

## An examination of immigration news coverage of Telemundo and Univision during the 2020 U.S. presidential election

### Un análisis de la cobertura informativa sobre inmigración de Telemundo y Univisión durante las elecciones presidenciales de Estados Unidos de 2020

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#### Abstract

This study analyzed how two major U.S. Spanish-language national television networks covered the topic of immigration during two simultaneous events: a global health pandemic crisis, COVID-19, and the 2020 U.S. presidential election. This investigation centered on the intermedia agenda setting effect between *Telemundo* and *Univision*. Outcomes indicate that *Telemundo* televised a higher number of immigration news stories than *Univision*. The intermedia agenda setting effect showed a moderate positive correlation between networks, demonstrating that their immigration news attributes were similar, but not quite the same. Results indicate that *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* viewers were receiving different information about immigration. The cross-lagged correlation established that the directional flow of influence between networks was reciprocal, suggesting that both newscasts were impacting each other's immigration coverage, but the dominant flow of news influence was from *Univision* to *Telemundo*. This investigation documented that the intermedia agenda setting effect of a single issue and its descriptive attributes can be successfully measured in ethnic news media outlets under a presidential election environment.

**Keywords:** 2020 U.S. presidential election; COVID-19 world health crisis; ethnic news media; immigration news; agenda setting theory; journalism studies.

#### Resumen

Este estudio analiza cómo dos medios televisivos estadounidenses en español realizaron la cobertura noticiosa sobre el tema de inmigración en medio de una crisis de salud pandémica mundial, conocida como COVID-19, y las elecciones presidenciales estadounidenses del 2020. La presente investigación centra su atención en la medición del efecto de la agenda setting entre los noticieros de *Telemundo* y *Univisión*. Los resultados indican que *Telemundo* elaboró un mayor número de notas periodísticas sobre migración que *Univisión*. El efecto de intermedia agenda setting presentó una correlación moderada positiva entre televisoras, demostrando que las características de sus noticias sobre inmigración fueron similares, pero no las mismas. Además, los resultados indicaron que los televidentes de *Telemundo* y *Univisión* recibieron diferentes informaciones noticiosas sobre inmigración. La correlación cross-lagged estableció que la dirección de influencia entre televisoras fue recíproca, sugiriendo que los dos noticieros se influenciaron uno al otro en relación con su cobertura sobre inmigración, pero la influencia fue más dominante de *Univisión* a *Telemundo* que al revés. La presente investigación documenta que el efecto de intermedia agenda setting sobre un solo tema y sus características descriptivas particulares puede ser medido en medios noticiosos étnicos utilizando esta teoría y en un contexto electoral.

**Palabras clave:** Elección presidencial del 2020 en EE.UU.; crisis mundial de salud COVID-19; medios de noticias étnicos; noticias sobre inmigración; teoría de la agenda setting; estudios sobre periodismo



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## 1.- INTRODUCTION

The 2020 U.S. presidential election cycle was proceeding smoothly until mid-March, when the global health crisis started. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global health emergency, known as the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. Immediately after, President Donald J. Trump declared a national emergency, ordering Americans into a mandatory lockdown, obligatory use of face masks to stop the disease from spreading, and implemented Title 42 of the Public Health Service Act, authorizing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to issue a public health order allowing a speedy removal by the U.S. government authorities of unauthorized border crossers and asylum seekers.

This unexpected global health crisis had an impact on the electoral cycle. In late August, during the general election period, the U. S. had reached about 6 million COVID-19 cases and approximately 190,000 deaths (CDC, 2020). According to the CDC, Latinos were the second most affected ethnic group in this pandemic crisis, compelling the Latino-oriented newscasts to report on this issue. The purpose of this research is to investigate how the top two Spanish-language national television news networks in the U.S. reported on the issue of immigration during the 2020 general election cycle. *Telemundo* and *Univision* frequently and consistently report on immigration, as it is a central topic to their news identity and a relevant issue to their Latino viewers.

Still, during this election, the world was hit with the global pandemic, which impacted how *Telemundo* and *Univision* covered immigration. This examination inquires how *Telemundo* and *Univision* covered immigration under an unforeseen emergency health situation, focusing on which perspectives/angles about this issue were implemented in the elaboration of their news stories, how similar or different immigration news was covered between networks, and, from a cause-and-effect standpoint, to establish which newscast was the leader and which was the follower by documenting their directional flow of influence. Also, the present study expands on the ethnic viewpoint of the agenda setting theory by continuing to test if the intermedia agenda setting effect can be accurately assessed in Spanish-language news press under the dual contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the U.S. presidential election simultaneously. The next section describes the immigration context during the 2020 electoral cycle.

### Immigration Context During Trump's First Presidency 2017 - 2021

In early summer of 2015, when Trump announced his presidential candidacy for the Republican Party at Trump Tower in New York City, Trump placed the issue of immigration and border security at the center of his 2016 presidential campaign. Immigration became the top policy issue of his presidential campaign and set the epicenter of his political rhetoric at the United States-Mexico border region. Trump described immigrants as a national problem that was not being adequately addressed. Trump's solution was to increase border security by building a wall on the southern border, which would be paid for by the government of Mexico (Trump, 2015). The Baker Institute for Public Policy identified that 2016 presidential campaign promises on border security were the most notorious aspect of Trump's campaign; "immigration was a touchstone issue in the 2016 federal election that brought President Donald Trump to office" (Norman, 2020, p. 1).

On January 20, 2017, Trump was sworn in as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. In his inaugural address, he spoke at length about immigration issues. "Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength" (PBS News, 2017, p. 1). During his first week as president, Trump signed three executive orders related to immigration: The "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvement," "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States," and "Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals."

The “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvement” Executive Order granted U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) operational control of the U.S.-Mexico border wall and mandated them to hire 5,000 Border Patrol agents. DHS was ordered to immediately construct detention facilities at or near the U.S. southern border, assign asylum officers and immigration judges to those facilities to hear asylum cases, and terminate ‘catch and release’ activities, opting for detention of illegal border crossers. Also, DHS was required to expand expedited removal throughout the country, not only within the 100 miles of the border, and to apply humanitarian parole only on a case-by-case basis. DHS personnel were requested to be trained on the unaccompanied alien children section of the Trafficking Victims Protection and Reauthorization Act (TVPRA). They were also required to ensure that credible or reasonable fear determinations for those in removal proceedings are conducted within the plain language of the provisions (Trump, 2017a).

The “Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States” Executive Order forbade sanctuary cities from receiving federal grants, except those that are necessary for enforcement purposes. The order directs DHS to designate jurisdictions in sanctuary cities, orders DHS to permit state and local law enforcement to act as immigration agents, and to apprehend and detain immigrants. It also re-institutes the Secure Communities program requiring local jurisdictions to issue detainers on unauthorized immigrants in their custody, and expanded the priority list of non-citizens subject to deportations to anyone who committed acts that constitute a criminal offense, who engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation, who has abused any program related to public benefits, who is subject to a final order of removal but has not departed or who poses a risk to public safety. This executive order also authorized an additional 10,000 ICE agents (Trump, 2017b).

The “Protecting the Nation from Terrorist Attacks by Foreign Nationals” Executive Order suspended the issuance of visas to nationals from seven nations—Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen—designed as being detrimental to the interest of this nation for 90 days, shutdown the U.S. refugee program for 120 days to ensure that refugees are being adequately screening for national security purposes, reducing by 54% the number of refugees to be admitted to the U.S. (from 110,000 to 50,000). The order also halted the resettlement of Syrian refugees indefinitely and launched a screening mechanism for the entry of foreign nationals. As per this executive order, DHS was required to expedite completion of an entry-exit tracking system and the implementation of screening standards for all immigration programs to assess whether an individual is a risk, will be a positive contributor to the nation, or can contribute to the national interest (Center for Migration Studies, 2017). Those three executive orders set the immigration policy for the entire Trump administration. Over 400 immigration related actions were taken during this presidential period; the most controversial were the following.

In the first year, 2017, the Trump administration announced the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which protected young undocumented immigrants, known as Dreamers, who came with their parents to the U.S. (about 800,000) from deportation and allowed them to work. The government immediately stopped accepting new applications and allowed existing recipients with permits expiring before March 5, 2018, to apply for a two-year renewal (Bush, 2017). In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court voted 5-4 to block the administration’s plan to dismantle DACA (Totenberg, 2020).

In the second year, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced the implementation of the Zero Tolerance policy to prosecute all cases of illegal entry, “aimed to prosecute all adults who crossed the southern border without inspection, if a family was apprehended, the parents were taken into custody by DHS, while their children were taken into custody by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), families were separated commonly kids were sent to shelters miles away from their parents, the government struggled to reunite families because there was not a centralized database, this policy ended six and a half weeks after its implementation when the president signed an Executive Order directing that they be detained together.” (American Immigration Council, 2025, p. 1). Also, in 2018, the Trump administration announced the termination of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for several countries—El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Sudan—arguing that conditions in their home countries have improved, revoking their protected status because this program was meant to be temporary; consequently, they were required to leave this country within 18 months of this announcement (Panetta, 2018).

In the third year, 2019, the Migrant Protection Protocols policy, also known as ‘The Remain in Mexico’ policy, was implemented, requiring asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border to wait in Mexico for U.S. court hearings. About 70,000 migrants were subject to this policy, which ended on June 30, 2022, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Biden Administration could end this policy (Associated Press, 2022). In the last year of the Trump administration, in March 2020, Title 42 of the Public Health Service Act was instituted, allowing a prompt dismissal by the U.S. government authorities of unauthorized border crossers and asylum seekers. This order was in effect for 38 consecutive months, ending on May 11, 2023, when the Biden Administration declared an end to the COVID-19 public health emergency (Pillai & Artiga, 2025). This paper assesses the extent to which the pandemic influenced news coverage of immigration issues in *Telemundo* and *Univision*.

### Department of Homeland Security’s 2017 – 2020 Arrests and Deportations Data

According to the 2017 Arrest and Deportation report from DHS, the agency made 323,591 arrests during the first year of Trump’s presidency when his executive orders and the termination of the DACA program came into force (See Table 1). The Customs and Border Protection (CBP) federal agents carried out 57% of these arrests at the U.S.-Mexico border. While U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) federal officers executed 43% of these apprehensions in the interior of the U.S. territory. In terms of deportations, 70% (226,199) of those detainees were removed from the country. The CBP agents conducted 64% of those deportations at the U.S.-Mexico border region, and ICE agents expelled 36% from the interior. The majority of those deported immigrants were convicted criminals (56%), had violated immigration laws (36%), or were pending charges (8%) (ICE, 2018).

