increasing convergence of criminal law and immigration law, a phenomenon for which the term “crimmigration” has been proposed (Stumpf, 2006).

In addition, it is common in the data collected from Univision News, the usage of the “protection and prevention” framework/narrative in which receiving countries portray immigrant groups threatening the country’s well-being which leads to stricter enforcement of immigration policies” (Gilliam, 2010). For example, Angelica Salas, director of CHIRLA, a organization that supports and provides services to immigrants, argued that it was extremely difficult for those who have been detained to receive legal services because of rapid deportation under Trump’s administration (Univision Noticias, 2020). The deportations and rapid processes were justified by stating that it was for the “protection” of the public health of the U.S. Also, it is crucial to note that Univision news was more likely to state and portray immigrants from Central America negatively than Mexican immigrants. For example, Univision uses images and clips of caravans migrating from Central America to the U.S. without historical context. They frame caravans as a threat to border security, unorganized, irresponsible, violent, and prime border security with a political framework.

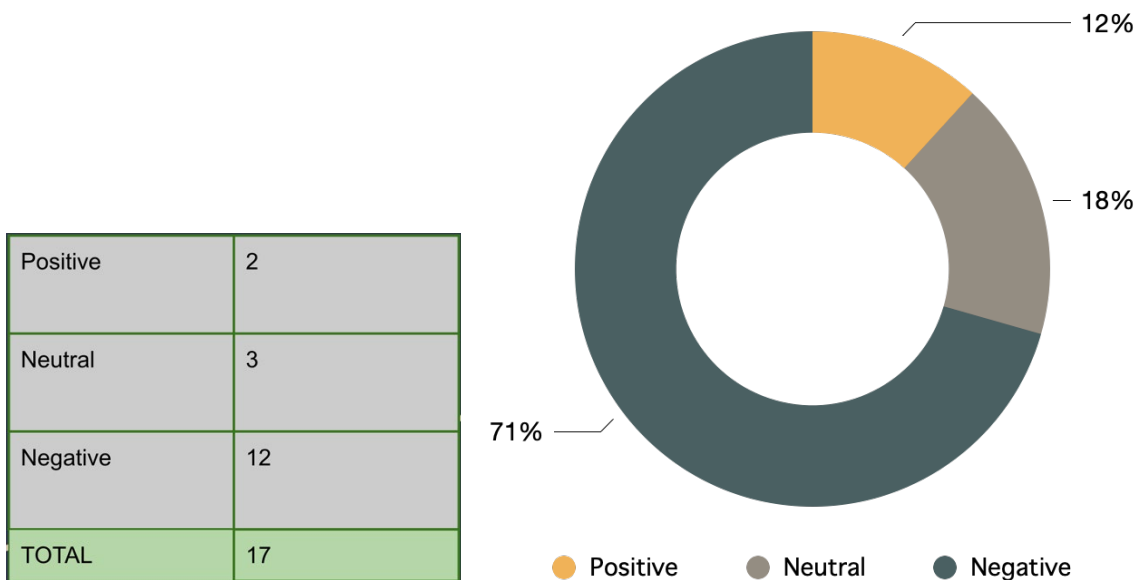
Moreover, to add to the narrative that immigrants are a threat and burden, Univision News continuously highlighted U.S. government reassurance through stricter immigration policies that ensure that immigrants do not drain nor take advantage of U.S. services when in fact, immigration has an overall positive impact on the long-run economic growth in the U.S. According to Dan Kosten (2018), in 2014, immigrants paid an estimated \$328 billion in state, local, and federal taxes and are less likely to consume welfare benefits and, when they do, they generally consume a lower dollar value of benefits than native-born Americans (Nowrasteh & Orr, 2018). However, policies addressing this “issue” and narratives of immigration and



immigrants as economic burdens are created and sustained through fear and as a threat to U.S. economic and political security . Another key observation is how Latinx immigrant women are portrayed as migrating to the U.S. with the intention of giving birth to their children so they can take advantage of U.S. services and benefits. In fact, immigrant children with citizenship are more productive workers, have more economic opportunities, and rely less on government assistance (Frazee, 2018). Lastly, this type of portrayal allows for the real reasoning and true context as to why women and their families migrate to the U.S to be forgotten. It's truly a form of forced migration due to the ramifications of US-funded wars and U.S. government interventions.

