

The more people see immigrants on TV, the more welcoming they become, study finds

There is something to be said for just how much a single television series such as *Ramy* can sway attitudes and opinions.

Sadaf Ahsan

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The more people see immigrants on television, the more likely they are to welcome immigrants, finds [a new study](#).

According to the study, those who watched these television series such as *Superstore*, *Ramy*, *One Day at a Time*, *Madam Secretary* and *Orange is the New Black* felt more inclined to take positive action in their communities.

This includes speaking to a friend about immigration issues, writing immigration-related social media posts, attending immigration rallies and going to immigration-related community events.

It makes sense. Many of these series included storylines inspired by real-life politics, with *Superstore* having an undocumented character taken away by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) after being hidden by his co-workers, and *Orange is the New Black* having an entire season set in an immigration detention centre.

And people are watching. The report found that the more often Americans watch shows featuring immigrant characters, the more they agree that the U.S. should welcome more immigrants, and often adopt a more inclusive attitude toward immigrants in general. It's likely these statistics could extrapolate to Canada, where the same series have found popularity and prevalence.

The study, entitled *Change the Narrative, Change the World*, was released Wednesday by the [Media Impact Project](#) at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center.

Those surveyed were no niche sample. Study participants had different political ideologies and racial backgrounds, and came from across the country.

However, while more representation and positive attitudes have arisen from much of television in the past year, there's still been a considerable over-emphasis on the association between immigrants and crime.

In analyzing 129 immigrant characters from 97 episodes of 59 scripted series that aired in the 2018-2019 season, the report also found an overrepresentation of Middle Eastern and Latinx immigrants and an underrepresentation of Black, Asian and Pacific Island immigrants.

And of the characters that the study analyzed with an identified immigration status, 63 per cent were undocumented or asylum seekers. In real life, only 24 per cent of immigrants in the U.S. are unauthorized.

Meanwhile, 22 per cent of immigrant characters were associated with crime and 11 per cent with incarceration, improving on 2018's 34 per cent. This isn't remotely realistic. According to 2018 research from the Cato Institute, undocumented immigrants are far less likely to commit crime than native-born American citizens, with immigrants legally in the U.S. even less likely to do so.

Negative buzzwords like "deportation" appeared in 29 per cent of episodes, "ICE" in 25 per cent, mentions of terms "illegal" in 22 per cent and "undocumented" in 17 per cent.

The study also found zero representation of transgender or gender non-conforming immigrants. And very few characters were found to identify explicitly with a religion. A third of them were Muslim, almost entirely thanks to *Ramy*, which follows a Muslim family living in America, and stars and is written and directed by a Muslim American. The second most common was Buddhism, also almost entirely due to the series *Fresh Off the Boat*, which features a largely Asian cast.

Still, there is something to be said for just how much a single television series can sway attitudes and opinions, which means if these numbers change even by the next television season, it could have even more of an impact.

There's no mistaking television is powerful. It did, after all, give us a reality star for a president.