When the Zero Tolerance policy and the end of the TPS program took effect during the second year of Trump’s presidency, the 2018 DHS Arrest and Deportation report indicated an 18% increase in arrests, with 396,448 individuals taken into legal custody during its annual operations. Again, CBP officers detained 61% of them at the border region and ICE agents apprehended 39% in the interior. Nevertheless, deportations decreased by 7% in comparison with 2017; about 65% (256,085) of detainees were removed from the country. CBP agents deported 63% of people apprehended, while ICE officers conducted 37% of removals, mainly expelling convicted criminals (57%), immigration law violations (34%), and individuals with pending criminal charges (9%) (ICE, 2019).

Table 1: DHS 2017 - 2020 Annual Arrest and Deportation Operations Report

| DHS Agency     | 2017 |             | 2018 |             | 2019 |             | 2020 |             |
|----------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|
|                | %    | Individuals | %    | Individuals | %    | Individuals | %    | Individuals |
| Arrests        |      | 323,591     |      | 396,448     |      | 510,854     |      | 182,869     |
| ICE- Interior  | 43   | 139,553     | 39   | 153,670     | 27   | 137,084     | 54   | 99,774      |
| CBP - Border   | 57   | 184,038     | 61   | 242,778     | 73   | 373,770     | 46   | 83,095      |
| Deportations   | 70   | 226,119     | 65   | 256,085     | 52   | 267,258     | 100  | 182,869     |
| ICE - Interior | 36   | 81,603      | 37   | 95,360      | 32   | 85,958      | 34   | 62,739      |
| CBP - Border   | 64   | 144,516     | 63   | 160,725     | 68   | 181,300     | 66   | 123,145     |

In the third year of the Trump Administration, when the Remain in Mexico policy became operative, DHS indicated a 22% increase in apprehensions from the previous year, the highest under the Trump Administration. Their 2019 Annual Arrest and Deportation Operations Report showed 510,854 apprehensions, 73% by CBP agents at the border and 27% by ICE officers in the interior. However, the document denoted a 20% decrease in deportations of detainees from the previous year, 52% (267,258). Those individuals captured by CBP agents, 68%, were deported more frequently than those detained by ICE officers, 32%. Predominantly, immigrants had criminal

charges (56%), followed by immigration law violations (35%), and pending charges (9%) (ICE, 2020). Up to this point, DHS data indicated that arrests were increasing, but deportations were decreasing, reflecting the fulfillment of Trump's campaign promises to the American people regarding immigration.

Flores and Chávez (2020) determined that Trump presented 17 issue positions related to immigration policy during his 2016 presidential campaign. For instance, to build a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border while ensuring that Mexico will pay for it; undocumented immigrants who crosses the border illegally will be detain and removed for the U.S.; no amnesty/no benefits to undocumented immigrants already in the U.S. territory; suspend immigration from terror-prone regions where vetting cannot safely occur; cancel visas to foreign countries that won't take their citizens back; restore community safety act creating a taskforce on violent crime and increase funding to law enforcement agencies to dismantle criminal gangs; to end illegal immigration by a two-year mandatory federal prison sentence for illegally re-entering the U.S., and 5-year mandatory federal prison sentence for undocumented individuals with criminal/felony/misdemeanor convictions; begin removing two million criminal undocumented immigrants from the U.S. territory; reform legal immigration to serve the best interests of Americans and keeping immigration levels within historic norms; implement a biometric entry-exit visa tracking system at all land, air, and sea ports; cancel all federal funding to sanctuary cities; triple the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents; people admitted to the U.S. should support American values; prioritizing jobs of the American people by ensuring that open jobs are offered to American workers first; and federal law prohibits the employment of undocumented immigrants (Flores & Chávez, 2020, p. 130). Trump's Executive Orders, termination of DACA and TPS programs, the Zero Tolerance and Remain in Mexico policies, and DHS data reports demonstrated that he was a president who fulfilled campaign promises made to American citizens to gain their political support and vote.

Nonetheless, DHS statistics changed dramatically during the last year of the Trump presidency when the president declared a national emergency enforcing the Title 42 policy authorizing DHS federal agents to expel migrants and asylum seekers from the country to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. DHS's 2020 annual operations report indicated that arrests were at the lowest level of the whole Trump administration: 182,869 (See Table 1). Detention trends from previous years were reversed. ICE officers apprehended 54% (99,774) of individuals in the interior, and CBP agents detained 46% (83,095) of persons at the border. Those arrests were made for criminal convictions (68%), pending criminal charges (22%), and violations of immigration law (10%). It is important to note that all immigrants in custody 100% were deported (ICE, 2021). This change in immigration policy required immediate news coverage from *Telemundo* and *Univision* reporters because it directly concerns their viewership.

## **Immigration Policies of Presidential Candidates in the 2020 Election**

In early 2020, the primary elections were held nationwide to determine the parties' nominees for the presidential seat. The Republican Party chose Donald J. Trump, who was running for reelection, as its presidential nominee, and the Democratic Party selected Joseph R. Biden as its presidential candidate. Moore (2020) compared both candidates' immigration plans, indicating that Biden's key priorities were to eliminate restrictions to immigration put in place during the Trump administration and stop construction of the border wall, reversal restriction toward granting asylum and temporary protected status, raise the number of refugees to 125,000 per year, make DACA program permanent, stop the separation of immigrant families, end bans on people from certain Muslim counties traveling to the U.S., call a moratorium on deportation during the first 100 days of his administration, modernize the immigration infrastructure by providing a roadmap to citizenship for people already living in the U.S. without papers, expand resources for them, and make permanent and temporary work visas more accessible. In contrast, Trump planned to continue his policies by finishing the border wall, implementing additional restrictions on immigration policy, opposing sanctuary cities (because local law enforcement has limited coordination with federal immigration officials), limiting asylum and work visas, ending human trafficking, and deporting 'non-citizen' gang members (Moore, 2020, p. 1).

Like in the 2016 presidential election cycle, immigration ranked within the top three priorities for American voters, along with healthcare and the economy. According to Gallup, these three issues were identified as the most important problems that the U.S. was facing at that time. Therefore, Gallup's senior analyst, Frank Newport (2020), advised presidential candidates that "no candidate can go wrong discussing these issues" (p. 1). Likewise, according to the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), Healthcare policy was the top priority for Democrat voters, while immigration policy was the driving force for Republican voters: "More than 4 in 5 registered voters say a candidate's immigration plan is important in their decision about who to vote for in the presidential election" (BPC, 2019, p. 1). However, according to Nuño-Perez and Pantoja (2020), "Latinos are the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. electorate...reaching out to Latinos by the parties has been a key variable in the plans to tip the scales in tight races across the country, as most Latino voters are U.S.-born citizens and not single-issue voters" (p. 1). They determined that issues important to foreign-born Latinos were also relevant to U.S.-born Latinos. For instance, the top five policy issues for Latino immigrants (foreign-born Latinos) were responses to the coronavirus (46%), lowering healthcare costs (32%), addressing racism and discrimination (27%), creating more jobs (24%), and immigration (19%). "Immigration reform was often among the top-three issues for Latinos and in some instances, it was the number one issue for immigrants. COVID and its disproportionate impact on communities of color have altered the landscape and are underlying a number of policy considerations in this election" (Nuño-Perez & Pantoja, 2020, p. 2). The next section discusses how the U.S. Spanish-language press has routinely reported on immigration.

### Trends in Immigration News Reporting at U.S. Spanish-Language Press

The first Spanish-language television station in the U.S. was Channel 41, KCOR-TV, established in San Antonio, Texas, on June 10, 1955, by owner Raúl Cortez. In 1961, this channel changed its identifying letters to KWEX-TV when the Mexican media businessman Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta purchased the station. He wanted it to share a similar call sign with his Mexican radio station XEW, known as the most powerful AM radio station in Mexico with 250 KW of transmission power. By the 70s, Azcárraga Vidaurreta had purchased three television stations—San Antonio-Channel 41-KWEX-TV, Los Angeles-Channel 34-KMEX-TV, and Miami, FL-Channel 23-KWL-TV—creating the *Spanish International Network* (SIN). In the mid-80s, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruled that SIN violated FCC laws because it was controlled by Mexican investors, forcing the sale of the company. In early 1987, after the network was purchased by Hallmark, it was rebranded to *Univision* (Univision, 2015). By 2019, *Univision* owned and operated 65 stations across the U.S. (The City University of New York, 2019).

Its competitor is *Telemundo*, which started as Channel 2-WKAQ-TV in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on March 28, 1954. This station was owned by Ángel Ramos, who also owned the newspaper, *El Mundo*, and the radio station WEMB-AM *Radio El Mundo*. In an effort to unify his media conglomerate, he decided to name his TV station *Telemundo*. In 1983, *Telemundo* was transferred from the island to the mainland after it was purchased by John Blair & Co. In 1987, Reliance Group Holdings purchased John Blair & Co, then proceeded to create the *Telemundo* network. Ten years later, Liberty Media and Sony Pictures purchased *Telemundo*, leading the television company for four years, until 2002, when NBC Universal acquired the network (Los Angeles Times, Archives, 1990). By 2019, *Telemundo* owned and operated 45 stations in the country (The City University of New York, 2019).

U.S. Spanish-language television networks are a subsystem of the U.S. television system, which in some cases has media ownership associations and content distribution agreements with major U.S. media corporations (Gómez, 2016). U.S. Journalistic values, routines, and norms of legacy mainstream news media are present in Latino-Oriented newscasts (Alexandre & Rehinder, 2008). Resemblance between newscasts is indistinguishable, since most of the Spanish-language journalistic workforce graduated from U.S. universities trained in American journalistic norms and values (Flores, 2019). "Among these values are altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, and ethnocentrism (...) Latino-oriented journalists embrace

these dominant values, including US ethnocentrism, albeit within a Latino ethno-racial context” (Rodríguez, 1999, p. 85).

On the screen, legacy news outlets and Spanish-language newscasts might look very similar, but their news content is different since their news-gathering processes are not the same. For instance, Latino issues and Latino sources are virtually absent from mainstream network news, reducing the availability of diverse voices (Moran, 2006). However, Latino reporters make an effort to include Latino experts as sources and the Latino community at the center of their news reports (Subervi-Velez, 1999). Likewise, Spanish-language reporters also use news sources and wire services from Mexico, expanding their coverage internationally to Latin American countries (Rodríguez, 1999). Consequently, Spanish-language media are presenting a completely different worldview that audiences would not hear about anywhere, as commented by Rodríguez during an interview (Seemetwice, 2008). Latino news practices a pluralistic news coverage that focuses on international affairs and assimilation news reports (Eshbaugh-Soha & Balarezo, 2014), with a service-orientation angle expected by their consumers. “Latino news audience is also understood as people in need of particular information about, and/or orientation to, dominant society institutions and practices” (Rodríguez, 1999, p. 108).