**Figure 2**

*Illustration of the Number of Univision News Pieces per category*



## **Comparative Analysis of ABC News and Univision**

In the analysis of ABC News terms such as “illegal”, “alien”, or “criminal” did not reoccur in the negative articles as they did in most of the Univision articles. Even the 6 negative portrayals that we found were not framed as strongly as some of the Univision media pieces, or even other outlets such as Fox News, where the “protection and prevention”, “economic strain”, and/or “Latino threat” frame/narrative are repeatedly utilized. Unlike ABC news portrayal of immigrants as victims of violent hate-crimes and mistreatment by ICE through a human interest frame, Univision News portrayed ICE — through a number of quotes and tweets — as a safety force to end “illegal” immigration and eliminate sanctuary cities nearing the November 2020 election. Though they did provide tips and information on what to do if encountering ICE, the quotes and tweets were never conceptualized. Also, Univision news was more likely to quote Republican or right-wing individuals or organizations without conceptualizing nor fact-checking the information. In ABC news, Mexicans were overrepresented in immigration discourse; in contrast, in Univision News, Central Americans and “Latinos” were overrepresented in immigration discourse. To end, neither news outlets used an intersectionality lens to highlight or include immigrants with various identities and master statuses such as LGBTQ+, and Black immigrants.

## **Immigration and the 2020 Presidential Election**

With the massive reach media has on the American audience, media outlets are an influential source of information. The 2016 election cycle proved the media's role as a soft power should not be understated. In the 2016 election, presidential candidate Donald Trump utilized his strong presence on major media outlets and social media to foster a more intimate relationship with voters. By interacting with the American public directly and indirectly through the media,

trust was established between the public and presidential candidate Trump. Immigration and border security were hot-button issues that the two major party candidates revolved their campaign around in the 2020 Presidential election. In the 2020 Presidential candidate campaign packets, both candidates explicitly stated their opposing stands on immigration. As President, Donald Trump rallied U.S. Congress to fully fund a wall along the Southern border, to close legal loopholes that enable illegal immigration, to end chain migration, and to eliminate the visa lottery program (DonaldJTrump.com, 2020).

Joe Biden's immigration promises within his 100 days are the following: a) immediate reverse of the Trump Administration's cruel and senseless policies that separate parents from their children at our border; b) end Trump's detrimental asylum policies; c) end the mismanagement of the asylum system, which fuels violence and chaos at the border; d) surge humanitarian resources to the border and foster public-private initiatives; e) end prolonged detention and reinvest in a case management program; f) Reverse Trump's public charge rule; g) end the so-called National Emergency that siphons federal dollars from the Department of Defense to build a wall; h) Protect Dreamers and their families; and e) Order an immediate review of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for vulnerable populations who cannot find safety in their countries ripped apart by violence or disaster (JoeBiden.com, 2020). Because of these divergent policy proposals between the two 2020 elections candidates, we are examining the voting statistics of Latinx and national populations to examine the relationship between public opinion on immigration and voting outcomes.

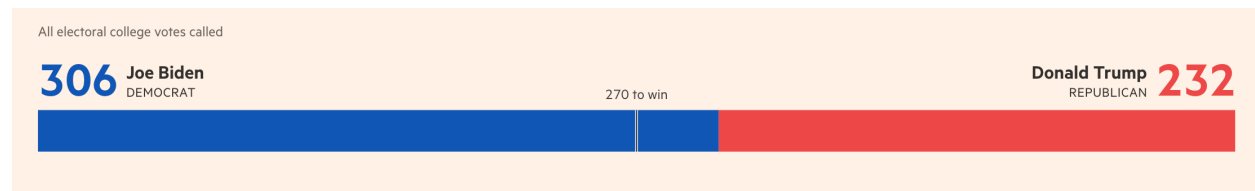
### **National American Voting Data**

Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election running for the democratic party. The election was close with Biden taking 51.3% of the vote and Donald Trump running for the

republican party took 46.9% of the vote. Biden gathered 306 electoral votes and Trump 232 (Financial Times, 2021). The national voting data tells us that the vote was fairly split leaving not one victor winning by a landslide, with the popular vote that is. Looking at the stances each party takes on immigration, if Trump were to win by a landslide you could say that a majority of the voting population is anti-immigration - a key in Trump's campaign. But, since we do not have enough statistical data to support this claim, we can potentially make the statement that the voting population feels split on the topic of immigration.

