

A FUTURE FOR ALL OF US

PART 2

BUENOS AIRES
for Immigrant
Narrative Strategy



Janelle Treibitz
Kana Hammon

Table Of Contents

106	Butterfly Lab Research Overview
109	Where Audiences Are Now
111	Paths Forward
113	Creating Persuasive Stories for Specific Audiences
115	What Persuades Different Audiences: A Closer Look
122	The Necessary Navigation Through the Fear of Change
127	The Power of Presenting the Irresistible Future
132	Portal To The Pro-Immigrant Future
134	Future Directions For Research
136	Conclusion
137	Appendix 1: Research Methodology
140	Appendix 2: Research Acknowledgments

Butterfly Lab Research Overview

THE BUTTERFLY LAB LAUNCHED IN 2020 to advance pro-immigrant narratives that recognize and honor the humanity of immigrants and advance freedom and justice for all. Our goal was to build narrative capacity for the movement and learn more about how we might create an aligned narrative strategy to build a pro-immigrant majority. In Phase 1 of the Lab, which was completed in 2021, we worked with sixteen immigrant narrative leaders who launched prototype projects that we supported with audience and impact research. This cohort of movement and cultural leaders understood that our current status quo is built upon a set of underlying beliefs and assumptions – deep narratives – that guide how we structure our society, what we believe is possible, and how we justify our behaviors and systems. We worked with this cohort to define the set of deep narratives that together can create a pro-immigrant worldview. This set of deep narratives became our Narrative System.

The Butterfly Lab's Narrative System represents the destination towards which we want to bring all of our audiences. But how do we move audiences from the toxic deep narratives that drive the status quo to the deep narratives of our pro-immigrant Narrative System? This question was at the core of the research we've conducted over the past year.

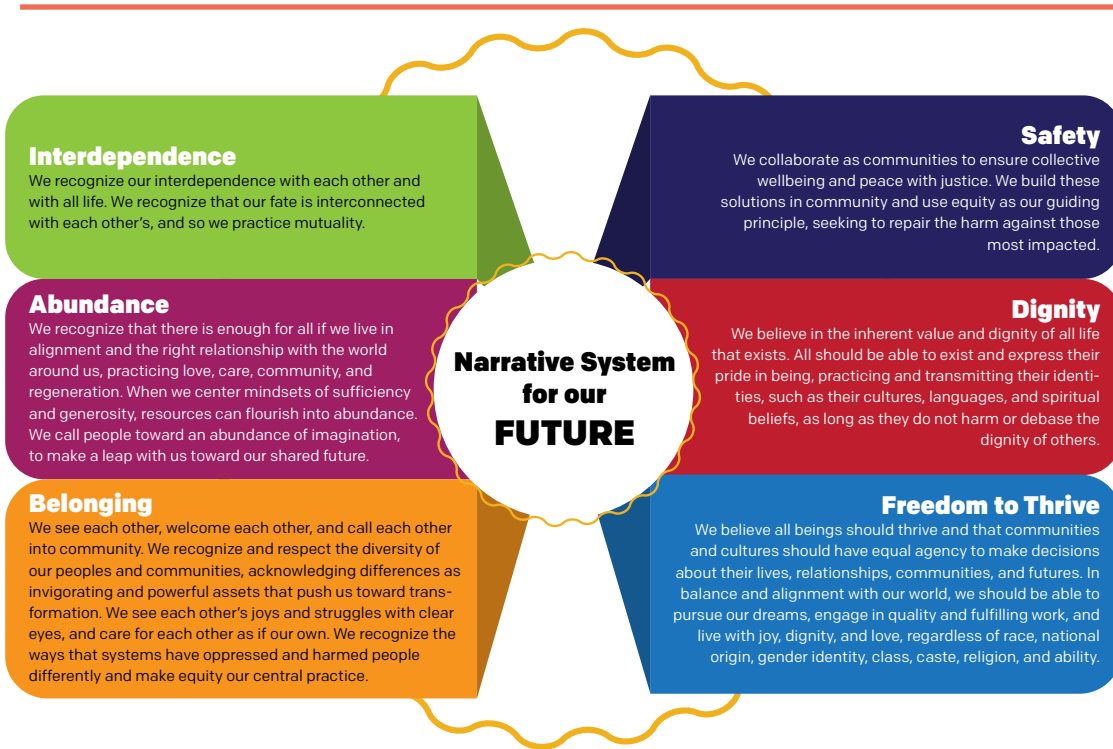
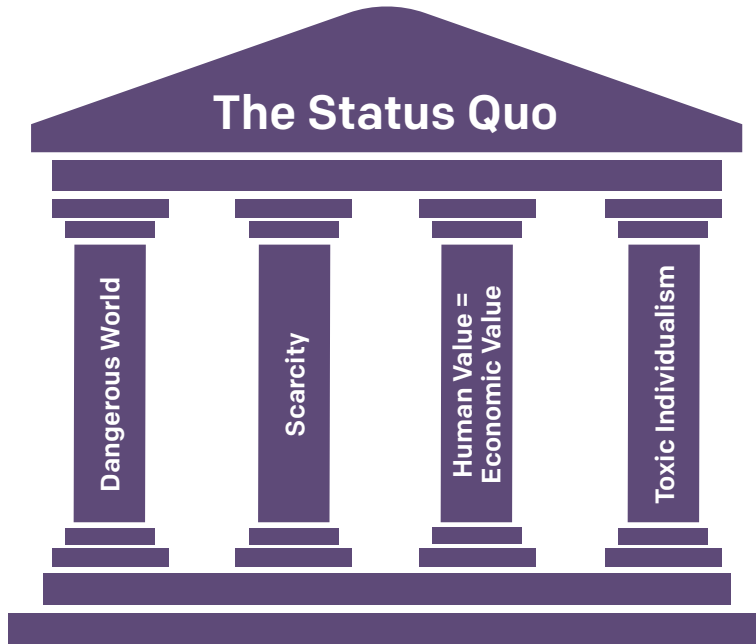
In order to move towards building a pro-immigrant majority in this country, we decided to focus our research on understanding what moves “stretch audiences” – those audiences who are not yet with us but, with some effort and intervention, could be – rather than “core audiences” – those audiences who are with us already). Both stretch and core audiences exist amongst liberals, conservatives, independents, and everyone in between. The distinction for our work is whether they have a reliably pro-immigrant worldview. Every organization will have their own stretch audiences that they define based on the goals of their campaign, initiative, or strategy. We believe that building a robust narrative ecosystem that is equipped to persuade many types of stretch audiences will help us win long-term.

Our research had two phases. In the first, we partnered with The Opportunity Agenda and Worthy Strategy Group (with support from Kirk Cheyfitz Political Strategies) to conduct qualitative research in a metaphor elicitation process.¹ This allowed us to identify some of the

¹ Portions of our report originally appeared as a research brief co-published by the Butterfly Lab and The Opportunity Agenda to report findings on our joint research from the Belonging Study. Research was conducted by Gretchen Barton. We gratefully acknowledge Charlie Sherman from The Opportunity Agenda, who contributed writing to the “Where Our Audiences Are Now” section.

underlying drivers of attitudes about immigration and what audiences would need to support a future where all people could make the choice to move where their lives would be best.

In the second phase we turned these learnings into content and used randomized controlled trials to understand which concepts, themes, or storytelling approaches would successfully move audiences toward a pro-immigrant mindset and inoculate them against fear-based opposition narratives. We worked closely with Grow Progress, Riki Conrey from Harmony Labs, and Milan de Vries to assist with our testing and analysis in this phase.



In order to assess a pro-immigrant mindset, we measured three things:

- whether audiences agreed immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, belong in America;
- whether they agreed that people should be able to move freely in or out of the country even if it meant more immigrants moving into their neighborhoods; and
- whether they could imagine a future where moving between countries is as straightforward as getting a driver's license.

