# Student Analysis: Immigration in Advertising

**Abolishing ICE and family separation are taking a backseat in campaign ads; Border wall and sanctuary cities are still major talking points**

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**(MIDDLETOWN, CT) November 6, 2018** - This report provides a detailed look at discussion of immigration in federal and gubernatorial advertisements aired from June 1 to October 1, 2018. Out of the 1,614,373 ads aired, 12.7 percent (205,742) discussed immigration. The majority (80.8 percent) of ads which discussed immigration came from pro-Republican sponsors and only 19.2 percent were from pro-Democratic sponsors.

Figure 1 compares specific immigration policies mentioned in all immigration ads (in federal and gubernatorial races from June 1 to October 1, 2018). The variables for "abolish ICE," "amnesty," and "sanctuary cities" were only coded for ads which specifically mentioned those terms. The "border wall" variable included any mention of "the wall" or "Trump's wall", and "Keeping families together" included any mention of family separation.

Notably, Figure 1 shows that sanctuary cities were discussed the most often out of these immigration policies, at 33.2 percent of all immigration ads. Abolishing ICE and keeping families together, issues more often associated with Democratic candidates, were discussed less often.

**FIGURE 1. Percentages of Top Issues Mentioned in Immigration Ads, June 1-October 1, 2018**
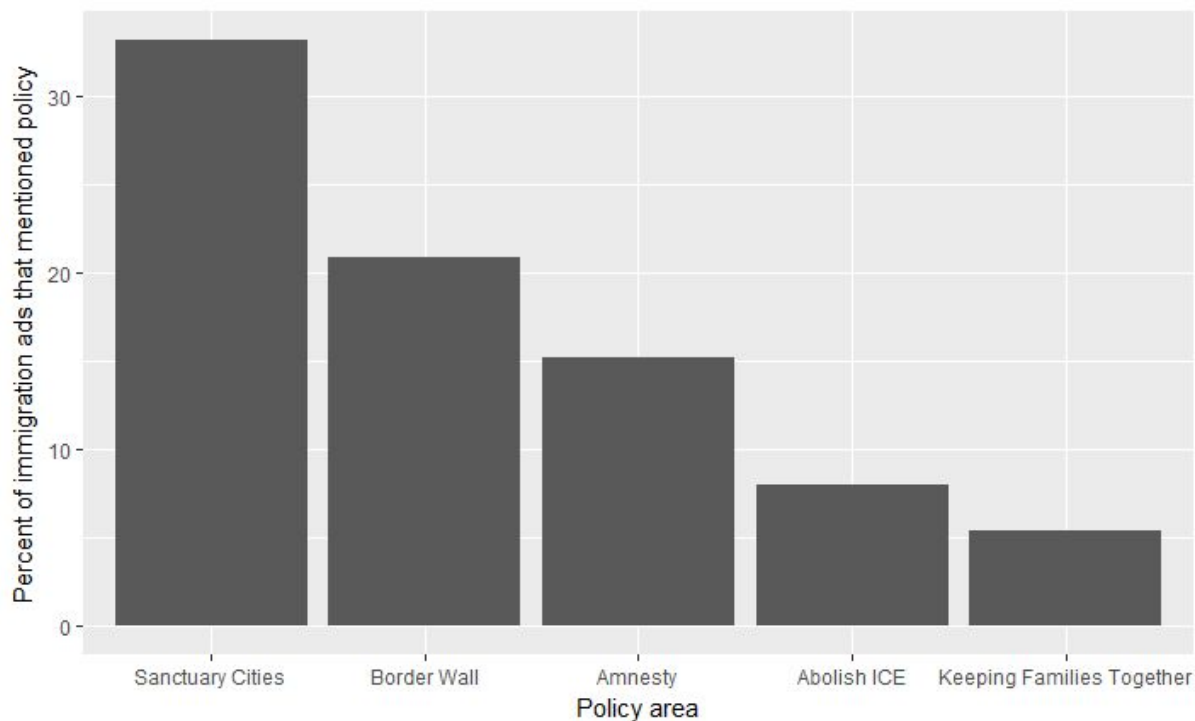