Hispanics are unlike other immigrant groups in the U.S.; they enjoy a dual cultural orientation: “Latinos tend to want to assimilate into the U.S. politics and society while they maintain clear connections to their country of origin” (Eshbaugh-Soha & Balarezo, 2014, p. 451). According to Wilkinson (2009), the purpose of the Latino-oriented media broadcasting is to construct an imaginary bridge that directly connects Hispanics with their Latin American cultural heritage to satisfy the socio-cultural media demands of the U.S. Latino population. The U.S. Spanish-language media motivates Latino immigrants to be knowledgeable about the U.S. political system and continually empowers Latino immigrants to acquaint themselves with American traditions (Félix et al., 2008). Finally, the demographic characteristic of language, not Latino ethnicity, determines the audience of U.S. Spanish-language media (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004). This paper aims to examine the Spanish-language national television networks, *Telemundo* and *Univision*, focusing on how their acculturation process takes place, particularly regarding immigration policies, through their immigration news coverage.

Traditionally, scholarly research regarding Spanish-language press coverage on immigration has identified two trends: the business model (operational) and the newsgathering and writing strategy (news content). Regarding the administrative component, scholars have documented that their business model shapes their immigration coverage, establishing that news expectations might be set up by their audiences’ information preferences while presenting their news consumers as a single group of individuals, minimizing cultural differences among Latino communities, and avoiding disparities as much as possible. Rodríguez (1999) established that Spanish-speaking audiences share the same language, cultural ties to their country of origin, the process of acculturating into U.S. culture, as well as its lifestyle and socioeconomic status, indicating that they are relatively homogeneous, making them convenient for advertisers and news organizations to establish a strong revenue strategy.

The U.S. television news model is based on market control, indicating that their major income comes from selling advertising with little governmental interference. Allen (2022) documented that “Spanish-language television networks manufactured the ‘Latino Market’ throughout the development of ‘Pan-Latinidad,’ which refers to a widely described amalgamation of Spanish-speaking individuals in which instinctive national identities are paralleled by...their perception of belonging to a single Latinx population” (p. 104). In this context, news is perceived as a commodity, and newscasts play a significant role in bridging with Latino audiences by producing news stories useful to their daily lives while building strong community engagement. Also, Allen (2022) determined that “Individuals living in the United States who are of Latin descent typically identify with their ancestral nationality” (p. 101). Consistently, Latino media have been linked to trends of migration and cultural connections between Latin American countries and U.S.-born Latinos.

As pointed out by Slocum (2009), “television news serves as a link between the audiences and the station. The on-air personnel [anchors and reporters] give a face to the station, which provides the service, the information,

and the local coverage needed by the specific market audience. Spanish language stations and their newscasts are no different [from English-language channels]” (p. 23). However, when Latino media engage in news content creation, news producers and reporters prioritize their target audience’s needs and interests to generate a strong relationship with their consumers. Consequently, the two main topics that Latino newscasts frequently report on to provide the information and service expected by their viewers are Latin American/U.S.-Latino culture (a type of information that links news consumers with their homeland/heritage) and immigration (which many audience members have experienced themselves and/or through a family member), which are implicitly and explicitly discourses of race.

Furthermore, Branton and Dunaway (2008) examined the immigration news coverage performed by Spanish-language newspapers located in the southern and central region of California, determining that “Spanish-language news outlets generate a larger volume of coverage and more positive coverage of immigration when compared to English-language news outlets” (p. 1006). because the Latino print media were motivated to cater to their target audiences’ views on this matter. They established that immigration coverage is determined by the news media’s particular market conditions and their specific audience preferences. Likewise, Eshbaugh-Soha and Balarezo (2014) documented that national Spanish-language TV networks also covered immigration more frequently than national English-language television news. Their outcomes determined that immigration coverage was quite different: *Telemundo* aired 208 stories while NBC broadcast one immigration story, suggesting that both networks were aware of their audiences’ preferences, distinct interests, and news expectations.

At the state level, the differences in immigration reporting between English-language and Spanish-language news outlets were notable as well. In South Carolina, López-Sanders and Brown (2020) examined immigration reporting for three consecutive years (2005-2007), before, during, and after the 2006 immigrant rights marches. Their results identified that after the marches, the English-language newspapers changed their racial categories to identify immigrants from a pan-ethnic category, such as Latinos and Hispanics, into a national-origin label, such as Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, etc. However, López-Sanders and Brown (2020) observed that in the Spanish-language newspaper, racial signifiers shifted in the opposite direction, from national-origin labels to a pan-ethnic category. Similarly, they found that cultural characterization of immigrants was optimistic, with a positive public discourse about immigration, “a tendency in the Spanish press to de-emphasize stark native-immigrant boundaries in favor of more positive stories” (López-Sanders & Brown, 2020, p. 833). For example, news stories highlighted immigrants’ work ethic and their ability to access mainstream institutions and resources.

Spanish-language press coverage of immigration typically follows the civic journalistic model, and examines how this information could facilitate its audience’s acculturation to U.S. culture. Once again, the Spanish-language press was adapting its immigration coverage to fit a particular set of audience preferences. It’s precisely this type of news information that empowers Latino media to build a strong relationship with their audience, as reflected in the classification Latino stations achieve in local, regional, and national markets. As documented by Molina Guzmán (2008), “the ratings for Spanish-language television and radio often outpace those of its general-market competitors...in the three largest media markets (Los Angeles, Miami, New York)” (p. 202). She clarified that this compelling content engagement resonates with consumers because it is procured by Latino media professionals specifically for Latino audiences. In other words, the news content describes the societal understandings and experiences of race by shaping public perceptions of self-identity as well as how other racial groups perceive Latinos. In addition, news content is a powerful tool to deconstruct negative stereotypes, ambiguous representations of Latino culture, and fight against injustices, racism, and acts of discrimination by providing a voice to Latinos by narrating their stories from their point of view that cannot be found anywhere else. Accordingly, Latino media acts as a counterpart of the English-language news. In short, the Latino media plays a crucial role in constructing racial self-representations of Latinos, encouraging positive portrayals that are decisive for achieving racial equity and justice. This study focuses on the representational element, examining how *Telemundo* and *Univision* construct a sense of self-representation in their immigration news coverage under a presidential election context.

Rodriguez (1999) documented that Spanish-language news media outlets tend to emphasize the advocate-

reporting style that encourages political participation and immigration coverage. Also, she found that the largest consumers of Spanish-language media are Mexican immigrants, which indicates a particular interest in this topic. Flores (2003) noted the interconnections between the topics of race, nation, and immigration in her rhetorical analysis of the media representations about the Mexican immigrants' deportation drive and repatriation campaign that resulted in a mass exodus in the 1920s and 1930s. Her comparative analysis of the City of Los Angeles main English-language (*Los Angeles Times*) and Spanish-language (*La Opinión*) newspapers established that the media's images of immigrants as illegal aliens are part of the U.S. history of immigration and race because the Mexican American indiscriminate deportations were motivated by economic reasons and underlying racial motives.

Flores (2003) points out that "the [mass deportations] drive was never designed to result in numerous deportations but was instead crafted to create a media-produced fear that would be the impetus for voluntary repatriation" (p. 364). Her outcomes indicated that English-language and Spanish-language dailies reported on the indiscriminate arrests of Mexican American individuals, along with the deportations of citizens and those lawfully in the U.S. For example, "*La Opinión* included regular coverage of repatriation and often published stories encouraging Mexicans to repatriate to help their native country" (Flores, 2003, p. 364). She concludes that the city's news organizations achieved the goal of motivating Mexican Americans to leave the U.S. Consequently, her rhetorical research demonstrates the importance of researching Spanish-language news media coverage of immigration and shows its connection with race studies.

In a separate study about *La Opinión*, Rodriguez (1999) documented that the newspaper adopted an editorial line to assist Mexican-Americans in their process of full incorporation into U.S. society while fighting against racism, denouncing acts of discrimination. Again, Flores (2003) argues that the news media's description of the immigration experience creates meanings that can be changed over time, particularly during challenging contexts, influencing audiences' perceptions of the matter, their responses to it, and transforming race policy and immigration law. She documented that over the years, the U.S. government has struggled with the role of immigration in the nation's identity and security; "such issues merit attention from communication scholars, especially those interested in media, for social debate over borders, boundaries, and citizens often occurs in mediated domains" (Flores, 2003, p. 363). This paper responds to Flores' call to provide scholarly attention to the topic of immigration in the media. This investigation examines how U.S. Spanish-language television networks reported on immigration during an international health crisis. The purpose is to identify *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* self-representations regarding Latino immigration experiences and how those news stories formed a connection with nationhood and race.

This civic journalistic model can be easily observed when the issue of immigration is discussed as a state law. Vigón et al. (2010) examined the national Spanish-language television evening newscasts' coverage of Arizona's Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, also known as SB 1070, signed into law by Arizona Governor Janice Brewer, in April 2010. This act stated that it was a crime to be an unauthorized immigrant living in Arizona and required legal immigrants to carry identification documents to prove their legal status. Their outcomes indicated that *Univision* and *Telemundo* intended to fulfill a public service duty, "Spanish-language TV news focused on mobilizations and marches against the measure, activists, immigrants contributing to the economy, undocumented immigrants without connections to drug smuggling, and data and experts that refuted stereotype images that linked undocumented immigrants to violence" (Vigón et al., 2010, p. 205).

Their results indicated that *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* network executives approached the SB 2017 reporting as a major national ongoing story, and Spanish-language journalists felt a sense of duty to raise awareness within the Hispanic community. Vigón et al. (2010) showed that both networks were reporting on similar initiatives in other states, providing a cost-to-cost coverage, focusing on giving voice to immigration experts, civil rights representatives, Hispanic advocacy groups, undocumented immigrants and their families, pro-immigration activists, federal/state legislators, law enforcement officials, artists/entertainers, and law supporters, "Univision's coverage was trying to influence the debate by demanding responses from U.S. authorities and officials" (p. 217). The authors acknowledged that from the English-language reporters' perspective, this type of advocacy

journalism practiced by Spanish-language reporters may have failed to broadcast a balanced coverage of SB 1070. However, “Univision and Telemundo successfully built a counter frame to the frequent negative portrayals of immigrants and Hispanics in most English-language media” (Vigón et al., 2010, p. 220).