Rather than identifying specific messages for the movement or testing support for specific policies, we aimed instead to uncover *storytelling elements* that could be layered onto many types of stories to strengthen their efficacy with different audiences.

We found that even the most conservative and fearful audiences already have pro-immigrant values, and will move given the right conditions. They, too, want to see an immigration system that works, but they are easily swayed by fear-based narratives.

We hope that others in the movement can use our findings as a launchpad to tell more stories and advance narratives that persuade stretch audiences, build a pro-immigrant majority in the United States, and invite lasting transformation.

Our concept testing uncovered several story elements that activate their pro-immigrant worldview, even in the presence of opposition narratives:

- Taking audiences on a positive, hopeful journey that culminates in a positive vision for how life could be;
- Acknowledging audiences' fears about a changing America; and
- Showing how a shared future can be better for everyone, including them.

Where Our Audiences Are Now

People dream of a better future.

Across all audience segments and ideologies, people dream of creating a peaceful world that is better for everyone, where everyone can choose to live wherever their life would be best, where everyone can thrive, where we invest in our future so we can leave the world a better place than we found it. They want a future that is calm, safe, and orderly, and where the rules make sense and are followed.

Audiences long for community, and want a world where families, communities, and neighboring nations reconnect. They want a better, safer, more secure future for their kids. They envision a future where there is enough for everyone, where communities help and celebrate each other, and where people work together to solve problems.

And they want a better immigration system.

We found that beliefs about immigration and immigrants don't track cleanly along partisan lines. Pro-immigrant values were strong across all audience segments, and our interview participants – no matter their ideology – expressed having twice as much confidence in immigrants over the American people. They agreed that the immigration system is broken and is harming immigrants and non-immigrants alike.

People in all segments described the current system as **impossible to maintain**, **unenforceable**, and **unfairly applied**. Whether left- or right-leaning, many even had similar ideas to improve the system. They suggested:

- **Increasing resources** to simplify and speed-up a process that seems complicated and lengthy, while keeping “bad actors” out.
- **Increasing access to legal immigration options** to diminish the need to migrate without documentation.
- **Streamlining the refugee and asylum process** to welcome those fleeing danger more quickly.

But fear often outweighs audiences' pro-immigrant values.

We have seen repeatedly through our research that most people — across all segments — hold deeply seated pro-immigrant values. But right now, audiences are scared. They are not sure if they're safe — from pandemics, guns, climate change, or war. They don't feel valued and don't feel heard. On top of that, every audience segment revealed anxieties sown by fear-based anti-immigrant dominant narratives: they're afraid of “chaos” at the border, “criminals” and “terrorists” whom they believe might be trying to get into the country, and demographic change.

When people feel afraid, they are easily pulled into a scarcity mindset, where they turn inwards and try to conserve what is theirs, unwilling to expand beyond what's known and what feels safe and familiar. We saw scarcity and fear driving how most audiences currently form their views on immigrants and immigration.

We heard from interviewees that rules and structure would make them feel less afraid and help them support a future in which everyone has the freedom to move. But when we tested content that affirmed rules and structure or reframed what safety might look like, we did not see those elements consistently contribute to moving any of our audience segments toward more pro-immigrant positions. We suspect we see these inconsistencies because, as immigrants and organizers have long pointed out, racism is playing a role in how this fear is activated against immigrants. Our suspicion is that the need for safety and order grows from an anti-immigrant paradigm, not the other way around.

Paths Forward

PEOPLE ENVISION AND DESIRE A PRO-IMMIGRANT FUTURE where moving freely across borders benefits all of us. But fear prevents us from getting to the better future that everyone already wants. What helps audiences move from holding pro-immigrant values to activating a pro-immigrant mindset? How do we move people past their fear and bias? Our research has begun to answer these questions, revealing some clear paths forward.

The current narrative paradigm around immigration is built on racialized fear. Specifically, the fears of chaos, danger, scarcity, and change. Based on our research, we believe that moving audiences away from fear and toward a pro-immigrant narrative paradigm may be possible when we show them the future we know they already want.

The strategy of some of the most successful opposition narratives is about painting a future that is chaotic, dangerous, zero-sum, and terrifying to most audiences. One of the most extreme narratives has been making astonishing headway recently. Known as the Great Replacement Theory, this narrative brings all of these elements together, arguing that immigrants and other groups are displacing and marginalizing whites. With the specter of this dystopian future attached to immigrants and immigration narratives, it becomes hard for audiences to imagine solutions.

But our job is not, as researcher Riki Conrey affirmed for us, “to play on the opposition’s field. We have our own story to tell. We don’t want to define success just by overcoming the opposition’s success.” So we tested content that we felt would evoke the world we want to create. Much of our content had a significant impact in moving audiences, most surprisingly with some of the most conservative audiences.

The content that was able to increase support for immigrants and immigration in the face of the opposition’s toxic dystopian narratives — even among audiences we expected to be the most resistant — were stories that both addressed audiences’ fear of cultural, societal or personal change while describing a pro-immigrant future where the freedom to move is available to everyone.



The freedom to move is a powerful idea with potential to persuade all audiences.

Our research showed that the freedom to move is a powerful idea with potential to persuade all audiences. We know this idea holds power for immigrants who attempt to exercise this freedom. But we found it holds power for stretch audiences, too. When stretch audiences were able to see how they could also benefit from free movement, it opened them to think about immigration from a different paradigm. When they were able to imagine themselves as having this freedom, they were more open to extending that same freedom to others.

Our core audiences respond to calls for action on what's "right" or "humanitarian". But we found that stretch audiences want to see immigration as a two-way street, where there is mutual benefit. We tried many ways to illustrate mutual benefit in our testing, and we had the most success with stories describing a world in which everyone has the freedom to move.

To help you craft effective, persuasive stories that build pro-immigrant support, we offer these three findings from our research:

- **We can create persuasive stories for specific audiences by understanding what journey they each need and then designing narratives and stories accordingly.** We found that to move audiences, we needed to take them on a journey that ends with a positive vision of what life could be. But there are important differences in storytelling that persuade different audiences; see our Audience Snapshot section to learn what worked for different audiences. Regardless of what stories we told, our storytelling was future-oriented, designed to move audiences toward our long-term goal of a pro-immigrant paradigm.
- **acknowledging and addressing audiences' fear of change helps clear a path for people to overcome fear-based opposition narratives.** Audiences' fear of change seems to grow from a core fear of loss – losing control, losing a way of life, or losing status and the ability to thrive. We developed content to test how we might move people away from a fear of change. We started where people were at by acknowledging emotions or anxieties in a non-judgmental way, and ended with a story of change that included those audiences. We didn't validate those fears, but instead showed how change could be better for us all, or showed how change is part of a larger story of the endurance of our shared values.
- **Telling stories of a positive, hopeful future are a critical bridge to a pro-immigrant mindset.** Especially for audiences primed for zero-sum thinking, it was important to illustrate how a pro-immigrant future is better for everyone, including them. Stories about the future are where we most effectively activated audiences' desire for the freedom to move. We found it effective to paint a picture of the future without conceptual words like "justice" or "equity", while describing the tangible benefits of a future in which those things were true. We also found it helpful to include hints of a structured, accessible immigration process as part of the future – not by mentioning systems directly, but by describing the *results* of having an easy and efficient immigration process.

In the following sections we'll dive in more deeply to these lessons. We acknowledge that which of these lessons apply to you will depend on your goals and the audiences you are prioritizing. We do not offer universal "recommendations", but instead frame the following lessons as insights which you can apply and experiment with in your work according to your own needs.

