

THE SANCTUARY MOVEMENT

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Abstract

The sanctuary movement has recently become an important social movement in the era of Trump's administration. While this movement has become a united front for many in opposition to the president's anti-immigration policies, it also is one of the most controversial political issues. This recent rise in support and resistance of this movement has also been accompanied by the recent increase in its media coverage. Various national and local news institutions have participated in writing/publishing stories or articles about this phenomenon. This research paper seeks to define the existing relationship between social movements and their press coverage by scrutinizing the sanctuary movement in depth. This paper will highlight the problems in the coverage of this political issue. It also seeks to identify how press coverage and conversations on social media platforms shape public opinion in situations like this and how people figure out their stance.

The Sanctuary Movement and It's Press Coverage

Coverage of sanctuary movements is important nowadays as it creates awareness of the issues and paves the way for a social change to occur. The sanctuary movement refers to a religious and political campaign to provide a haven for the immigrant community, regardless of status. The movement first started in the 1980s when the United States witnessed an influx of Central American refugees fleeing civil conflict. Since then, a rise has been seen in this collected campaign with the Trump administration's coming into power. The article "Abolitionist futures and the US sanctuary movement" by A. Naomi Paik provides a detailed account of its roots, limitations, and future directions of this movement that has become "a central front of resistance" the new administration. (3) What started from various congregations and churches offering sanctuary, "the movement has spread to city, county and state governments" and joined by diverse local communities like students, faculties, and different organizations. (5) Paik highlights how the movement started and the US government's actions under the Reagan and Bush era. The government ultimately criminalized the movement and refused to give many fleeing refugees access and termed them 'economic migrants.' It is also from where the term 'illegal aliens,' referring to undocumented migrants, circulated and is now widely used. Even though the conflict in Central America was resolved through peace treaties, "the criminalization of migrants only intensified." (7) What Paik serves in highlighting is the fact that two concepts – existence of immigrant communities and increase in crime – have been exceedingly associated together and since then has fostered as a factual claim in the minds of Americans. "The history of criminalization shows that the Trump administration has a robust foundation on which build its platform to target marginalized populations further." (12) Trump's campaign was solely based on

him garnering this internal fear that occupied the people's mindset, which was mostly fueled by the 9/11 attacks and the murder of Kathryn Steinle by an illegal immigrant.

A research article by Loren Collingwood, Benjamin Gonzalez O'Brien, and Joe R. Tafoya, called "Partisan Learning or Racial Learning..." states that "throughout the 1990s and into the mid-2000s, the sanctuary city movement, in general, received minimal press coverage at the national level." (Collingwood et al. 3) The focus on sanctuary policies was more locally based as the movement consisted of a dispute between the government and individuals rather than a national issue. However, ever since Trump's campaign in 2015 for the presidency that capitalized on the particular case of public safety, the press coverage increased. And it kept on rising in the two years from 2015-2017, with the most activity seen in 2017 after Trump issued his executive order. The Opportunity Agenda report, "Redefining Sanctuary," discusses and extensively analyses the media coverage plus content on social media platforms found on this political issue. The research "analyzed trends in narrative, opinion, spokespeople, and use of terminology related to sanctuary jurisdictions, immigrants, and immigration contained in news reporting and opinion articles." (40) The report examined 50 articles from national and public newspapers and highlights several notable trends seen in media coverage on the political issue. Most of the focus in the items published was on a stringent part of the executive order where the administration threatened to withhold "federal funding from sanctuary jurisdictions." (40) As the report states, the coverage fell into five broad categories: public safety and 'rule of law', anti-immigrant legislation, defining sanctuary cities, challenging the Trump administration, and impacting immigrant communities. There was the consistent use of elected spokesperson that was anti-immigration and other officials that were pro-immigration advocates. Yet, in the report's analysis, there was repeated use of quotations from Trump and Jeff Sessions themselves.

The analysis done by the report of media content on this controversial issue highlights certain problems that accompanied the many articles published. There was an increased focus on commenting on associations made between immigrant policies and public safety. “More than half of articles within this category made references to undocumented immigrants committing a crime, with more than a third making specific reference to a single case: the 2015 murder of Kathryn Steinle.” (43) As mentioned above, there was the consistent use of quotations from officials (mainly Trump and Sessions) that held an anti-immigrant stance. Only 15% of the articles focused on challenging Trump and his reasons for his policies, and only 10% of the articles focused on the fear that immigrant communities were facing. The increased attention given to reporting mere information gave the Trump administration the publicity needed to unravel their policies further. In hindsight, the attention acted as positive reinforcement. Most of the population focused on why Trump was putting out the policies rather than on why it shouldn’t have been. Rory Carroll, in his article at The Guardian, “Protesting Trump's immigration policy? You might be accidentally helping him”, mentions how the increased resistance and news coverage by media is helping the Trump administration in its plan to instill fear in communities. According to Rasmussen Reports, 76% of likely Republican voters agreed that illegal immigration increases the level of serious crime during his campaign. And the number of people believing this even after passing the executive order could be said to be consistent. According to the latest Rasmussen Reports posted on March 24, 2017, 64% of people are opposed to their community, declaring itself a sanctuary for illegal immigrants. During the campaign, Democrats were largely silent on the issue of immigration policies. “A defense of sanctuary cities from Clinton and other leading Democrats during the 2016 campaign was relatively muted, as – insofar as immigration policy is concerned.” (Collingwood et al. 4) The