Due to those different styles of news reporting, the people who choose Spanish-language press as their main source for news would be better informed about immigration. Latinos can receive their news in Spanish and/or English, according to Abrajano and Singh (2009), who conducted a comparative study of several major national television networks when President George W. Bush announced his new Guest/Temporary Worker Program on January 7, 2004. Results showed that Spanish-language stations reported more frequently on the immigration reform than their English-language counterparts. Abrajano and Singh determined that “Latinos who only use Spanish news are more sympathetic towards immigrants and more knowledgeable of the Bush proposal than Latinos who only rely on English-language news” (p. 11). Their results also indicated that Latinos’ opinions regarding immigration change according to their generational status; first-generation Latinos tend to support immigration policies, while second and third-generation Latinos are more likely to perceive undocumented immigrants as a threat to the economy or as competition for them in the labor market.

Thus, previous scholarly research regarding immigration news coverage of Spanish-language press has recognized two perspectives: the business model and the news content. The present study continues this conversation regarding the second tendency to determine if it is still current and/or if it has changed. The last time that newsgathering and news writing strategy inclination was examined at the national level was back in 2004. Therefore, an update is needed to keep up with the trends in Spanish-language news media. This investigation uses agenda setting theory as its theoretical framework because this theory has generated a race and ethnicity component, which permits the examination of Latino press such as *Telemundo* and *Univision*. Originally, agenda setting theory was intended to be assessed in mainstream media, but some scholars have applied it to examine ethnic media outlets. Therefore, this research continues expanding this trend, centering on a particular cultural context like Latino Spanish-language television networks, directing our attention to their journalistic practices covering the issue of immigration. The question is not will the agenda setting theory work on ethnic media? but rather does ethnic media set its agenda in a manner similar to the non-ethnic media according to agenda setting theory?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Agenda setting theory serves as the intellectual foundation of this study to examine the attention that the ethnic media, particularly the Latino press, gave to immigration during the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Agenda setting theory examines the communication process, focusing on its effects on audiences. McCombs (2004), one of the intellectual fathers of this theory, commented that his theory was inspired by Walter Lippmann’s (1922) concept of ‘pictures in our heads’, describing the role that news plays in its audience’s perceptions of reality. As McCombs (2004) stated, “Agenda Setting is a theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media’s pictures of the world to the pictures in our heads. The core theoretical idea is that elements prominent in the media picture become prominent in the audience’s picture” (p. 68). Agenda setting theory calls attention to the learning process that takes place from the news to its audiences. As a result, news consumers learn that the importance of a topic or theme is directly related to the amount and frequency of coverage, increasing its level of salience. As McCombs (2004) explains, “for all news media, the repetition of a topic day after day is the most powerful message of all about its importance” (p. 12). For this reason, audiences perceive those topics and themes that are continuously present in the news as more significant than those presented only rarely.

The classic agenda setting effect proposition suggests that the news’s ability to focus the attention of its audiences on a few public issues is the agenda setting role of the press, where McCombs (2004) described that “the unit of analysis on each agenda is an object, a public issue” (p. 69), and whereby a set of attributes are chosen by journalists to describe a public issue in their news stories. In agenda setting theory, the label agenda describes the

list of the most frequent issues. However, when the attention of the examination is focused on a particular issue, like immigration, the label agenda describes the list of attributes that were most recurrently used by reporters to describe that particular issue. Typically, news consumers do not have the opportunity to experience first-hand the immigration situation in the country.

Therefore, they rely on national, state, and local journalists to investigate and inform them in their news stories, creating a sort of second-hand reality. All of those reports are concerning a single issue, but the newsgathering process involves several decisions that the reporter has to make quickly based on the information that was available when working on the story. For instance, from which journalistic angle, perspective, and approach should immigration be described to viewers? The particular characteristics selected by the reporter to narrate, describe, and recount those immigration events in their news stories are known as “attributes.” That is, the list of attributes will be learned by news consumers, generating the immigration “pictures in our heads.”

Furthermore, as Cohen (1963) described, the news media inform their audiences what to think about (first level) through the constant development of their news agendas, but the news media can also explain to their news consumers how to think about objects by describing the objects’ attributes (second level). This investigation examines one object exclusively, immigration, assessing that object’s attributes to establish the most frequent journalistic perspective that Spanish-language journalists selected to report in their newscasts. This study scrutinizes Cohen’s second function, how to think about objects—how to think about immigration according to news reports aired by *Telemundo* and *Univision*. The intermedia agenda setting effect can be quantified when *Telemundo*’s and *Univision*’s lists of immigration attributes are compared to each other, focusing on the transfer of attributes from one television network to the other, illustrating the flow of influence between both newscasts and recognizing which of them led in immigration coverage conversation and which one followed.

### **Agenda Setting Theoretical Approach Regarding Race and Ethnicity**

In terms of race and ethnicity in agenda setting research, there have been four different approaches that have measured this intersection. The first approach examined the English-language media news with a focus on the audience’s/viewers’ own racial and ethnic self-identification, determining that it could play a role in agenda setting effect because its effectiveness depends on the audience’s personal experience interacting with a particular racial or ethnic issue and the enforcement of those points of view with other sources such as family, friends, and the news media. For instance, Tipton (1986) found that minority audiences are less susceptible to agenda setting effects than white audiences because they consume less news media. However, Miller and Wanta (1996) did not find any differences in agenda setting effects in newspaper readers by race and ethnicity. Furthermore, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) investigated the relationship between issue relevance and race as well as ethnicity in television news. They established that for minority viewers, issues related to civil rights had higher significance than for white audiences. Scholars stated that news consumers who have been personally affected by topics reported in the news have a higher predisposition to the media’s power of influence. Likewise, Hill (1985) demonstrated that in television news, basic demographic characteristics such as race and ethnicity could play a role depending on the level of personal experience that news consumers had with a social problem that could impact their issue priorities.

Moreover, Salwen and Matera (1997) examined the agenda setting effect on a single issue, immigration, between Phoenix’s (Arizona) news media and their residents. They argued that agenda setting could be achieved as a passive experience for news consumers with the news media: “people who actively attend to the news with pre-conceived agendas of issue importance are less likely to adapt to the media’s agenda than those who passively attend to the news” (Salwen & Matera, 1997, p. 330). That is, if audiences have first-hand experience with a particular issue, the power/ability of the news media to transfer their priorities would be limited. Salwen and Matera (1997) documented that “Hispanics assigned greater interest to immigration than non-Hispanics” (p. 329). To them, racial and ethnic identification with a problem constitutes a form of barrier that diminishes agenda setting

effects. Likewise, Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) found evidence indicating that audiences' "personal experiences might resonate with and reinforce the signals received from other sources of information [such as news media], rather than interfere with them" (p. 806).

The second approach regarding the intersection among agenda setting theory, race, and ethnicity continued the conversation by focusing on how immigration has been discussed within unions, environmental, and religious interest groups. For example, Jacobson (2011) examined its effects on three interest groups—AFL-CIO, Sierra Club, and Christian Coalition. He considers that organizational agendas are a tool that their leaders could use to establish a narrative to let people know what the group stands for, which individuals/organizations the group represents, and who belongs—who are their individual members. Through this process, the interest groups develop and set a particular agenda, which can be envisioned every time a new leader is elected, "a key piece of interest groups' identity central to agenda setting is who the interest groups envision representing...agendas are a key piece of the process of redrawing the contours of a group as they draw some potential constituents inside the sphere of belonging in the organization and they draw some outside" (Jacobson, 2011, p. 994).

In other words, it is the operational process by which interest groups define their identity and how, over the years, it can change to adapt to new political, social, health, and technological environments. Organizational leaders use the agenda setting process to set up a vision, organizational mission, and a social identity, which are expressed through their actions and group behavior in their community. Consequently, "interest groups then would formulate their stances on immigration based on their members' desires" (Jacobson, 2011, p. 995), which could influence governmental policies. Additionally, Heaney (2004) found that "interest group identities are fluid, negotiated and strategically formed within constraints...depending on context and the intersection of the issues they represent, their tactics, and who they represent" (p. 616).

The third approach regarding this intersection dynamic among agenda setting theory, race, and ethnicity examined the role of immigration during electoral cycles, especially in the context of presidential elections, highlighting that immigration does play a strong role. To illustrate, Sussman (2017) stated that Trump was elected president due to his position on immigration because it was his ride to victory. Newport (2016) released a Gallup study indicating that immigration was the second most important issue for voters in the 2016 presidential election. On Election Day, the CNN Exit Poll (CNN, 2016) indicated that immigration was the third most important issue to voters after the economy and terrorism. Sussman found that "it appears that in the 2016 vote, not only did immigration influence voters' choices, so too did leading politicians harness public sentiment in order to gain public support... Trump appeared to be the right man at the right time, able to ride a wave of discontent with immigration" (p. 80). Moreover, Patterson (2016), director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy, found that in the 2016 election cycle, Trump received more press than any other presidential candidate.

Likewise, Trump led immigration coverage particularly in the news distributed by digital search engines such as Google and Bing according to Krupenkin et al. (2020) who found "significant and sustained increases in news segments on crime by immigrants and their use of public services after Trump's inauguration and find that searches for crime and welfare related to immigrants are correlated with the daily volume of news on immigrant crime and welfare" (p. 2). They argued that this type of immigration coverage could have a strong impact on voters' anti-immigrant attitudes and behavior, "immigration news coverage can lead to both the reinforcement of anti-immigrant beliefs and the impetus to act on those beliefs" (Krupenkin et al., 2020, p. 10). However, Suro (2005) explained that "immigration ebbs and flows in importance, its ranking as priority has risen and fallen sharply depending on its prominence in the policy arena" (p. 18), and the resultant media attention. Similarly, Weaver et al. (1981) documented results in the context of a presidential election, "personal experience is a more powerful teacher of issue salience than are the mass media when the issues have direct impact on voters' daily lives" (p. 195).

Furthermore, Dunaway et al. (2010) examined whether location plays a role in immigration coverage by comparing newspapers in border states and in non-border states over 12 months in 2006 when the nation experienced a wave

of immigration marches and protests everywhere. Their results documented that “media attention to immigration is greater in border states than in non-border states; as a result, residents of border states are more likely to identify immigration as the most important problem than are residents of non-border states” (Dunaway et al., 2010, p. 359), indicating that geographical location plays a significant role when assessing the agenda setting effect on immigration.