In the spirit of Linda Sarsour's declaration at the 2022 NIIC conference, "We are a movement where unity is not uniformity", we hope that there will be something useful here for everyone.

Creating Persuasive Stories for Specific Audiences

We created and tested 58 distinct pieces of content to learn what would move different audiences toward a pro-immigrant mindset. We were able to move every audience segment toward pro-immigrant support with a variety of storytelling concepts and approaches. But what persuaded one audience didn't always work for another. As we refined content across our rounds of testing, we learned which elements worked best for whom.

However, we did find these three storytelling practices to be consistently useful across all audience segments:

- **We designed stories for specific audiences.** We want to first affirm that not all audiences need to like all the stories we tell. We do not need to pander or gloss over stories that are important to us. But when we are targeting a specific audience and have a particular persuasion goal, designing *how* we tell that story matters. As you see in the following *Audience Snapshot* section, we learned there are important differences in storytelling that persuade different audiences. The angles or elements or imagery we used made the difference between whether we achieved pro-immigrant support for a particular audience or not. We were able to tell stories we wanted to tell, but designed them based on what we knew about our audiences. We also learned where our audiences still need to grow beyond what our content could achieve.²
- **We took audiences on a journey that ended in a positive vision of what life could be.** We began by acknowledging audiences' fears of a changing America. We shared rich personal stories of desired experiences like cultural sharing or celebrations that evoked relatable emotions. We ended either by reassuring audiences that shared values like respect, freedom, and hard work were here to stay, or by describing how a future where everyone has the freedom to move could be safer, more efficient, more free, and allow all of us to thrive. Including a vision for a better reality — now or in the future — is important because although stretch audiences *want* to believe a better immigration system is possible, most of what they see in daily life shows the opposite. In fact, content without a vision rarely fared positively. Offering a vision worked for all audiences.

² See the "Future Directions for Research" section for insights about opportunities to grow our audiences into stories to which they don't yet respond.

- **Our storytelling was oriented around our long-term goal, designed to move audiences toward a pro-immigrant worldview.** Even when creating content that tried to meet people where they were at, we didn't soft pedal our vision: a society where all of us will have the freedom to move where our lives will be best, to thrive and be welcomed. Our content was aligned with the Butterfly Lab Narrative System, aimed to reinforce the values and ideas that build a pro-immigrant worldview. It is worth noting that the only content not aligned with our deep narratives that did well were "good immigrant" storylines, in which immigrants work hard and assimilate. We discuss the pitfalls and possible solutions of "good immigrant" stories further on, in the Future Directions for Research section of our report. We offer additional details on what persuades different audiences below, followed by examples of four high-performing pieces of content that successfully persuaded those audiences.

We offer additional details on what persuades different audiences below, followed by examples of four high-performing pieces of content that successfully persuaded those audiences.

WHAT PERSUADES DIFFERENT AUDIENCES: A Closer Look

To understand how attitudes differ across the population, we used Harmony Labs' Narrative Observatory Audiences, a way to segment audiences according to their core values and cultural consumption, rather than the more common audience segmentation strategies of differentiating by demographics, geography, or political affiliation. A values-based segmentation allows us to understand audiences relative to the culture and narratives in which they are steeped, and can reveal unexpected insights into where audiences have commonalities or differences, what motivates them, and what can persuade them.

Distilled here is what we know about each audience segment, what we learned about what moves them toward a pro-immigrant mindset, and the storytelling elements that facilitate that shift:

AUDIENCE SEGMENTS & THEIR CORE VALUES:

PURSUE

People Power



COMMUNITY
All kinds of people coming together can fix the system.

If You Say So



AUTONOMY
There may be no one way to succeed, but freedom to make our own choices is paramount.

WE

Tough Cookies



ORDER
Playing by the rules is the key to success.

Don't Tread on Me



AUTHORITY
Strong leadership and hard work is the solution.

ME

PROTECT

Adapted from Harmony Labs. For more information, see <https://obiaudiences.org/audiences/>

(continued on next page)

People Power:

Community-minded, politically engaged, and ready to fight for system reform to solve social issues. They skew college-educated and Democrat and believe all types of people coming together will create change. Many people in progressive social movements are People Power. We often consider this segment to be part of our core audience, but they also can be surprisingly soft in their commitment to supporting immigrants.

What Persuades People Power:

Pro-immigrant support in this group is already high, and we were able to increase their support with content featuring personal stories as well as emotion-based idealistic content. Though justice-oriented, they appear to also be influenced by anti-immigrant and other racially-motivated, fear-based narratives. Islamophobia surfaced strongly in this audience. When faced with a fear-based opposition narrative based on the Great Replacement Theory, their support only increased if we both addressed their fear of change and described a positive future where everyone has the freedom to move.

If You Say So:

Independent realists who know the system is broken but are skeptical that there are real solutions to society's problems. They span all races, skew younger, and value choice and autonomy. More interested in enjoying life than joining movements, this is an audience you'll more likely find at a party or playing video games than at a protest. We often find them at the edge of our core audiences or as stretch audiences.

What Persuades If You Say So:

These audiences had the highest baseline agreement with every pro-immigrant measurement question we asked. More than any other audience segment, they are moved by personal stories, particularly stories with "striving" themes or stories about pushing through the fear of change to enjoy cross-cultural experiences. Fear of change, however, doesn't seem to be an issue with them. Nor do they need a vision of the future to move them, possibly because they already have the ability to imagine a better future. They were moved by the widest variety of content of any audience segment, so long as it demonstrated pragmatism, striving, or pleasure-seeking.

(continued on next page)

Tough Cookies:

Family-first rule followers who believe that while the system might be broken, hard work can create success. They skew older, span all political parties and love content featuring good deeds and helping hands. They value order and are cautious—of new people, new ideas, changes in the status quo, and more. We often encounter them as stretch audiences and sometimes as opposition audiences.

What Persuades Tough Cookies:

To unlock their pro-immigrant mindset, Tough Cookies need to be reassured that change is natural and positive and that they have a place in a pluralistic future. They need stories forecasting a better future that also benefits them. When faced with a Great Replacement Theory-based opposition narrative, the only thing that overcame it for them was a story that both addressed their fear of change and described a positive future where everyone has the freedom to move.

Don't Tread On Me:

Achievement-oriented, they are strong believers that equal opportunity already exists. They're idealistic, but they're worried they need to be in control to make a better future happen. They skew white, rural and Republican, and value authority, hard work, and determined leadership. We often encounter them as opposition audiences, but they can become stretch audiences.

What Persuades Don't Tread On Me:

Unlike Tough Cookies, Don't Tread on Me audiences are less fearful of change. They love stories that paint a picture of a world where we can all be friends; where we get to experience aspects of other cultures; where people contribute and work hard; and where systems operate efficiently. Though they respond strongly to personal stories, they are primed for "good immigrant"/"bad immigrant" stories and don't respond well to stories with more complex humans. They were able to overcome a Great Replacement Theory-based opposition narrative after viewing content that both addressed fear of change and described a positive future where everyone has the freedom to move.

Black, Latinx, and AAPI Audiences:

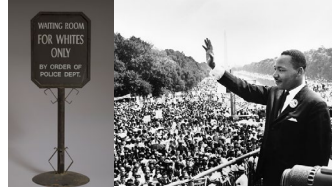
When we analyzed the results according to audiences' race, we noticed that what moved our Black, Latinx, and AAPI audiences was strikingly similar. To unlock a pro-immigrant mindset, they responded best to stories prominently featuring diverse characters, storytelling that referenced our nation's history with racism and framed change as part of a larger arc toward progress.

Anatomy of a Story

Addressing fear of change

America has changed a lot in the past 245 years. From outhouses to running water. From exclusion to opportunity.

