

# 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 of the president's anti-immigration policies, it also is one of the most controversial political issue. This recent rise in support and opposition of this movement has also been accompanied in recent rise in its media coverage as well. 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 its press coverage by scrutinizing the sanctuary movement in depth. The problems in the coverage of this political issue will be highlighted. It also seeks to identify how press coverage and conversations on social media platforms shapes public opinion in situations like this and how do people figure out there stance.

## The Sanctuary Movement and It's Press Coverage

Coverage of sanctuary movements are important nowadays as it creates awareness of the issues but also paves way for a social change to take place. The sanctuary movement refers to religious and political campaign to provide a safe haven for the immigrant community, regardless of status. The movement first started in 1980s when United States witnessed an influx of Central American refugees that were fleeing civil conflict. Since then a rise has been seen in this collected campaign with the coming of Trump administration 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” to 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 various other local communities like students, faculties and different organizations. (5) Paik highlights how the movement started and the actions implemented by the US government under the Reagan and Bush era. The government ultimately criminalized the movement, refused to give access to many fleeing refugees and termed them ‘economic migrants’. It is also from where the term ‘illegal aliens’, referring to undocumented migrants, circulated around and is now widely used. Even though the conflict in Central America was resolved through peace treaties the “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 highly 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 further target marginalized populations.” (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.

In 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 in that time consisted of dispute between the government and individuals rather than a national issue. However, ever since the Trump’s campaign in 2015 for presidency that capitalized on the particular issue of public safety the press coverage increased. And it kept on increasing in the two years from 2015-2017 with the most activity seen in 2017 after Trump issued his executive order. The report by The Opportunity Agenda, “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 articles 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 which include public safety and ‘rule of law’, anti-immigrant legislation, defining sanctuary cities, challenging the Trump administration and impact on immigrant communities. There was consistent use of elected spokesperson that were anti-immigration and other officials that were pro-immigration advocates. Yet in the analysis done in the report 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 with the many articles published. There was 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 crime, with more than a third making specific reference to a single case: the 2015 murder of Kathryn Steinle.” (43) With this, as mentioned above, there was 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 it needed to further unravel their policies. In hindsight, it acted as a sort of positive reinforcement with all the

attention where most of the population focused on the reasons why Trump was putting out the policies rather than focusing on reasons as to why it shouldn't have been. Rory Carroll in his article at the The Guardian, "Protesting Trump's immigration policy? You might be accidentally helping him", mentions how the increased resistance and news coverage by media is actually helping the Trump administration in its agenda to instill fear in communities. According to Rasmussen Reports, 76% of likely Republican Voters agreed with him 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. Once again, according to the latest Rasmussen Reports posted on March 24, 2017 stated that 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 and advocated policies in opposition and succeeded in building a mindset for people that continued after he passed 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 of this, a rise in pro-immigrant voices was seen in 2017 by not only Democrats but also elected officials, university administrators and community members. In a blog post by Carly Goodman on American Friends Service Committee, she states how are media content analysis conducted by the team showed that before election "coverage of sanctuary tended to be pretty negative with stories linking sanctuary city policies to crime." However, coverage after election the media covered a broader aspect of it focusing on "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. No uniformed reason had been given by the activists that were pro-immigrant. 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 the issue of racial profiling which could have been a major contender in opposing the policies. And a very small proportion of speakers quoted in news stories, about 3% according to the report, were immigrants themselves. Low coverage on both these areas cultivated into a larger problem for shaping people’s opinions on the political issue of sanctuary. On the topic of confusion surrounding Trump’s executive order, Jane Chang mentions in her blog post on Lawfare how the media has contributed in providing 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 artificially enhance its power and encourage overreaction.” This reiterates my point that the mass coverage of this advantaged Trump 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 potentially shape the opinion of the general public 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 is supporting 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 key role in forming and shaping public opinion. The power that media holds is explained through the ‘Cultivation theory’ which originally composed by G. Gerbner which

posits that television and media has a large long-term influence on attitudes and beliefs of people about society. With sensationalistic narratives, exaggerated claims, and misleading phrases leading to misreporting the media coverage of the sanctuary movement has been on the whole problematic. Consistent quoting of Trump administration, increased attention paid to interpretation the executive order, regular associations made between immigrants and crimes even when not supporting the popular belief, repeatedly referring to isolated events like the Kathryn Steinle as used by the Trump administration and constant usage of ‘illegal aliens’ when referring to undocumented immigrants all has collectively influenced the public whether in a positive way or a negative way.

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