The U.S.-Mexico border region became the news epicenter throughout the entire 2016 presidential election campaign period as documented by Flores and Chávez (2020), who performed a content analysis of Republican presidential nominee Donald J. Trump’s political television ads, official campaign website, Twitter posts, and his first 100 days of contact with the American people. Their outcomes identified that the most controversial issue of Trump’s presidential campaign was immigration, described by means of 17 distinct policies, of which 14 were directly related to the U.S.-Mexico border. The most popular policies included building a wall on the border that Mexico would pay for, canceling federal funding to sanctuary cities, tripling the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, suspending immigration from various countries, setting up/enhance a biometric entry-exit tracking system, and providing no amnesty and no benefits to undocumented immigrants, among others.

Flores and Chávez (2020) determined that “the most effective political communication tool was Trump’s first 100 days agenda, which disseminated 16 immigration attributes” (p. 123). Their outcomes show that two moderate correlations were found between Trump’s website and Trump’s 100 days, and between Trump’s TV agenda and Trump’s 100 days, indicating somewhat similar content. In addition, Flores and Chávez determined that Trump was disseminating different descriptions of the immigration situation by narrating the issue differently on each of his digital and social media platforms. This absence of a clear immigration message could result in confusion among voters. The present study continues this analysis, inquiring if this same situation would repeat itself during the 2020 election because Trump was running for reelection, even though this cycle took place during a global pandemic.

Lastly, the fourth approach regarding the intersection among agenda setting theory, race, and ethnicity examined how the Spanish-language press has covered immigration over the years. The predominant research on the intersection between agenda setting theory and race and ethnicity has been conducted in English-language news media, which mostly serve a non-Latino audience. English-language news media tend to portray minorities less favorably, as documented by Subervi (2017) in his “Brown out report” for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ). Over the course of six consecutive years from 2008 to 2014, he examined several national television newscasts—ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN—establishing that Latinos are frequently portrayed negatively in the news, presenting them as problem people typically associated with topics of crime and immigration. Subervi (2017) stated that “among the findings of this study is the fact that the patterns of coverage, or most accurately stated, neglect of the coverage of the nation’s largest ethnic minority population, has remained practically frozen in time or has worsened” (Subervi, 2017, p. 1) because his outcomes indicated that coverage of Latinos is about one percent of all their news stories aired.

Consequently, those findings were a call to attention for some Latino scholars who began examining the U.S. Spanish-language press, focusing on the intersection between agenda setting theory, race, and ethnicity. There is a limited number of studies that centers its attention on this connectedness. To illustrate, Flores and McCombs (2008) examined how *Telemundo* and *Univision* reported on immigration during the 2004 U.S. presidential election. Their results showed that immigration ranked in fifth place in both TV networks’ news agendas combined and ranked eighth place in the voters’ agenda, according to the William C. Velazquez Institute’s 2004 National Latino Election Day Exit poll. In particular, immigration ranked in fourth place in *Telemundo*’s newscast agenda and in sixth place in *Univision*’s newscast agenda. Consequently, immigration had a higher level of newsworthiness in *Telemundo* than at *Univision*, but it was not a crucial newsworthy topic during the 2004 presidential election. Moreover, as time went by, immigration became instrumental in subsequent presidential elections. For the next presidential election, Vigón (2010) studied Spanish-language television networks’ coverage of the Democratic primaries, focusing on Hispanics and immigration issues. During her one-month (May 5 through June 5, 2008)

qualitative analysis, she found that the economy was the most frequent issue covered by *Univision* and *Telemundo* in their newscasts focusing on the unemployment situation among the immigrant population and other members of the Hispanic communities, “these stories were ahead of the curve...the only difference was that they were about Hispanics, aired three months earlier than the English-language station” (p. 31).

Furthermore, in the 2020 presidential election, Flores (2022) identified that immigration was the second most frequent topic during the entire campaign period on *Univision*’s and *Telemundo*’s national newscasts, just after healthcare, which ranked on top of the list due to the COVID-19 pandemic health emergency crisis. Results show that the top three news topics during the entire general election period for *Telemundo* were healthcare, economy, and immigration, whereas *Univision* focused on healthcare, economy, and social unrest. During the first 45 days of the election cycle, immigration ranked on top of *Telemundo*’s news agenda as well as on *Univision*’s news agenda, tied for the first position with healthcare. From the middle of the general electoral cycle until Election Day, immigration coverage presented a shift, a decrease, to second place in both TV news agendas, just after healthcare. These results indicate that immigration for *Telemundo*’s news team was of higher importance than for *Univision*’s news group. Interestingly, immigration ranked in fifth place in *Univision*’s news agenda.

Also, Flores (2022) found that *Telemundo* produced a larger number of news reports on immigration-related news than *Univision* did during the general election period. Nevertheless, according to the New York Times National 2020 Exit Polls (New York Times, 2020), the top three most important issues for voters were the economy (35%), the coronavirus pandemic and healthcare (28%), as well as crime and safety (11%). Consequently, immigration was not considered significant for voters across the country. This same tendency was found with Hispanic voters. Krogstad and Lopez (2020) stated that the top five national problems for Latino voters during the 2020 general election were the economy, healthcare, the coronavirus outbreak, racial and ethnic inequality, and violent crime. Immigration ranked eighth, indicating that this issue was not considered important to Hispanic voters, but it was an important issue for *Telemundo* and *Univision* to cover.

In terms of previous studies regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, elections, and agenda setting theory, Budak et al. (2023) observed how the intermedia agenda setting effect operates in a fragmented media environment, focusing on broadcast news media—*ABC*, *CBS*, and *NBC*—and cable news networks—*CNN*, *Fox News*, and *MSNBC*. Researchers examined primetime weekly night newscasts from January 21, 2020, to June 12, 2020, using computerized content analysis software, with a concentration on COVID-19 coverage. Results showed the highest similarity was from cable-to-cable newscast pairs, followed by broadcast-to-broadcast coverage, and the lowest similarity was observed from broadcast-to-cable coverage, indicating that the intermedia agenda setting effect of COVID-19 coverage can be observed despite the fragmented television context (Budak et al., 2023). Perhaps those reporting resemblances could be due to communalities in conceptual and practical journalism training, journalism newsgathering routines, and organizational news cultures (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). Also, their competition for audiences could lead to monitoring each other’s journalistic content frequently (Gans, 1979), and economic pressures for ratings could motivate news directors to create different news coverage by implementing several news values into their work such as a mix of hard and soft news, ideology (right or left), polarized newscasts to support a particular political party, polarized issues, and target niche audiences (Hamilton, 2004).

Likewise, Kim et al. (2025) examined immigration coverage for a year (from January 1, 2020, to January 20, 2021) during the COVID-19 pandemic from three perspectives: (1) social media from a cross-platform perspective, comparing Facebook (FB), Twitter, and YouTube, (2) by examining liberal and conservative news media, and (3) analyzing how public policy affected the attribute salience of an issue. Results demonstrated a second-level agenda setting effect on media coverage, and policy announcements indicated that liberal news headlines about the border and court rulings positively predicted social media response across platforms. However, conservative news headlines on travel restrictions had a greater social media response across the board. Moreover, policy announcements concerning immigration positively predicted the salience of this topic on YouTube, but had a limited impact on sparking FB and Twitter. Consequently, the immigration policy announcements had a limited

impact on social media.

In addition, Kim et al. (2025) identified several particular attributes used to describe immigration, such as illegal immigrants, court rulings, border, travel bans, Trump's immigration policy, and the pandemic, "depending on which side dominates or leads the debate on an issue attribute, the aligned media appeared to be a successful second-level agenda setter of the issue attribute" (p. 1938). Famulari and Major (2023) found that liberal news outlets tend to report on hardships experienced or future contributions expected from immigrants, while conservative news outlets present immigrants as social threats.

The present investigation continues the conversation about the flow of information regarding immigration during the pandemic, but focuses on U.S. Spanish-language television networks. It is worth noting that *Telemundo* is considered to lean left, meaning it moderately aligns with liberal, progressive thoughts and policy agendas (AllSides Media Bias, 2025). Similarly, *Univision* is also considered a left-center news organization with moderate liberal bias (Media bias/Fact check, 2025). Furthermore, Gómez-Aguinaga et al. (2021) found that "ethnic news consumption is strongly associated with trust in Spanish-Language journalists, whereas mainstream media consumption is not associated with trust in English-language media...source credibility, particularly in Spanish-language journalists, matters for Latinos as it is associated with a positive assessment of state and local officials providing adequate information about COVID-19" (p. 1). Consequently, *Telemundo* and *Univision* reporters play a significant role during a health crisis to keep people safe and alive.

### **Investigation Objectives and Research Questions**

The present study contributes to the intellectual conversation of agenda setting theory within its race and ethnicity component by testing whether an issue-centered immigration study can identify its distinct attributes presented by the Spanish-language top national television networks within their reporting. This investigation is an intermedia agenda setting effect study between *Telemundo* and *Univision* to determine how both news organizations described immigration in their national newscasts. This investigation emphasizes three variables while examining immigration reporting in the context of the top U.S. Spanish-language television press. First, it establishes the list of immigration attributes, which determined both networks' immigration news agendas. Second, it measures the degree of similarity between their immigration news agendas. Third, it reveals which news organization, *Telemundo* or *Univision*, leads and which one follows regarding immigration coverage. The 2020 general election presents a unique opportunity to test the role that immigration had on this presidential election cycle under the COVID-19 global health crisis environment. Four research questions are guiding this investigation:

RQ1: What were the immigration news agendas of *Telemundo* and *Univision*?

RQ2: What were the immigration news agendas for *Telemundo* and *Univision* at the initial and final phases of the electoral campaign?

RQ3: What was the intermedia agenda setting effect between *Telemundo* and *Univision* regarding their immigration news agendas?

RQ4: From a cause-and-effect perspective, what was the directional flow of influence between *Telemundo* and *Univision* regarding immigration news?

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The present investigation is based on a quantitative methodological approach. The sample for this study was collected from the content analysis of *Noticias Telemundo* and *Noticiero Univision*, the news segments for each

respective network that broadcast nationwide on weekdays (Monday to Friday) in the evening from 5:30 pm to 6:00 pm U.S. Mountain Time. The unit of analysis was every immigration news story aired on each television newscast during the 2020 general election period, which started on August 31, 2020, and ended on November 3, 2020, Election Day. The data-collection period was divided into two phases to allow for a time-lagged comparative analysis. The initial phase ran for 23 consecutive days from August 31, 2020, through September 30, 2020, and the final phase covered 24 consecutive days starting on October 1, 2020, through November 3, 2020. In 2019, *Univision*'s evening newscasts had an audience of approximately 1,007,752 viewers, and this number increased by 9.6% to 1,104,233 in 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2021a). In contrast, *Telemundo*'s evening news audience decreased by 9.5% from 787,552 in 2019 to 712,827 in 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2021b).