With so much talk of immigration, it can feel like America is changing again. But history shows that change has made our lives easier, safer, and freer.



Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Hulton Deutch / Corbis Premium Historical via Getty Images

Presenting a positive future



Evgenia Parajanian / Shutterstock.com

Imagine in 50 years people can easily travel in and out of the country because we have a safe immigration process that makes it easy.

We know who is coming in and out of the country because the freedom to move is available to everyone and the rules are straightforward and easy to follow.



Evgenia Parajanian / Shutterstock.com

Illustrating the shared benefits of this future



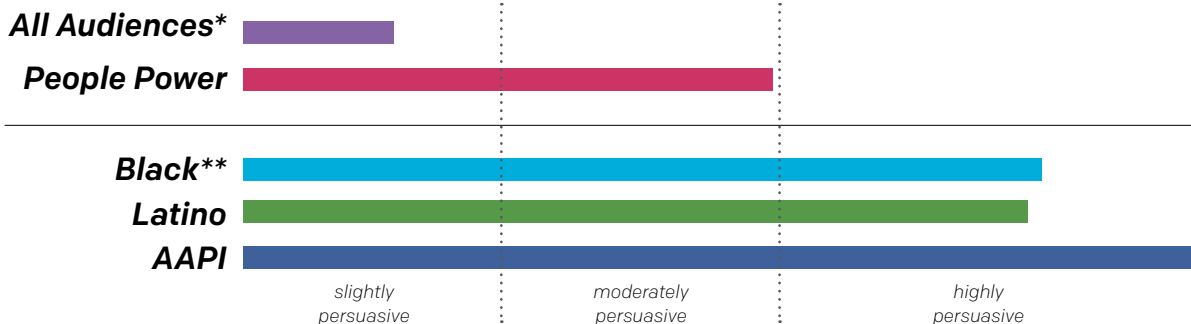
Dmitry Molchanov/Shutterstock.com

New arrivals are welcomed into communities and we all have friends from many different places. If we want to move to another country, we can.

We all thrive - those of us who were born here and those of us who moved here from other countries.

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

We tested the content above against opposition content featuring the Great Replacement Theory and immigrant “inundation” narratives. This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing both this content and the opposition content.



* Only statistically significant results are included, for all audience and demographic segments.
** Racial demographic results include data from all values-based audience segments.

Anatomy of a Story

Modeling a character overcoming their fear of change

This year, my granddaughter married an immigrant from Mexico. I love my granddaughter, but I was worried. Would their wedding even feel like a wedding? What would it be like to have an immigrant in the family?



Rocketclips, Inc. / Shutterstock.com

Their celebration was beautiful. It was full of joy and love like any other. We danced to a mariachi band, then a brass band. We ate Mexican cookies alongside wedding cake. It reminded me of my wedding, where my husband's family tried pierogies for the first time in honor of my Polish grandparents.

But seeing how impossible it was for some of my grandson-in-law's family to get visas just to come to the wedding, it's made me wonder about how we could make a better process.

Presenting an efficient future

Imagine if immigration worked like an airport. If security lines were run efficiently and smoothly with people safely arriving and leaving.

Imagine if we all could choose to live where our life would be best. Imagine in 50 years - when my great-grandkids will be grown - that we have a safe immigration process that makes it easy.

Positive vision rooted in shared values

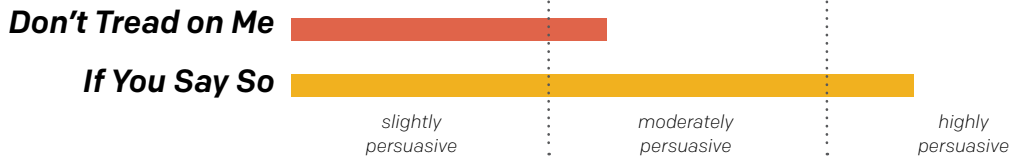
In America, our traditions come from all over the world. We might not all look the same, but we do share enduring American values: the freedom to make the right choices for our families, to give our kids and grandkids a better life than we had, and the love of a great wedding band!



Digital Vision / Photodisc via Getty Images

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.



We moved to the US after my mom died. I remember as a child playing hide and seek in my dad's restaurant with my siblings. Every night, my dad would pack leftovers for me to take for lunch. Other kids pointed and laughed at my food. I felt so ashamed.



Image by bigter_choi on Pixabay

When I told my dad, he gave me a hug. The next day, he packed a little extra, with a note: Mr. Kwan's Famous Korean Fried Chicken. "I triple dog dare you to try some!" I said to the other kids. To their surprise, it was a huge hit.

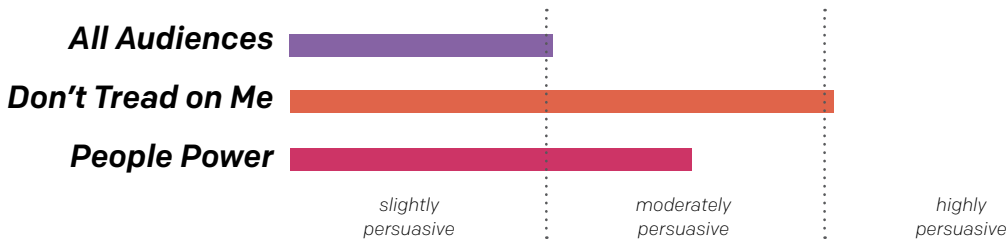


Rawpixel.com / Shutterstock.com


From that day on, we kids shared sandwiches and Korean cooking for lunch. I felt proud of where I came from and grateful for my dad, who helped us build a new life in America. And I knew I belonged at my new school.

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support


This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.



**You were hungry
and I fed you.**



SuperStock / Alamy Stock Photo



Monkey Business Images / Shutterstock.com

**You were naked and I
clothed you.**

**You were thirsty, and I
gave you water.**



*Robertus Pudyanto / Getty Images
News via Getty Images*



Monkey Business Images / iStock.com

**You were in need of
shelter, and I took you
in.**

I am always with you...



*Drew Angerer / Getty Images News
via Getty Images*



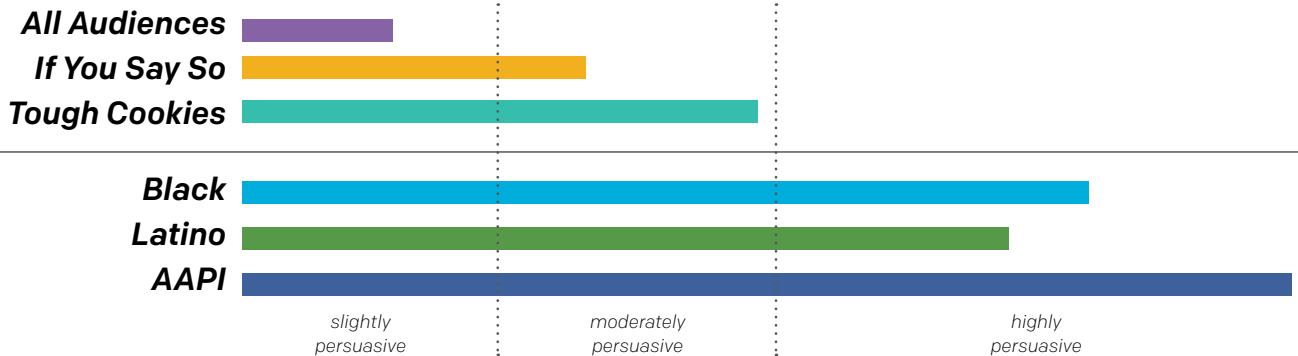
Monkey Business Images / iStock.com

Are you with me?

Based on content
submitted by Rachel van
Geenhoven at Worksafe

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.