### Figure 3

*Representation of All Electoral College Votes Called*

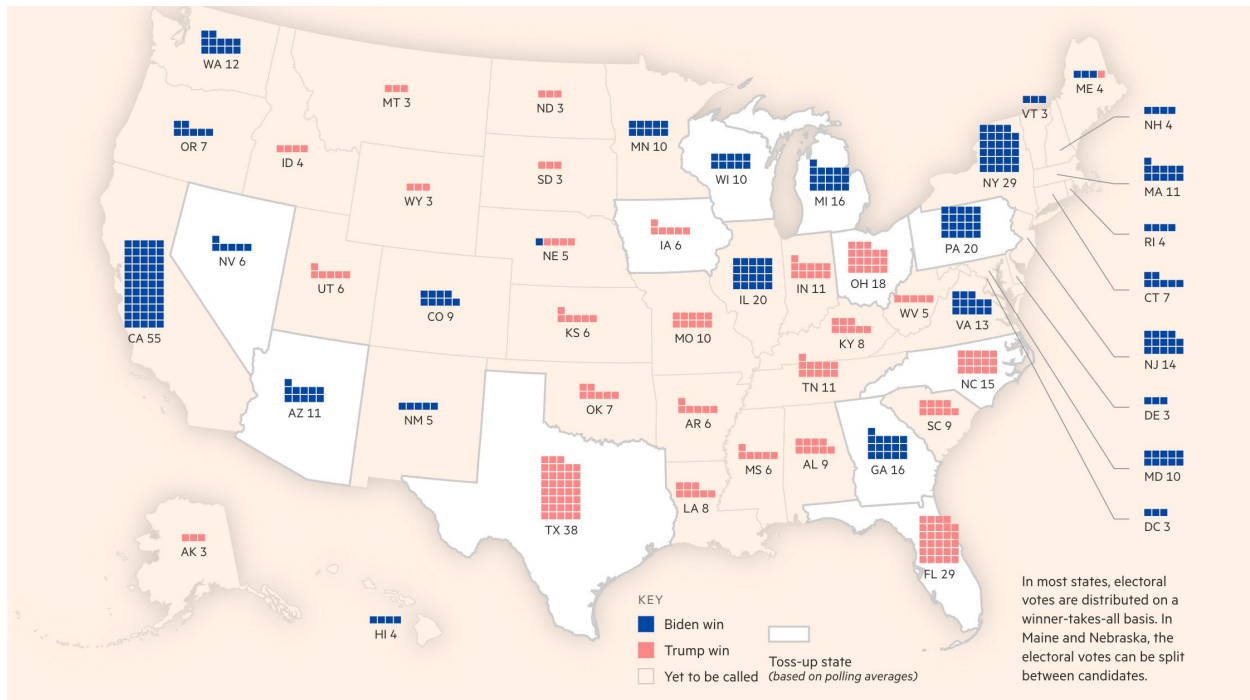


*Source: Financial Times 2021*

This data correlates with the data found on ABC national news seeing as the news was very well dispersed in terms of neutral, positive, or negative. It would be difficult to tell whether the American public was more anti-immigrant or pro-immigrant from the data collected from ABC news. Since there was not an overwhelming positive or negative portrayal of immigrants in October of 2020 one could say that the topic of immigration is still one that's being discussed and broken down. Thus, the data collected from ABC news correlated well with the overall national voting data from the 2020 Presidential election.

**Figure 4**

*U.S. Map depicting the number of electoral college votes for each party by state*



*Source: Financial Times 2021*

### **National Latinx Voting Data**

The Latino Policy and Politics Initiative report (2020) looks at the Latino vote in the 2020 presidential election by analyzing votes in 13 key states that are home to 80% of the nation's Latinos. They found a 30.9% increase of Latino voters casting their vote by an estimate of 16.6 million. Latino voters supported the Democratic candidate, Joseph R. Biden, by very wide margins across the country, and consistent margins won by Obama in 2008 and 2012 (Latino Policy and Politics, 2021). For example, in counties in Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin Latino voters supported Biden over Trump by nearly 3 to 1 margin (Latino Policy and Politics, 2021). Specifically, in Arizona, the size of the Latino electorate and their overwhelming support for Joe Biden flipped

the state from Republican to Democrat for the first time since 1996, as well as, tipping the states of Wisconsin and Georgia in favor of the Democratic candidate (Latino Policy and Politics, 2021). Lastly, in Florida, the Latino vote differed from the rest of the nation, Latinos in Miami-Dade supported Trump by a 2 to 1 margin, but Latinos in the rest of the state preferred Biden with a 2 to 1 margin. Overall, the majority of Latinos voted for Joe Biden in Florida and across the U.S.