Figure 1 shows the percentage with which different immigration policies were mentioned as a percentage of total immigration ads. Numbers include English-language ads aired on broadcast television for gubernatorial, U.S. House, and U.S. Senate races from June 1 to October 1, 2018.
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team coding & analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

## Abolishing ICE

In the past year, references to abolishing ICE have increased, concurrent with an increased focus on family separation and other policies related to immigration laws and enforcement. However, in our analysis, ICE was discussed in immigration-related advertising only 8.0 percent of the time, notably less than other immigration policies.

The majority of ads which discussed policy positions on abolishing ICE were pro-Republican airings that discussed another candidate's support (73.5 percent of ICE ads). All of the ads which articulated a candidate's own position on ICE or the abolition of ICE were run by pro-Democratic candidates or groups. Conversely, all of the ads which targeted a candidate for his, her, or their position on the abolition of ICE were run by pro-Republican candidates or groups. Abolishing ICE was not mentioned in reference to favored Republican candidates or targeted Democratic candidates.

**Negative Portrayal of Immigrants Most Prominent in GOP Ads**

Most ads that contained an obvious emotional appeal in reference to immigrants did so using negative emotions, as 81.2 percent of ads with a clear valence portrayed immigrants negatively rather than positively. This is the result of a dynamic in which Republicans both aired the bulk of immigration-related ads and disproportionately referred to immigrants negatively.

Ads were coded as negative when they portrayed immigrants as a threat to safety or security, or when they focused on immigrants taking benefits or jobs away from the average American. Ads were coded as positive when they showed immigrants in a sympathetic light, often focusing on children and families. In all cases, these valances were only assigned for instances in which a) the appeal had an obvious emotional undertone and b) when the appeal was directed towards individual immigrants, rather than the immigration system as a whole. We tested the reliability of these measures through multiple rounds of practice coding; more information on the kappa values of these variables can be found in the "About" section of this report.

Although we were relatively stringent in assigning valances, with only 30.2 percent of ads receiving any designation at all, trends nonetheless remained clear. Overall, Republican candidates mentioned immigrants negatively 26.1 percent of the time while mentioning them with a positive valence just 0.9 percent of the time. Meanwhile, Democrats used a negative appeal in 2.4 percent of instances and a positive one in 22.1 percent.

Figure 2 shows the geographic variation in negative characterizations of immigrants. Because the figure lists states by percentage of immigration airings with a negative valence, it is important to note that some states have a low number of total immigration ad airings. These states include Arizona (20 total airings), South Dakota (31), North Carolina (122), Connecticut (209), and Oregon (254).