The Necessary Navigation Through Fear of Change

We tested content that addressed audiences' fears of change, chaos, danger, and scarcity. We found that of all these, the fear of change was the most important to address explicitly in order to increase pro-immigrant support. Tackling audience's fears of change³ required us to take audiences on a journey. We told stories that tried to meet audiences where they were at and lead them past their fears to a brighter reality.

We found that addressing their fear of change alone was able to dramatically increase pro-immigrant support among our most cautious and conservative audiences (Tough Cookies and Don't Tread On Mes). But we also saw that all audience segments responded very positively to content that addressed their fear of change. Content that both addressed the fear of change and told stories about the future was able to beat the the opposition narrative and still significantly increase support for some audiences.⁴ Examples of what this looks like are included further down.

We tried several different approaches to addressing fear of change, and most of them worked well for at least one audience segment. The following are the elements that we believe contributed to the contents' success, though not all elements would work easily in the same piece of content:

- **We acknowledged feelings.** A key feature in all of the fear of change content was acknowledging emotions or anxieties in a non-judgmental way. Though we didn't validate the fears, we did acknowledge fear of a diversifying America, fear of cultural difference, fear of being left behind, and fear of change more generally. This acknowledgement served as the starting point for a narrative journey that ended by showing how change could be better for us all, or showing how change is part of a larger story of the endurance of our shared values.
- **We reassured audiences that change includes them.** We noticed that the fears people have mostly grow from a core fear of loss: losing control, losing a way of life, or losing status and the ability to thrive. In all of our fear-of-change content, we started where people were at (fearful of loss) and ended with a story of change that included them. In one particularly successful piece of content, we reframed change as progress using historical examples to show how change has improved our lives over time and will continue doing so. In others, we ended by affirming that even as things change, we still maintain a shared identity or shared values. And in others, we told stories showing how people benefit from changes in their communities and lives.
- **We modeled a person's journey from fearing to embracing change.** We used personal storytelling to show how different people navigated through their fear of

³ Our work on addressing fear of change was influenced in part by Ashley E. Jardina's research in *White Identity Politics*. (Cambridge University Press, 2019.)

⁴ Tough Cookies saw a very high increase in support with content that combined fear of change and storytelling about the future, while Don't Tread On Me's saw high increase with that combination.

change to have experiences that enriched their lives. We used characters with whom our audiences might identify, experimenting with protagonists of different genders, ages, and races. We found that content using this modeling approach worked for all audience segments. However, our most anxious audience (Tough Cookies) resonated more strongly with fear-of-change content that was not part of a personal story, and that was simpler, more general, and less emotional.

- **In order to counter the effects of an opposition narrative, we began our stories by addressing fears of change.** The only piece of content that increased pro-immigrant support in the face of the opposition narrative was content that began with a simple fear-of-change element and then moved into a story about the future. From this we believe that you don't always need to address fear of change up front, but if you're speaking to conservative audiences in a moment when the media is awash with anti-immigrant narratives, acknowledging fear of change can help move audiences in your direction.

To see what addressing the fear of change looks like in action, on the following pages we show three examples of high-performing content that either focus entirely on the fear of change or combine it with other storytelling elements.

I was afraid that all the changes in this country would leave me behind.



Rocketclips, Inc. / Shutterstock.com

But then I met my neighbors who came from Guatemala. We share recipes and stories and look out for each other.



Rawpixel / iStock.com

I feel grateful for these friendships. They make my life more fulfilled, and I feel safer in a strong, connected community. I'd like to see more people like them in my neighborhood.

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.

All Audiences 

If You Say So 

Black 

slightly persuasive

moderately persuasive

highly persuasive

**America has changed a lot in the past 245 years.
From outhouses... ...to running water.**



vm / iStock.com



stevecoleimages / iStock.com

From lawlessness... ...to justice and order



Tucson Citizen photo via Arizona Historical Society / Arizona Daily Star Tucson.com



Chris Ryan / iStock.com

From exclusion... ...to opportunity



Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

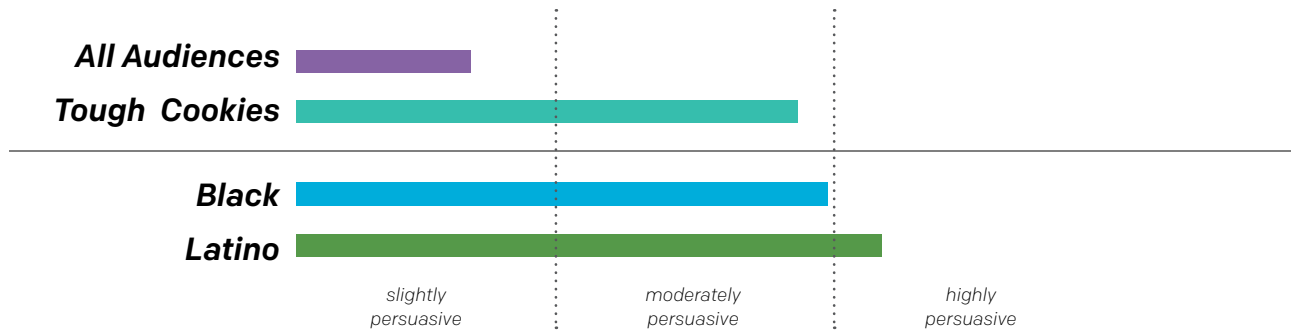


Hulton Deutsch / Corbis Premium Historical via Getty Images

With so much talk of immigration and diversity, it can feel like America is changing—for the worse. History shows that change has made our lives easier, safer and freer. Change might feel strange now, but in 50 years, we might just be glad it happened.

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.



Politicians want us to think that immigrants will change America as we know it. That people like me, whose family has lived in the US since 1776, won't be considered truly American anymore.



Martin-dm / iStock.com

We're better than that. Whether we're Black, Brown, Asian or White, immigrant or US-born, we know that being American isn't about how you look, it's how you act: It's about treating others with respect, the freedom to do what you want in life, and working hard to go after your dreams. That was true in 1776, and it will be true in 2076, too.

I hope that by then, we can fix the immigration system. Instead of blaming immigrants for wanting to live the American dream, why not fix the rules so that they are straightforward and easy to follow, so people can come and go, and have the freedom to choose where their life would be best.

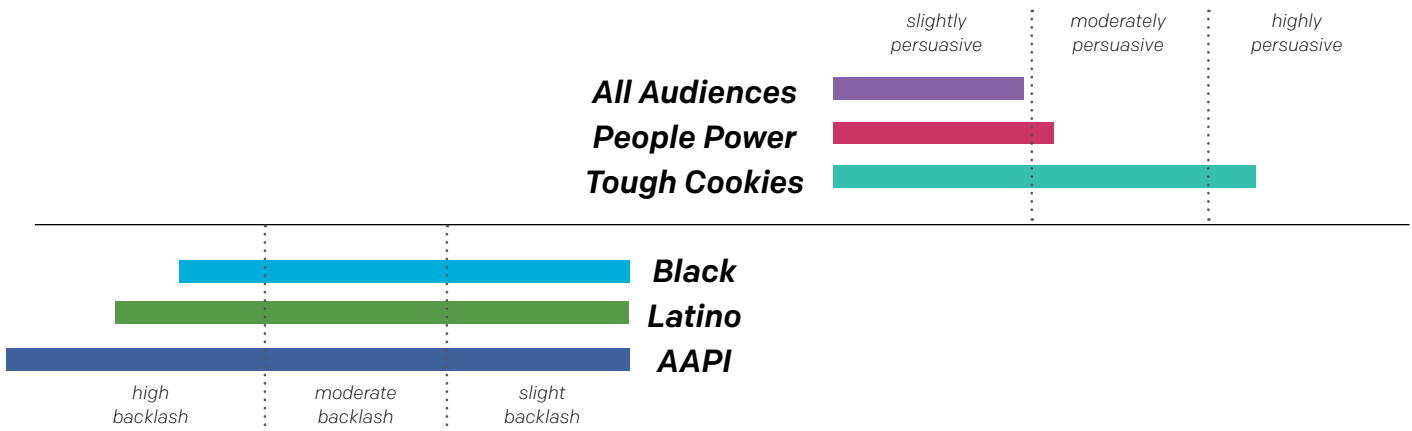


LightFieldStudios / iStock.com

This story includes language developed by the Race / Class Narrative Project, developed by Heather McGhee, Anat Shenker-Osorio, Ian Haney López, Lake Research Partners, Brilliant Corners, SEIU and Demos. Learn more about the Race / Class Narrative Project [here](#).