## Code Manual

Each of the 112 news stories found was scrutinized by two coders. The codebook required coders to determine the leading immigration attributes presented in each news report. Ten immigration attribute variables were included in the codebook. Those were (1) "border wall" the construction of a physical wall at the U.S.-Mexico border, (2) "temporary protected status-TPS" the DHS designates a list of foreign countries as TPS due to insecurity conditions that prevent those country's nationals from returning safely and/or the country is unable to handle the returns of its nationals adequately, (3) "deportations" the formal removal of a foreign national from the U.S., (4) "detentions" the arrest or imprisonment of someone by law enforcement agents, (5) "DACA dreamers" Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals enables people who came to the U.S. undocumented as children and who meet several key guidelines such as were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012, arrived to the U.S. before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and has continuously resided in the U.S. since June 15, 2007, (6) "immigration court and citizenship procedures" undocumented immigrants have the right to an immigration court hearing where an immigration judge decides whether the person is eligible to stay in the U.S. or should be deported to their country of origin—naturalization is the process through which an immigrant to the U.S. can become a U.S. citizen, (7) "public charge rule" The Department of Homeland Security determines a public charge inadmissibility based on a noncitizen's likelihood of becoming primarily dependent on the government for subsistence by receiving public cash assistance for income or long-term institutionalization at government expense, (8) "immigrants with COVID-19" undocumented immigrants and immigrants who have been diagnosed with the COVID-19 illness, (9) "Border Patrol controversial video" The U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency released a video communication campaign to make undocumented immigrants aware of the dangers of crossing the border, but one of those videos was found to be controversial by several human rights organizations as well as pro-immigration entities; and (10) "other."

## Intercoder Reliability

At the beginning of each coding session, coders participated in a calibration exercise. The intercoder reliability between coders was systematically monitored by obtaining the consistency of coders using the formula for calculating the coefficient of reliability suggested by Poindexter and McCombs (2000). The formula used for two coders is:

$$C.R. = \frac{2M}{N_1 + N_2}$$

where *C.R.* is the coefficient of reliability, *M* is the number of coding decisions that the two coders agreed on, *N<sub>1</sub>* is the number of coding decisions made by coder 1, and *N<sub>2</sub>* is the number of coding decisions made by coder 2. "As a rule of thumb, an acceptable coefficient of reliability is 80 percent or above" (Poindexter & McCombs, 2000, p. 203); the results indicated a 91% coefficient of reliability between coders.

## Statistical Analysis

To establish the intermedia agenda setting effect between *Telemundo* and *Univision*, the outcomes of their immigration news attributes (previously described) were organized by frequency, percentage, and ranked to identify the top attributes of each television network. The Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient  $\rho$  (rho) was then calculated to assess the degree of correlation between the immigration news attributes for each pair of time periods. The formula used to calculate the correlation coefficient is:

$$\rho = \frac{\sum_i (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_i (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_i (y_i - \bar{y})^2}}$$

where  $x_i$  and  $y_i$  refer to the  $i^{th}$  rank of the immigration news attributes, and  $\bar{x}$  and  $\bar{y}$  are the mean ranks of the immigration news attributes of the two television networks being compared, of the two time periods being compared, or both. For example, *Univision* ( $x$ ) and *Telemundo* ( $y$ ), or *Univision*'s initial phase ( $x$ ) and *Univision*'s final phase ( $y$ ), etc. This formula was applied due to tied ranks in most cases. A correlation coefficient of +1 would indicate a perfect agreement; a correlation coefficient of 0, no agreement; and a correlation coefficient of -1 would indicate a perfect inverse agreement. The strength of the correlation between two variables is therefore determined by the value of the correlation coefficient. For values of  $\rho \geq .70$ , the correlation is strong; the correlation is moderate for  $.40 \leq \rho < .70$ , low for  $.10 \leq \rho < .40$ , and weak for  $\rho < .10$ .

A positive correlation between immigration news agendas suggests that as the ranking in *Telemundo*'s news agenda increases, the ranking of the corresponding immigration news in *Univision*'s agenda also increases. In contrast, a negative correlation between immigration news agendas suggests that as the ranking of immigration news in *Telemundo*'s agenda increases, the ranking of the corresponding immigration news in *Univision*'s agenda decreases. The immigration news agendas of each television network were measured to assess similarities between the initial and final phases of the examination period (autocorrelations). That is, autocorrelations were measuring *Telemundo*'s and *Univision*'s immigration news content consistency over a specific period of time, evaluating if each television network kept the same type of reporting during the entire general electoral cycle or if their immigration news content changed at some point.

The next step was to conduct a time-lagged comparative analysis (cross-lagged correlations) of *Telemundo* and *Univision* to determine the directional flow of influence of immigration news agendas between both networks. A cross-lagged correlation analysis was conducted to determine the flow of communication between *Telemundo* and *Univision*. This study utilized the Rozelle and Campbell (1969) method of cross-lagged correlations to determine the degree of causality between two variables (*Telemundo*'s and *Univision*'s immigration news agendas) over time.

The Rozelle and Campbell (1969) method consists of computing three pairs of correlations: (1) autocorrelations  $\rho_{X1X2}$  and  $\rho_{Y1Y2}$ , where X1 is variable X at time 1, X2 is variable X at time 2, Y1 is variable Y at time 1, and Y2 is variable Y at time 2; (2) synchronous correlations  $\rho_{X1Y1}$  and  $\rho_{X2Y2}$ ; and (3) cross-lagged correlations  $\rho_{X1Y2}$  and  $\rho_{Y1X2}$ . The cross-lagged correlations are then compared to the Rozelle-Campbell baseline (RCb) statistic, which is computed using the autocorrelations and synchronous correlations, and is given by the formula (López-Escobar et al., 1998).

$$RCb = \left( \frac{\rho_{X1Y1} + \rho_{X2Y2}}{2} \right) \sqrt{\frac{(\rho_{X1X2})^2 + (\rho_{Y1Y2})^2}{2}}$$

If the cross-lagged correlations  $\rho_{X1Y2}$  and  $\rho_{Y1X2}$  are both greater than the Rozelle-Campbell baseline, this indicates that the two variables (*Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration news agendas) influenced each other reciprocally; one variable could be more predominant than the other. However, if one of the cross-lagged correlation coefficients is greater than the Rozelle-Campbell baseline and the other is not (e.g.,  $\rho_{X1Y2} > \text{RCb} > \rho_{Y1X2}$ ), then the variable at time 1 (*Univision*) with a cross-lagged correlation coefficient greater than the RCb influenced the other variable at time 2 (*Telemundo*), but the reverse is not the case. If both cross-lagged correlation coefficients are less than the Rozelle-Campbell baseline, the two variables show no causality at all; they are independent of each other, indicating that neither immigration news agenda is influencing the other's immigration news agenda. According to Campbell and Kenny (1999), if X in time 1 causes Y in time 2 more than Y in time 1 causes X in time 2, then  $\rho_{X1Y2}$  should be greater than  $\rho_{Y1X2}$  and greater than the value of the RCb, then X is said to cause Y. Furthermore, to determine the statistical significance of Spearman's rank-order correlations, a two-tailed t-test was performed. The results are presented in the following section.

## 4. RESULTS

This section is divided into three subsections, which address all of the research questions in the following order: first, *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration news agendas during the entire examination period, as well as during the initial and final phases. Second, the intermedia agenda setting effect of immigration news agendas between *Telemundo* and *Univision*. Third, the directional flow of influence of immigration news agendas by television networks. The outcomes indicate that both networks aired a total of 112 immigration-related stories during the 47 days of this study, where 58% (65 stories) of the immigration reports were broadcast by *Telemundo* (29 days with one story per day and 18 days with two stories per day), and 42% (47 stories) were aired by *Univision* (an average of one story per day). Consequently, *Telemundo* had a higher frequency of reports about immigration in its newscast during both phases of this study.

Specifically, in the initial phase (from August 31, 2020, through September 30, 2020), *Telemundo* aired 58% (26 stories) of immigration news while *Univision* broadcasted 42% (19 stories). This same tendency was observed during the final phase (starting on October 1, 2020, through November 3, 2020-Election Day), where *Telemundo* broadcast 58% (39 stories) of the immigration reports and *Univision* 42% (28 stories). Overall, the results show that both networks kept the same percentage of immigration reporting throughout both periods. In addition, the results determined that in the initial phase, both networks combined aired a total of 45 immigration stories and 67 immigration reports in the final phase. The comparative analysis of immigration news produced by *Telemundo* and *Univision* over both time periods showed that there was more intensive reporting during the final phase, 60% (67 stories), than in the initial phase, 40% (45 stories), indicating an increment of 49% (22 stories) towards the end of the general election campaign period. This outcome clearly suggests that the issue of immigration increased in importance as the campaign progressed, reaching its peak during the final phase of the presidential election cycle.

### *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* Immigration News Agendas

Regarding *Telemundo's* immigration news agenda during the first half of the electoral cycle, results identified six immigration attributes highlighted in *Telemundo's* news: border wall, temporary protected status, detentions, public charge rule, immigration court and citizenship, and controversial border patrol footage. The outcomes indicate that the top three attributes used by reporters to describe the immigration policy were detentions with 46.2%, followed by a tie between temporary protected status and immigration court and citizenship, each with 19.2% (see Table 2). Furthermore, in the second half of the electoral cycle, the outcomes determined that *Telemundo* increased its immigration news agenda from six attributes to seven attributes. The network incorporated two new attributes—deportations and immigrants with COVID-19—while eliminating one—controversial border

patrol video—from its previous immigration coverage. In the final phase, the attribute of detentions with 51.3% remained as *Telemundo*’s top-ranking immigration attribute, followed by public charge rule with 17.9%, and deportations with 10.3%.

Additionally, the results indicate that during the final phase, the frequency of reporting about several immigration attributes changed. For example, temporary protected status, which ranked second at the beginning of the election cycle, went down to fourth place at the end of the cycle. Likewise, immigration court and citizenship, which used to be in second place at the beginning of the campaign period, decreased to seventh place at the end of the campaign. The comparative analysis between *Telemundo*’s newscasts at two different time frames is given by the autocorrelation. The changes of immigration attributes in *Telemundo*’s news agenda between its initial and final phases led to a low positive autocorrelation ( $\rho_{T1T2} = .33$ , where T1 refers to *Telemundo*’s initial phase and T2 refers to *Telemundo*’s final phase), documenting distinct immigration reporting over the entire examination period.