There was no clear evidence that supported a correlation between the Latino voting outcome and Univision News negative portrayal of immigration and immigrants. Despite the power Univision News has as a Hispanic leading television network, their negative portrayal of immigration and immigrants, and the potential influence that has in shaping beliefs and perceptions on immigration, most Latino voters continued to support a Democratic candidate. However, there are many factors that could have played a role in this turnout such as Trump's racist rhetoric on immigration and immigrants, community organizing to vote Trump out of office, and Trump's lack of leadership during the pandemic. As well as, Joe Biden's promises to not deport immigrants in his first 100 days as president, calling "criminal" to separating families, and promise to address issues and concerns of the immigrant community.

### **Recommendations**

For future research on this topic we recommend five ways in which the research would benefit. The first is that the research would be more conclusive and enveloping if data was collected from two or three election cycles rather than just one. Gathering data from multiple election cycles will provide a look at the way news portrayals have changed or remained the same and then in turn how they affected that year's election.

The second recommendation would be to look at more national news outlets for both the Spanish and English language news broadcast networks. This will eliminate any bias that one singular news network may have and thus provide more objective analysis for the Spanish and English news networks.

The third recommendation would be to track not just the month preceding the election, but 3 consecutive months before the election. We decided that a minimum of 15 news pieces would be sufficient for our research, but the research would be stronger if upwards of 30 news pieces were analyzed and gathered for Spanish and English broadcast news networks. This would then give a better portrayal of immigration, just as looking at more news networks would.

The fourth recommendation would be to look at more specific voting statistics as the national American voting population and national Latinx voting population are both very diverse. Future research would benefit from looking at specific Latinx groups and different demographics for the national voting population. One could then look into specific voting results for those groups and analyze the data on a micro level, rather than a macro level wherein these diverse groups get pushed together into one extremely diverse category.

The fifth and final recommendation would be to watch the news networks live during prime-time news hours rather than just reading the available articles online. This way the research would include live news and also the news articles reporters and news outlets post online. There is no way to guarantee that all the same material presented on live news is the same as that posted to the online news outlets. This way the research covers all of the news outlets live shows, articles, and videos, allowing for the most comprehensive collection of data for each news outlet.

## **Limitations**

The study has potential limitations even though conclusions were made based on the research and data gathered. Time constraints didn't allow us to dive into a deeper analysis where more news networks and specific demographics in voting data would be analyzed.

Additionally, we did not have access to the live primetime airings of the news networks. Thus, allowing for certain new pieces and reports to be missing from our research that would otherwise be included in our analysis. In line with that, Univision's online platform gave us access to multiple videos for news in contrast to ABC news where we only had access to the articles.

Finally, although the specifications for positive, negative, or neutral were the same for each news outlet, different researchers analyzed different pieces thus not eliminating possible bias when organizing them into these specific categories. One researcher, or a group of researchers analyzing and grouping the articles together, would do better in eliminating bias and more strictly enforce the specifications for those groupings.

## **Conclusion**

The portrayal of immigration in October of 2020 was a prime point of interest with the 2020 Presidential election coming up. Both Spanish and English language television broadcast networks portray immigration in a specific light and our analyses concluded that Univision's framing was predominantly negative while ABC news portrayal was mixed thus not allowing for a determination of either negative or positive.

Our comprehensive analysis revealed that the data gathered from ABC news agrees with the national voting data while the data from Univision disagrees with the Latinx voting data gathered from the 2020 Presidential election. Comparing the Spanish and English broadcast news networks portrayals of immigration and examining these results alongside the voting data



allowed us to identify the broader implications of these portrayals in the November 2020 election cycle. This study is dense and would benefit from further in-depth research to yield more cogent findings.

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