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured change in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content. People Power and Tough Cookies' support increased, while AAPI, Latino, and Black audiences' support decreased.



The Power of Presenting the Irresistible Future

Illustrating the future held great power for audiences, successfully moving them away from fear-based narratives and toward a pro-immigrant mindset. The level of movement among our most skeptical, cautious, and conservative audiences (Tough Cookies and Don't Tread on Me) was striking, ranging from a moderate to a very strong increase in pro-immigrant support compared to the baseline after viewing our content.⁵

Looking at the content that worked, here are the main elements that we believe contributed to their success with audiences:

- We illustrated how the pro-immigrant future benefits everyone: It is important to help audiences primed for zero-sum thinking, especially conservative audiences, grasp how the pro-immigrant future is better for them, too. Leaning into an abundant future was how we addressed their fear of scarcity. We described a world where everyone can win, using inclusive language like “everyone can...” or “imagine if you could...”
- We described the future without jargon: Painting a picture of the future in some detail worked best for audiences, though even subtle nods to the future worked well. The content that worked did not include conceptual words like “justice” or “equity”, instead describing the tangible benefits of a future in which those things were true.
- We included hints of a structured, accessible immigration process as part of the future. In order to address fears of danger and chaos, we wanted to find ways of reassuring audiences that a future where everyone has the freedom to move could be safe, without validating their fears of “criminals” crossing the border or fears of “inundation”. Content about the future did well when it included generalized references to “rules”, “process” or “efficiency”. We found success even against the opposition narrative by not mentioning systems directly, but describing the result of having an easy and efficient immigration process.⁶

To see what addressing the power of presenting the irresistible future looks like in action, on the following pages we show four examples of content that either focus entirely on the future or combine it with other storytelling elements.

⁵ We want to note that content about the future alone didn't do as well once the Great Replacement Theory opposition narrative was introduced. Audiences needed their fear of change addressed in combination with a future vision in order to overcome that narrative.

⁶ Though this subtly implies a “legality” framework, we wonder if using it in the context of the future may offer a way to sidestep a “law and order” narrative by making it obsolete — that is, framing a future as one in which there's no need to overstay a visa or cross a desert because people are simply free to move here and the process is easy and straightforward. This is worth further experimentation to understand the benefits vs pitfalls.

A Story of the Future

People have always been on the move. Movement enabled us to progress, to grow, and to connect with each other across plains and oceans. But, as time moved forward, politicians, media, and businesses profited by making us afraid of people who were moving here from other places.



MilanMarkovic78 / Shutterstock.com

But then, just when the anxiety and finger pointing seemed to become too much, we decided fear was holding us back. We decided we were greater than fear.

We began in our own neighborhoods. We stopped and listened to one another. We realized we had much more in common than what divided us. We learned one another's traditions and celebrated them. We created opportunities for our communities and showed reverence for the wonders of nature. And we laughed and danced together.



klebercordeiro / iStock.com



PopTika / Shutterstock.com

Before long, this energy spread across the country and the globe. Systems became more inclusive, efficient, and fair. And as communities across the globe became more welcoming, the world became safer, too.

And back in our local communities, we were stronger, kinder, and more caring to one another. Life was better knowing there was always space for one more at the table.

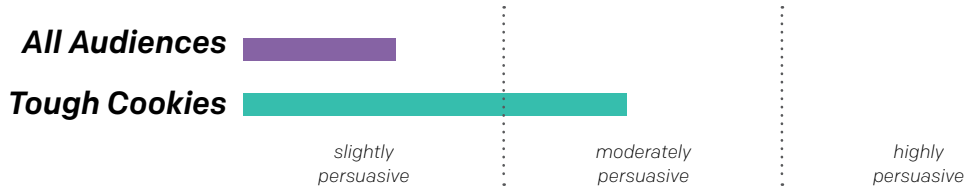


DisobeyArt / Shutterstock.com

This Story of the Future was closely adapted from the video, [UN Human Rights Vision for the World](#), from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.



If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you choose?



PopTika / Shutterstock.com

Imagine if our immigration system gave ALL OF US the freedom to choose where our lives would be best. We could work over the border in Canada. Have our friends from Mexico visit from dinner.



DisobeyArt / Shutterstock.com

Updating our antiquated immigration rules to be faster, smoother, and available to more than just the rich would give all of us more freedom.



Dmitry Molchanov / Shutterstock.com

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.



Imagine if immigration worked like an airport.



Bloomberg / Bloomberg via Getty Images

If security lines were run efficiently and smoothly with people safely arriving and leaving.



vm / iStock.com

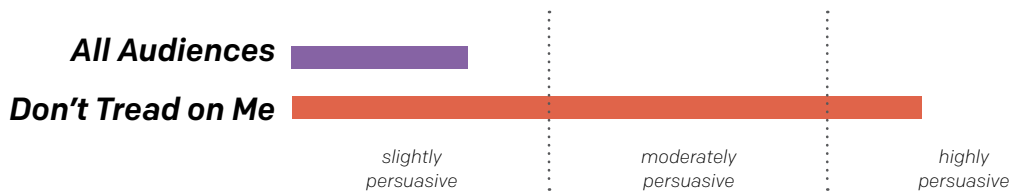
Imagine if we all could choose to live where our life would be best.



fizkes / iStock.com

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing this content.



The world around us has changed a lot and our communities are changing with it.

But one thing stays the same - we're all a part of the American family.



sirtravelalot / Shutterstock.com*



PopTika / Shutterstock.com

Imagine in 50 years people can easily travel in and out of the country.

We know who is coming in and out of the country because the freedom to move is available to everyone.



Evgenia Parajanian / Shutterstock.com



Dmitry Molchanov / Shutterstock.com

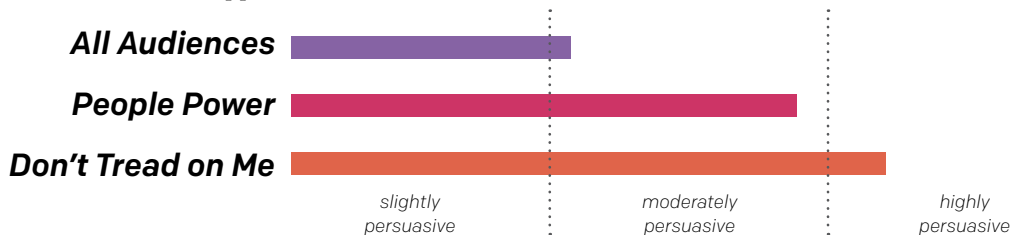
New arrivals are welcomed into communities and we all have friends from many different places. If we want to move to another country, we can.

We all thrive - those of us who were born here and those of us who moved here from other countries.

*Due to due to copyright issues, we cannot publish the original image we tested, which featured a crowd of Latinx children cheering and waving American flags.