Therefore, the attributes used by *Telemundo*’s journalists at the beginning of the electoral cycle to describe the immigration phenomenon were different from those attributes used at the end of the electoral cycle, indicating that *Telemundo*’s immigration news underwent a shift in their journalistic approach over time, which presented two different pictures of the immigration situation to its viewers. Nevertheless, detentions remained as *Telemundo*’s top immigration attribute in both periods, but its frequency of reporting increased by 5% from 46.2% in the initial phase to 51.3% in the final phase. Consequently, immigration news reports on the attribute of detentions were at the top of *Telemundo*’s agenda by means of frequency of coverage and ranking in both time periods. It is interesting to note that *Telemundo* did not report on the attribute of DACA dreamers like *Univision*’s newscast did.

Table 2. Intermedia Agenda-Setting Effect of Immigration News between *Telemundo* and *Univision*

| Category                          | Initial Phase |       |           |       | Final Phase |       |           |       | Entire Period |       |           |       | Total |       |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------------|-------|-----------|-------|---------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                   | Univision     | Rank  | Telemundo | Rank  | Univision   | Rank  | Telemundo | Rank  | Univision     | Rank  | Telemundo | Rank  | %     | Rank  |
| Border Wall                       | 0%            | (7.5) | 7.7%      | (4)   | 3.6%        | (6.5) | 5.1%      | (5.5) | 2.1%          | (8)   | 6.2%      | (5.5) | 4.5%  | (6)   |
| Temporary Protected Status        | 21.1%         | (2)   | 19.2%     | (2.5) | 3.6%        | (6.5) | 7.7%      | (4)   | 10.6%         | (2)   | 12.3%     | (2.5) | 11.6% | (2)   |
| Deportations                      | 0%            | (7.5) | 0.0%      | (8)   | 14.3%       | (2)   | 10.3%     | (3)   | 8.5%          | (3)   | 6.2%      | (5.5) | 7.1%  | (4.5) |
| Detentions                        | 57.9%         | (1)   | 46.2%     | (1)   | 57.1%       | (1)   | 51.3%     | (1)   | 57.4%         | (1)   | 49.2%     | (1)   | 52.7% | (1)   |
| DACA Dreamers                     | 5.3%          | (4.5) | 0%        | (8)   | 7.1%        | (3.5) | 0%        | (8.5) | 6.4%          | (4.5) | 0%        | (9)   | 2.7%  | (8)   |
| Immigration Court and Citizenship | 0%            | (7.5) | 19.2%     | (2.5) | 7.1%        | (3.5) | 2.6%      | (7)   | 4.3%          | (6.5) | 9.2%      | (4)   | 7.1%  | (4.5) |
| Public Charge Rule                | 10.5%         | (3)   | 3.8%      | (5.5) | 3.6%        | (6.5) | 17.9%     | (2)   | 6.4%          | (4.5) | 12.3%     | (2.5) | 9.8%  | (3)   |
| Immigrants with COVID-19          | 5.3%          | (4.5) | 0%        | (8)   | 3.6%        | (6.5) | 5.1%      | (5.5) | 4.3%          | (6.5) | 3.1%      | (7)   | 3.6%  | (7)   |
| Controversial Border Patrol Video | 0%            | (7.5) | 3.8%      | (5.5) | 0%          | (9)   | 0%        | (8.5) | 0%            | (9)   | 1.5%      | (8)   | 0.9%  | (9)   |

Note. *Univision & Telemundo*: Initial Phase  $\rho = .35$  | *Univision & Telemundo*: Final Phase  $\rho = .41$  | *Univision*: Initial & Final Phases  $\rho = .20$  | *Telemundo*: Initial & Final Phases  $\rho = .33$  | *Univision & Telemundo*: Entire Period  $\rho = .62$

Regarding the examination of *Univision*’s immigration news agenda, the outcomes demonstrate that at the beginning of the electoral cycle, a list of five attributes was identified in their news agenda (see Table 2). Those attributes were: temporary protected status, detentions, DACA dreamers, public charge rule, and immigrants with COVID-19. Out of that list of attributes, detentions with 57.9% ranked at the top of *Univision*’s immigration news agenda, followed by temporary protected status with 21.1%, and the public charge rule with 10.5%. However, this list of attributes changed by the end of the electoral cycle. *Univision*’s immigration news agenda increased, in the final phase, from five attributes to eight attributes, where three new attributes were incorporated—border wall, deportations, immigration court and citizenship. During the final phase of the general election campaign, the results show that the top immigration attributes in *Univision*’s news agenda were detentions with 57.1%, followed

by deportations with 14.3%, and a tie between DACA dreamers and immigration court and citizenship, both with 7.1%.

Accordingly, several changes in *Univision*'s immigration news agenda were identified, such as temporary protected status, which used to rank in second place at the beginning of the electoral campaign period but was pushed down to seventh place at the end of the electoral cycle. Likewise, the public charge rule ranked third in the initial phase and went down to the sixth position in the final phase. Consequently, the comparative analysis between *Univision*'s immigration reporting at two different time frames (autocorrelation) indicates that their immigration news agenda autocorrelation between *Univision*'s initial and final phases also showed a low, positive correlation ( $\rho_{U1U2} = .20$ , where U1 refers to *Univision*'s initial phase and U2 refers to *Univision*'s final phase), documenting a dissimilar immigration news agenda in the network. Thus, *Univision*'s immigration reporting described two different contexts over time to its audiences.

The attributes used at the start of the electoral cycle were different from those used at the end of the cycle, indicating a modification of their journalistic approach and heterogeneous coverage. However, detentions remained at the top of *Univision*'s immigration news agenda during both periods, with about the same frequency of coverage at 57.9% in the initial phase and continued at 57.1% in the final phase. Consequently, immigration news reports on the attribute of detentions were at the top of *Univision*'s agenda by means of frequency of coverage and ranking in both time periods. The outcomes indicate that, unlike *Telemundo*, *Univision* did not report on the controversial Border Patrol video.

In short, outcomes have shown that *Telemundo* had a higher frequency of immigration coverage than *Univision* throughout the entire examination period. It was noted that as the general election cycle progressed, as Election Day approached, the number of immigration stories increased by almost 50% in both Latino networks combined. After a content analysis of each of the television immigration news reports, a list of nine immigration attributes was identified: border wall, deportation, detentions, Border Patrol, immigrants with COVID-19, immigration court and citizenship, public charge rule, DACA dreamers, and temporary protected status. The results show that, from that list, the highest-ranked attributes on both television networks' immigration news agendas were detentions, temporary protected status, and the public charge rule.

Furthermore, the results show that the immigration reporting of the major national Spanish-language television networks was different from each other, indicating that neither *Telemundo* nor *Univision* was consistent in their immigration reporting when compared with themselves (same newscast, different time frames) and with each other (two newscasts, two different time frames) from the beginning to the end of the 2020 general electoral cycle. The outcomes indicate that *Telemundo*'s and *Univision*'s immigration news agendas were more dissimilar in the initial phase of the election cycle but showed a slight convergence in coverage toward the end of the electoral period. For example, *Telemundo* showed a low positive autocorrelation (*Telemundo*'s newscast compared at two different time frames) between the initial and final phases, indicating a distinct immigration news agenda for each time period. Similarly, *Univision* also showed a low positive autocorrelation (*Univision*'s newscast compared at two different time frames), indicating a heterogeneous immigration news agenda between the initial and final phases of the electoral campaign period.

### Intermedia Agenda Setting Effect of Immigration News Agendas

Overall, the outcomes document that the top three attributes for the immigration news agenda in both television networks consisted of detentions, temporary protected status, and public charge rule (see Table 2). Also, the results demonstrate that the entire examination period of immigration coverage showed a moderate positive correlation of .62 between both television newscasters, indicating some degree of similarity in their immigration content. When comparing the immigration coverage between *Telemundo* and *Univision*, the results document that their news content was somewhat similar (about 60%) but not quite identical. This means that people watching

*Telemundo's* national newscast were not receiving the same immigration information as those watching *Univision's* national newscast. In other words, each network used a different set of attributes in its news reports to describe the immigration policy to its viewers, presenting a different picture of reality.

In terms of the comparative immigration news analysis in each electoral phase, the outcomes indicate that the top three attributes of *Telemundo's* immigration news agenda were detentions, with 49.2% at the top of the list, followed by a tie between temporary protected status and public charge rule, both with 12.3%, at the initial electoral phase. Meanwhile, the top three attributes in *Univision's* immigration news agenda were detentions with 57.4%, in the top position, followed by temporary protected status with 10.6% and deportations with 8.5%, at the start of the electoral campaign period.

Correspondingly, the correlation results determined that, at the initial phase, the intermedia agenda setting effect of immigration news agendas between *Telemundo* and *Univision* was a low positive synchronous correlation ( $\rho_{T1U1} = .35$ , where T1 refers to *Telemundo's* initial phase and U1 refers to *Univision's* initial phase), indicating that both immigration news agendas were somewhat (about 70%) different from each other. Again, the immigration news content between *Telemundo* and *Univision* showed appreciable contrast, indicating that each of those networks was portraying a different immigration picture to its viewers by following a different journalistic approach at the start of the general election period.

For the comparative analysis at the final phase, the outcomes show that the top three attributes of *Telemundo's* immigration news agenda were detentions with 51.3% at the top of the list, followed by public charge rule with 17.9%, and deportations with 10.3%, at the end of the electoral cycle (see Table 2). At the same time, the top three attributes of *Univision's* immigration news agenda were detentions with 57.1% in the top position, followed by deportations with 14.3%, and a tie between DACA dreamers and immigration court and citizenship with 7.1% each at the end of the general electoral campaign period.

As a result, the intermedia agenda setting effect between *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration news agendas at the final phase increased from a low correlation to a moderate positive synchronous correlation ( $\rho_{T2U2} = .41$ , where T2 refers to *Telemundo's* final phase and U2 refers to *Univision's* final phase) suggesting that their immigration news agendas were more convergent with each other (about 40%) than in the initial phase of the examination period, but not completely alike. Once again, as in the previous time period, the attributes utilized to describe the national immigration dynamic by *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* reporters were different, presenting in their newscasts two different portraits of the same issue to their viewers. In short, *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration news agendas were mostly independent of each other, covering different attributes.

Table 3 summarizes the Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient matrix for immigration news agendas of *Telemundo* and *Univision*, indicating that four of the correlation coefficients were low ( $.10 \leq \rho < .40$ ), whereas two of the correlation coefficients were moderate ( $.40 \leq \rho < .70$ ). To sum up, the outcomes documented two low correlations when the television networks' immigration news agendas were compared between their initial and final phases of the election cycle, indicating that the immigration news content presented to viewers by each of the Latino news media was not the same. Likewise, another low correlation was found whereby the immigration news stories between *Telemundo* and *Univision* were not similar at the beginning of the electoral cycle. Nonetheless, the immigration news agendas were more similar to each other, but not identical, and stronger at the end of the electoral period, as documented by a moderate correlation.