Republicans here weaved the silence to their advantage, advocated policies in opposition, and succeeded in building a mindset for people who continued after passing the executive order. It also was fueled by the fact that Trump’s campaign received most of the coverage during the campaign than any of his rivals did – in my opinion, a gross error by the journalistic media.

Despite this, a rise in pro-immigrant voices was seen in 2017 by Democrats and elected officials, university administrators, and community members. In a blog post by Carly Goodman on American Friends Service Committee, she states how media content analysis conducted by the team showed that before the election, “coverage of sanctuary tended to be pretty negative with stories linking sanctuary city policies to crime.” However, after the election, the media covered a broader aspect of it, focusing on the “non-existent link” between sanctuary cities and crime.

“While pro-immigrant voices dominated media coverage in the time reviewed, the consistency of anti-immigrant voices presents important implications for pro-immigrant advocates.”

(Redefining sanctuary 53) The anti-immigrant voices were consistent in their source and their framing of the issue that is illegal immigration relating to public safety. The pro-immigrant activists had given no uniformed reason. One issue was that “Many, in an attempt to debunk negative stereotypes about the criminality of undocumented immigrants, acted to reinforce anti-immigrant framing, which connects issues of crime and public safety to sanctuary policies.”

(Redefining Sanctuary 47). Added to this were the articles that attempted to define what the term “sanctuary cities/jurisdictions” meant and largely failed to diffuse the confusion surrounding the whole issue. “Collectively, these stories point to a general lack of clarity regarding the official definition of “sanctuary cities,” and again, point to the effectiveness of the administration’s anti-sanctuary cities rhetoric.” (46) Moreover, only 10% of the articles discussed racial profiling, which could have been a major contender in opposing the policies. And a tiny proportion of

speakers quoted in news stories, about 3% according to the report, were immigrants themselves.

Low coverage on both these areas is cultivated into a larger problem for shaping people's opinions on the sanctuary's political issue. On the topic of confusion surrounding Trump's executive order, Jane Chang mentions in her blog post on Lawfare how the media has contributed to misinformation and greatly exaggerating on many subjects. In a series of other blog posts, she also serves to mention how "to exaggerate or over-complicate what it does (the executive order) only serves to enhance its power artificially and encourage overreaction." This reiterates my point that this advantaged Trump's mass coverage in the way he aimed to achieve.

To illustrate, Chang uses the example of a line from *Daily Beast*:

"Experts disagree about whether or not jurisdictions break federal law when they ignore ICE's requests to hold undocumented immigrants in jail so the agency can pick them up and deport them."

She counters this by mentioning that federal law does not require jurisdictions to hold illegal immigrants without any reason for ICE. The phrasing of any news article always has to be carefully done, especially on a political issue that could shape the general public's opinion on certain controversial matters. Taking this example from the New York Times, "Contrary to Trump's Claims, Immigrants Are Less Likely to Commit Crimes" by Richard Perez-Pena.

"Contrary" to what the headline says, the article itself doesn't necessarily focus on disputing and presenting evidence as to *why* in detail. In fact, in the latter part of the article, it almost seems like the writer supports anti-immigrant policies by adding statistics of the number of immigrants in jail and how many have been convicted for crimes.

Mass media plays a crucial role in forming and shaping public opinion. The power that media holds is explained through the 'Cultivation theory', which was initially composed by G. Gerbner,

which posits that television and media have a considerable long-term influence on attitudes and beliefs of people about society. With sensationalistic narratives, exaggerated claims, and misleading phrases leading to misreporting, the sanctuary movement's media coverage has been, on the whole problematic. Consistent quoting of the Trump administration increased attention given to the interpretation of the executive order. Traditional associations made between immigrants and crimes, even when not supporting the widespread belief, repeatedly refer to isolated events like the Kathryn Steinle used by the Trump administration and constant usage of 'illegal aliens' when referring to undocumented immigrants influenced the public whether positively or negatively.

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