How This Content Influenced Pro-Immigrant Support

We tested the content above against opposition content featuring the Great Replacement Theory and immigrant “inundation” narratives. This graph shows the measured increase in pro-immigrant support after viewing both this content and the opposition content.



Portal to the Pro-Immigrant Future

IN ALL OF OUR STORYTELLING ABOUT THE FUTURE, we describe a pro-immigrant, pluralist future where freedom of movement is the norm and everyone can thrive. But while every audience segment is on board with a future where people have the freedom to move and thrive, how they get to that future is different.

Justice-oriented base audiences (People Power) are the only ones who will explicitly embrace pluralism. For more order- and authority-focused audiences (Tough Cookies and Don't Tread On Me), their support of the stories we presented did not grow from a desire for a pluralist future, but rather "a unified future". This future is one where diversity is okay because there is still a degree of sameness and unity - values are shared, people get along, assimilation is a measure of success, and everyone is rowing in the same direction.

Though there are important differences between the pluralist future we are moving toward and the unified future these audiences long for, they are not diametrically opposed. From our research, the broad desire for a unified future shares roots in three deep narratives that we in the Butterfly Lab have identified as key to a pluralist future: Abundance, Belonging, and Freedom to Thrive. We can think of these three shared deep narratives as a portal that creates the openings for a paradigm shift. Telling stories rooted in these narratives can move audiences closer to a pro-immigrant worldview.

Abundance

Audiences are experiencing fear and scarcity in their everyday lives right now and long for a future where that is not the norm. Abundance in a pro-immigrant, pluralist future is about living in a world where there can be enough for everyone if we live in alignment with the world around us. It's about practicing love, care, community, and regeneration. It's about centering mindsets of sufficiency and generosity.⁷

We don't need everyone to share an exact vision of a pluralist future to be able to realize it. Just imagining a better future is an act of abundance, and we believe there is potential in nurturing what appeals to each audience as we tell stories about the abundant future. Effective storytelling can help them imagine a world where diversity makes us strong, a world where there can be what organizer Linda Sarsour calls "unity without uniformity."

⁷ From Butterfly Lab's *Narrative System for our Future*.

Belonging

Belonging in a pro-immigrant, pluralist future is about recognizing and respecting the diversity of our peoples and communities, acknowledging differences as invigorating and powerful assets, and welcoming each other. It's about seeing each other in our joys and struggles, calling each other into community, and making equity a central practice.⁸

It didn't take much to persuade audiences that immigrants belong in the U.S. But the continuing popularity of "good immigrant" stories tells us that many may have a way to go in embracing the complexity of immigrants. Our research showed that we don't need to bend our vision of the future according to what audiences seem ready to accept now. We saw persuasive power in sharing a vision of the future where we all belong.



In a pro-immigrant paradigm, our job is to show people how they belong and thrive in our pro-immigrant future.

This is what addressing the fear of change is about at its heart – it's acknowledging people's fear of not belonging, and then showing them how their story is a valued part of our shared future.

Freedom to Thrive

Opposition narratives evoke a scarcity mindset to persuade people that we're in a zero-sum reality - that if immigrants thrive, then others will not. But we think building pro-immigrant support depends upon our ability to tell a story of how we all thrive.

Freedom to Thrive in a pro-immigrant, pluralist future is about all communities and cultures having equal agency to make decisions about their lives, relationships, communities, and futures. It's about all of us – in balance and alignment with our world – being able to pursue our dreams, engage in quality and fulfilling work, and live with joy, dignity, and love.⁹ It's about having the freedom to move where our lives would be best, and being able to live our best lives there.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

Future Directions For Research

BECAUSE WE CONDUCTED OUR RESEARCH against the backdrop of broad anti-immigrant and anti-immigration sentiment in the national political environment, we were heartened by the possibilities our research revealed. However, we know that much more work needs to be done. Here we suggest some future directions for further narrative research.

We need to create a meaningful narrative connection between immigrants and immigration.

Recent research from United We Dream and Harmony Labs revealed that most audiences are not viewing stories about immigrants at all, and most stories about immigration center politicians as the protagonists rather than immigrants themselves. The stories that audiences may see often reinforce harmful dominant narratives.

We know that telling stories connecting immigrants and the immigration process is what many advocates, activists, and artists do daily. We suspect that a basic lack of positive stories connecting immigrants to the immigration system make it difficult for these stories to get traction when they are out in the world.

To make more headway connecting these two things, we believe we need more testing, narrative experimentation, and investments in creating and disseminating a large volume of stories designed for and targeted to specific audiences that strongly connect immigrants and immigration.

The Great Replacement Theory is a powerful, existential threat. We need to learn more about how to neutralize the perception that diversity is threatening.

The dominant narratives around immigrants and immigration are rooted in zero-sum thinking, white supremacy, and racism. The Great Replacement Theory is a conspiracy-based narrative that positions pro-immigrant policies as part of a plot to use immigrant voters to diminish the political power of White people. It represents an extreme distillation of all of these toxic modes of thinking, combining narratives of immigrant inundation, inferiority, and criminality. When we used Fox News content advancing the Great Replacement Theory as the opposition narrative, we saw again and again how much it moved audiences away from a pro-immigrant mindset. To overcome these opposition narratives, we linked three story elements together: taking audiences on a journey that addressed their fear of change, offering reassurance that the

immigration process can be smoother, and describing an abundant future that is welcoming, pluralistic, and free. We found that when we did so, we were able to win all audience segments back to pro-immigrant and pro-immigration positions.

When we removed The Great Replacement Theory content, linking these story elements became less important. For Tough Cookies, people who value continuity and value family, acknowledging their fear of change alone was enough to overcome the opposition message. Content about the future fared positively, as did personal stories of immigrants.

The Great Replacement Theory may hold salience because it is a narrative of the future. We know we need to offer a different, better future for all. We know that some audiences will never value diversity for diversity's sake, and may even fear it. But our research suggests that despite this, we may be able to win audiences over to our side by sharing a vision of a future where they, too, belong. We recommend more testing to explore other ways of neutralizing the notion that diversity is a threat to the future.

Audiences are primed for the “good immigrant” trope. We need to learn more about how to move audiences beyond the good/bad immigrant binary.

Our stories of immigrants were also designed to test something else: the limits of the “good immigrant” trope. We featured immigrants who worked hard in both working-class and professional-class jobs; who assimilated by dancing to country music; and who married into a White American family. Good immigrant stories were consistently among the best-performing types of content across all of our audiences, and we found that audiences could support even Black and Muslim characters who played “good immigrant” roles. But when we named that one of the characters was undocumented, support disappeared.

These findings reinforce what many in the movement have known for a long time: immigrants are acceptable as long as they are assimilated and “non-threatening”. They also show how this trope is a dead end and won't move our movement past the current status quo.

Our research points to the need for what the writer Viet Thanh Nguyen calls “narrative plentitude”: more, truthful stories told by immigrants that move the norms away from the “good”/“bad” binary, where characters experience the joy, pain and love consistent with being human, where they are allowed to make mistakes and still be accepted.¹⁰ As an example, the Black Lives Matter movement has led to a sea change in less than a decade toward more and truer representation. We need additional exploration and investment to achieve that narrative plentitude and to set cultural norms that acknowledge the breadth of immigrants' humanity.

¹⁰ See the Chrysalis Lab findings for additional experimentation and learnings around narrative plentitude.

Conclusion



If you only take one thing away from this report, take this: storytelling about the future paves the way to the future.

We don't need to compromise our vision, we need to share it. By acknowledging audiences' fears of change, taking them on a journey that ends in a better vision for a shared future, and staying true to the deep narratives we need to advance, we know we can move some of even the most resistant audiences. A pro-immigrant majority is ready for us to organize and activate. Our work ahead is clear.