In short, *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* intermedia agenda setting effect was low and positive, suggesting that both immigration news agendas were somewhat independent of each other and presented slightly different immigration coverage to their viewers. The correlation between the television networks became stronger during the final phase, exhibiting a moderate positive intermedia agenda setting effect. Accordingly, *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration news agendas were independent of each other, covering a different set of immigration attributes in their news stories. This outcome indicates that news consumers of each of these Latino news outlets developed different perceptions about the national immigration situation.

Table 3. Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient Matrix

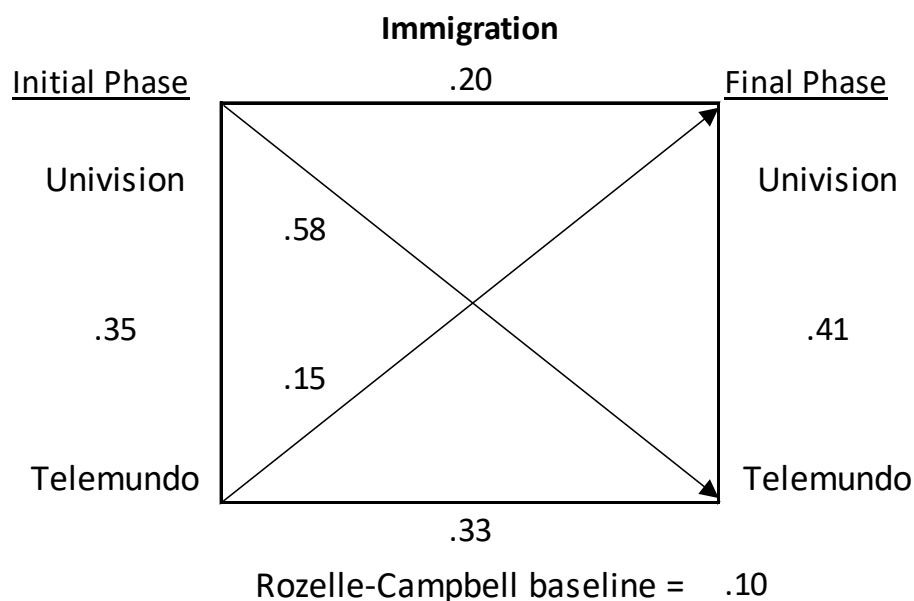
|               | Univision (1) | Univision (2) | Telemundo (1) | Telemundo (2) |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Univision (1) | -             |               |               |               |
| Univision (2) | .20           | -             |               |               |
| Telemundo (1) | .35           | .15           | -             |               |
| Telemundo (2) | .58           | .41           | .33           | -             |

Note. (1) refers to the initial phase and (2) refers to the final phase.

### Directional Flow of Influence Between Immigration News Agendas

It has been established that *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration news agendas were different; now the next step is to measure whether their news content was influenced by each other. As Figure 1 illustrates, the flow of influence between *Telemundo* and *Univision* regarding their immigration news agendas was reciprocal since the Rozelle-Campbell baseline value ( $RCb = .10$ ) is lower than the two cross-lagged correlation coefficients from *Univision* to *Telemundo* ( $\rho_{U1T2} = .58$ , where U1 refers to *Univision's* initial phase and T2 refers to *Telemundo's* final phase) and from *Telemundo* to *Univision* ( $\rho_{T1U2} = .15$ , where T1 refers to *Telemundo's* initial phase and U2 refers to *Univision's* final phase). Consequently, both television networks were influencing each other, but the predominant influence regarding immigration coverage was from *Univision* to *Telemundo* rather than the other way around. In short, after establishing that *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration news agendas were different, the next step consisted of measuring the flow of influence of immigration news between *Telemundo* and *Univision*. The results suggest a reciprocal impact, but the predominant influence was from *Univision* to *Telemundo*.

Figure 1. Cross-lagged correlations of the power of influence between Univision and Telemundo on immigration news attribute agendas.



## 4. CONCLUSION

In the case of ethnic media such as the Latino press, their audiences mostly identify themselves with one predominant culture, as members of the Latino community, and commonly speak Spanish or are bilingual speakers—English/Spanish. Consequently, Latino journalists who work for Latino news outlets produce a particular news

content that resonates with a very specific cultural, racial, and ethnic audience demographic. This unique Latino environment needs to be constantly tested by agenda setting theory to increase the scientific evidence of how this theory works under a distinct cultural context from the one for which the theory was originally considered, documenting the significance and dynamic interplay among Latino culture, Latino race, Latino ethnicity, and the Latino news media. This investigation confirms that immigration reporting practices previously documented by scholars, who conducted their analysis through agenda setting theory, are still accurate. For example, the intermedia agenda setting effect continues to be successfully measured and observed in Latino news media outlets in the same way that it has in non-ethnic media. *Telemundo* has a tendency to cover immigration more frequently than *Univision*. Likewise, for *Telemundo*, immigration is a newsworthy topic because continued to rank in third or fourth place within its news agenda, but for *Univision*, the theme of immigration ranks lower in fifth or sixth place on its agenda, suggesting that it is a less crucial matter. Interestingly, immigration ranked even lower in the Latino voters' agenda at the eighth position. This finding suggests that immigration is more important for Latino journalists and Spanish-language television networks than for Latino voters.

The limitation of the present study was that, due to restricted available resources, this research was conducted exclusively on Spanish-language news media. Perhaps, if additional resources were available, a more comprehensive study that included English-language news outlets could have allowed for an immigration news comparative study. For future research, it would be interesting to compare *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* immigration coverage in the 2024 presidential election setting to continue testing and documenting the intersection connections between race and ethnicity as a component of agenda setting theory in Latino news organizations. Every study that focuses on the examination of the Latino press and uses agenda setting as its theoretical framework is contributing to the expansion of the race and ethnic component of this theory by increasing its body of knowledge. By investigating and documenting how Latino news is expanding the applicability of agenda setting theory, we are, at the same time, gaining a better understanding of what the theory can reveal in the Latino news context. The classic agenda setting theory has been tested time and again in an English-language news context, which creates content for a customary American audience.

The present study is contributing to the agenda setting theory body of knowledge by documenting that the intermedia agenda setting effect can continue to be successfully identified, observed, and measured in Latino media, Spanish-language television in this case, under a world health emergency crisis and the 2020 general election period. This paper also contributes to the theory by demonstrating that the intermedia agenda setting effect of a single issue, such as immigration, with its corresponding descriptive attributes, can be successfully identified, observed, and measured in the top Latino Spanish-language television networks.

In addition, this investigation found that innovative implementations within the immigration coverage practices were in place at *Telemundo* and *Univision*. For instance, at the time when the country was experiencing an international healthcare emergency, as was the COVID-19 pandemic, the immigration reporting was downgraded to a lower position within *Telemundo's* and *Univision's* news agendas. The Latino press was committed to reporting on the COVID-19 topic because the Latino population was the most affected ethnic group in the nation during this pandemic crisis. Results indicate that, within the Spanish-language television networks, there is a difference in their immigration reporting. Neither *Telemundo* nor *Univision* was consistent in their news coverage on immigration from the beginning to the end of the election cycle. Similarly, *Telemundo* and *Univision* are constantly modifying their immigration coverage to the point that over time, they tend to use different immigration attributes to describe a diversity of immigration contexts, narrating distinct immigration realities to their audiences by continually shifting their journalistic approach.

However, both networks were influencing each other in their immigration coverage, but the predominant flow was from *Univision* to *Telemundo*, even though *Telemundo* produced twice as many immigration news stories as *Univision* did. That is, *Telemundo* presented in their newscast an average of two immigration stories per day, but *Univision* was, to a degree, influencing *Telemundo's* content as to which immigration descriptive attributes should be used in those stories.

This study is contributing to the field of Latino journalism studies by highlighting the complex interplay of Latino culture, Latino race, and Latino ethnicity, as well as Spanish-language news media dynamics in shaping immigration coverage. Outcomes indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced immigration news during the 2020 general election cycle. This international health emergency activated a series of legal instruments that national law enforcement agencies could use to stop the spread of the disease and protect the population. One of those regulations was the activation of the policy known as Title 42, which allowed for a quick removal of unauthorized border crossers and asylum seekers from U.S. territory by government authorities.

Furthermore, this investigation presents consistent results with previous studies (Kim et al., 2025), highlighting the emphasis that left-leaning media networks place on reporting immigration, approaching it from a U.S.-Mexico border-centric angle and perspectives on court rulings. However, *Telemundo* and *Univision*'s immigration coverage expanded those two perspectives by expanding their examination to a diverse presentation of how immigration policies are operationalized in different cities/regions/states across the nation, such as DACA dreamers, Temporary Protected Status TPS, detentions, deportations, border patrol anti-immigration campaign, public charge rule, and immigrants with COVID-19.

Once again, as noted by Rodriguez (1999), *Telemundo* and *Univision* offer news coverage that cannot be found anywhere else, in any other news outlet in the country. In this case, those networks, through their immigration reporting, broadened the conversation scope to a comprehensive description of the implementation of immigration policies that affected Latinos. This particular reporting approach serves as evidence to document that *Telemundo* and *Univision* journalists continue to practice the civic journalistic model, which consists of an advocate-style of reporting, as documented by Rodriguez (1999), to describe immigration policies during a presidential election. Likewise, this paper's outcomes demonstrated that *Telemundo* and *Univision* reporting was grounded in the Pan-Latinidad viewpoint and their audience's news expectations, creating a strong relationship echoed in their ratings. In addition, this paper contributes to the conversation of the process of Latino acculturation (Subervi-Velez, 1999) into the U.S. lifestyle through the news gathering practices of Latino reporters working for Spanish-language news.

The present investigation confirms that the pandemic played a role in shaping the way Latino television reporters covered immigration by constantly focusing their news stories on two specific descriptive attributes, which were directly connected to the Title 42 policy. In other words, the fact that the descriptive attributes of detention and deportation ranked in the top three positions of *Telemundo*'s and *Univision*'s immigration news agendas suggests that both networks were aware of their audiences' news expectations and continued to exercise an advocate-reporting style, aiming to accomplish a public service duty to raise awareness about the Title 42 policy in their audiences. Overall, this study corroborated that the Spanish-language television press tendencies of operational design and type of news content regarding immigration coverage continue to be implemented at *Telemundo* and *Univision* during the 2020 electoral cycle.

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