**FIGURE 2.  Percentage of Immigration Ads Portraying Immigrants Negatively, June 1-October 1, 2018**
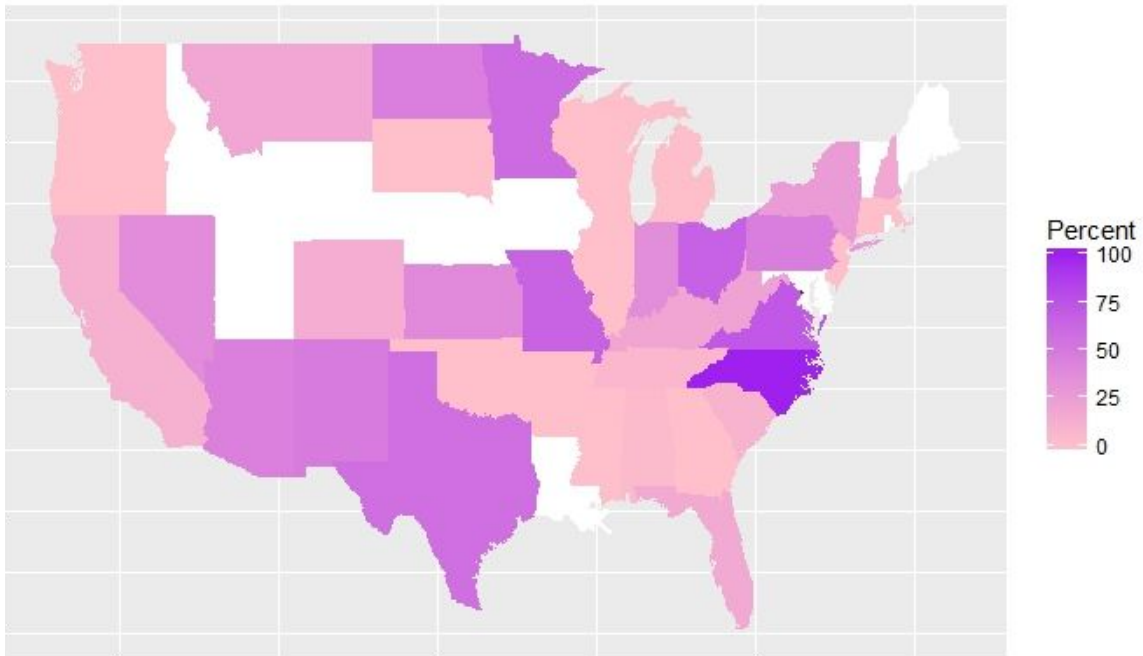


This map displays the percentage of immigration ads, by state, that adopt a negative valence when referring to immigrants. Numbers include English-language ads aired on broadcast television for gubernatorial, U.S. House, and U.S. Senate races from June 1 to October 1, 2018. There were no immigration airings in white-shaded states. Hawaii had a percentage of 0 and no immigration ads were coded for Alaska.
CITE SOURCE OF DATA AS: Wesleyan Media Project student team coding & analysis of Kantar Media/CMAG data.

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

Data reported here from Kantar Media/CMAG do not cover local cable buys, only broadcast television, national network and national cable buys.

Data in this report covers U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and Gubernatorial English-language ad airings from June 1 to October 1, 2018. Out of a total of 352 unique ad creatives that mention immigration aired during the above time period (according to Kantar Media/CMAG) our team successfully coded 345. Seven ads could not be coded due to video errors. This data was analyzed as part of a WMP lab course (Gov378) in the Department of Government at Wesleyan University. Our student team conducted an in-depth content analysis of these immigration-related ads. We developed a codebook to assess the content related to immigration and rigorously tested its reliability through an iterative process using Cohen's kappa. All content features discussed in this report achieved intercoder reliability of at least 0.67. Figures created by Sam Prescott '19 and Sean Regan '19.

The **Wesleyan Media Project (WMP)** provides real-time tracking and analysis of political advertising in an effort to increase transparency in elections. Housed in Wesleyan's Quantitative Analysis Center – part of the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life – the Wesleyan Media Project is the successor to the Wisconsin Advertising Project, which disbanded in 2009. It is directed by Erika Franklin Fowler, associate professor of government at Wesleyan University, Michael M. Franz, professor of government at Bowdoin College and Travis N. Ridout, professor of political science at Washington State University. WMP staff include Laura Baum (Project Manager), Dolly Haddad (Project Coordinator) and Matthew Motta (Research Associate). Elizaveta Kravchenko '19 serves as the course assistant for Gov378, the WMP lab course.

The **Wesleyan Media Project** is supported by Wesleyan University and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Data are provided by Kantar Media/CMAG with analysis by the Wesleyan Media Project. WMP is partnering again this year with the Center for Responsive Politics, to provide added information on outside group disclosure.

Periodic releases of data will be posted on the project's website and dispersed via Twitter @wesmediaproject. To be added to our email update list, click here.

**About Wesleyan University**

Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Conn., is known for the excellence of its academic and co-curricular programs. With more than 2,900 undergraduates and 200 graduate students, Wesleyan is dedicated to providing a liberal arts education characterized by boldness, rigor and practical idealism. For more, visit wesleyan.edu.

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