It has been our greatest honor and pleasure to serve the pro-immigrant movement. We believe in what we are building together and hope that this research offers something you can use to move your important work forward.

Appendix 1: Research Methodology

OUR RESEARCH THIS YEAR involved two phases: qualitative research conducted in partnership with the Opportunity Agenda in the summer of 2022 and content testing based on those findings. We chose to focus on unlocking a pro-immigrant mindset among stretch audiences because we believe this is a prerequisite for a sustained, long-term attitudinal shift among a majority of the population that can ultimately lead to support for policy change.

We define stretch audiences as those who are skeptical or not yet supportive of immigration reform or immigrants. Our stretch audiences can include conservatives who value safety and authority; older liberals, moderates and conservatives who fear change and put family first; younger liberals who value structure but take a fatalistic approach to the state of society and would more likely be found at a party than a protest; and liberals who value community and believe coming together can solve problems, but are easily swayed by harmful dominant narratives about immigrants.

No research process can answer every question, especially for a space as vast and important as the immigrant justice movement. Our goal was to identify concepts or ideas that could be layered onto many types of stories the movement is already telling, or wants to tell, to strengthen their efficacy with stretch audiences. As such, we didn't test specific policies; we didn't focus on messages or what to say; we didn't compare the effectiveness of delivery modes or messengers; and we didn't seek out a formula that advocates can apply to content in all situations. Our goal is not to offer specific instructions to the movement, but to contribute to a larger body of research that advocates, artists, organizers and others can expand upon as we continue to push for much-needed change.

For our qualitative process, we worked with Gretchen Barton of Worthy Strategy Group to interview 48 participants who were socio-demographically representative by race, income, age, and location and who lived in Michigan, Ohio, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, Arizona, Western New Mexico, Upstate New York and Pennsylvania. We oversampled on Black, Latinx, and AAPI populations.

We wanted to learn what made participants feel more open to immigration, so we asked them to consider a fictional scenario (inspired by an existing reality, the European Union): a future world in which North, Central, and South America operated as a "free movement zone," where people could safely travel across borders for work, travel, and even to live. Then, through a

careful multivalent process that included multiple interviews, we solicited metaphorical images through which interviewees could explain their feelings and thoughts about immigrants and immigration. This process uses best practices from the world of psychology and neuroscience in order to give participants the time and the space to share what matters most to them in an unfiltered manner.

Our qualitative research revealed opportunities to build a pro-immigrant mindset, but we needed to learn more about how to put them into action. Specifically, people dream of a better future and want a better immigration system, but fear often outweighs pro-immigrant values. Structure, order and safety rose to the top as areas to investigate further.

In the fall of 2022, we translated the qualitative research findings into 58 lo-fi concepts, iterating across three rounds of testing. All of our concepts included images and text formed into brief stories about immigrants or immigration that addressed the elements we hoped to test. We included stories sourced from the immigrant justice movement, submitted by United We Dream, the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project, Unbound Philanthropy, ASO Communications, and Rachel van Geenhoven of Worksafe, as well as stories sourced from Intelligent Mischief, the Ultimate Messaging Guide to Winning the Immigration Narrative report¹¹, the #StandUp4Migrants campaign¹², the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, the Greater Than Fear campaign¹³, and Anat Shenker-Osorio's *Words to Win* By podcast. Riki Conrey of Harmony Labs and Milan de Vries offered extensive support throughout our test planning, content creation and question selection process.

We used the Grow Progress Rapid Message Testing platform to survey real people across the United States, balanced on demographics. Then, the efficacy of our content was measured against a control, using statistical best practices to accurately weight populations, calculate statistical significance and account for small sample sizes. In total, we received 15,400 survey responses across 7 tests. Each piece of content was viewed by 200 people. Although we cannot guarantee that each response was unique across all tests, the survey platform does prevent duplicate responders in each test. Survey results were also matched to the Narrative Observatory audiences using raw data from Grow Progress, thanks to the teams at Grow Progress and Harmony Labs.

11 The guide was stewarded by the California Immigrant Policy Center and America's Voice, and led by leaders from those organizations as well as from United We Dream, Immigration Hub, ACLU Colorado, and Somos Votantes.

12 The #StandUp4Migrants campaign is out of the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. More information here: <https://standup4humanrights.org/en/>

13 The Greater Than Fear campaign was co-led by ASO Communications, Uprise, Education Minnesota, Faith in Minnesota, and SEIU Minnesota. More info here: <https://greaterthanfear.us/>

We based our concepts' success on audience movement across three questions:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: All immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, have a place here and belong in America.
2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: We should expand the ability for people inside and outside the US to move freely even if that means that more immigrants move to my neighborhood.
3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I can personally imagine a future in which moving between countries is as straightforward as getting a driver's license.

Riki Conrey of Harmony Labs provided additional statistical support using the raw data from Grow Progress to compare content between tests, and to calculate performance across all questions, combined. We present estimates of the degree of concept persuasiveness for certain subgroups. The labels “slightly”, “moderately”, and “highly” persuasive reflect the concepts' effectiveness relative to the other concepts we tested. Most (about 70%) concepts with a significant impact were just “slightly” persuasive across all audiences. The next 20% of persuasive concepts moved audiences toward the target narrative more; we call these “moderately” persuasive. The top 10% of content moved the overall audience the most; these most effective content were “highly” persuasive.

Appendix 2: Research Acknowledgements

WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL TO Gretchen Barton of Worthy Strategy Group and Kirk Cheyfitz of Kirk Cheyfitz Political Strategies for their incredible work on the metaphor elicitation process and their invaluable guidance and insights throughout our research journey. And to Charlie Sherman, Julie Fisher-Rowe, Adam Luna, and the entire team at The Opportunity Agenda for their partnership in commissioning, analyzing and presenting the results of that research to the movement.

We are also especially grateful to Riki Conrey of Harmony Labs, Milan de Vries, and Lucy Odigie-Turley of Odigie-Turley Consulting for the invaluable analysis, insights, and support throughout our content testing and impact research. Thank you also to Mary Bogus and the rest of the Grow Progress team.

We offer heartfelt thanks to our Research Advisory Table for their brilliant guidance, generous feedback, and kind encouragement: Adey Fisseha, Cristina Jiménez, Anat Shenker-Osorio, Riki Conrey, Kimberly Serrano, and Wendy Feliz.

We also would like to thank the following people for their thought leadership and advice that set us on this research journey: Ryan Senser, Eleanor Morrison, Kirk Cheyfitz, Amy Simon, Maya Bourdeau, Jess Morales Rocketto, and Stephen Duncombe.

We deeply appreciate the organizations and individuals who submitted content for our testing: United We Dream, Worksafe, Rachel van Geenhoven, Harness, Center for Law and Social Policy, We The People-MI, Define American, Felix Endara, ASO Communications, National Immigration Law Center and NILC Immigrant Justice Fund, CA Dignity for Families Fund, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees, Leadership Learning Community, the Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project, Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition, and Unbound Philanthropy.

And finally, our research would not have been possible without the efforts and support of Adey Fisseha and Taryn Higashi at Unbound Philanthropy and the generous support of the Open Society Foundation, Oak Foundation, and the Luminate Group.

Permissions Page

THE AUTHORS GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE permission to republish work from the following creators:

Photo of the outlaw Billy Stiles

Reproduced with kind permission from The Arizona Historical Society

Text from the Work is Love campaign

Reproduced with kind permission in our content testing from Rachel van Geenhoven at Worksafe



NEW YORK 145 East 57th St, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10022 **p** 212.513.7925 **f** 212.513.1367

OAKLAND 900 Alice Street, Suite 400 Oakland, CA 94607 **p** 510.653.3415 **f** 510.986.1062

RACEFORWARD.ORG    **RACEFORWARD**
