

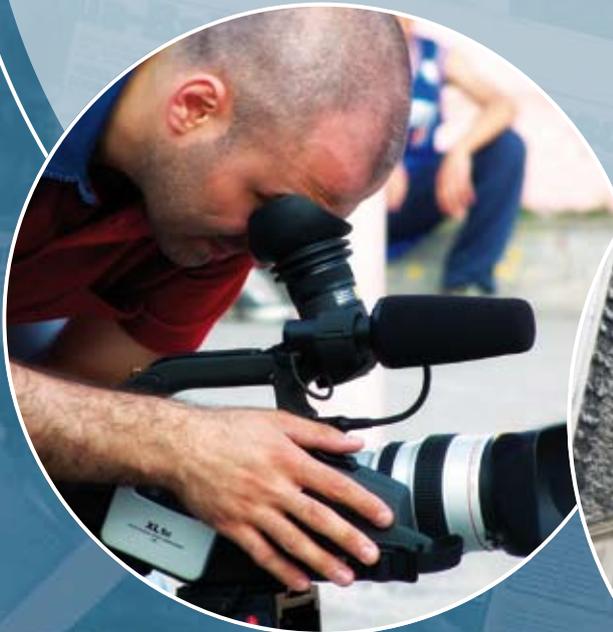
French-American
Foundation

United States



MEDIA AND IMMIGRATION

An International Dialogue Organized
by the French-American Foundation – United States



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About the French-American Foundation - United States

Founded in 1976, the French-American Foundation is the principal non-governmental organization linking France and the United States. Our mission is to promote a dynamic French-American partnership and to advance the humanist principles that these two countries represent. We provide high-level policymakers, academics, business leaders and other experts on both sides of the Atlantic with a platform to share knowledge and best practices on a wide range of policy issues. Our goal is to inform debate and to identify solutions to common issues of global concern.

We accomplish this mission through a variety of initiatives, including conferences, study tours and leadership and professional exchanges on subjects such as national security and defense, sustainability, equality of opportunity—for universal access to education, employment and health care—business, media and culture.

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During the past twenty years, the United States, Canada and Europe have been experiencing a significant surge in immigration, with major implications for their societies. While the economic crisis has altered this trend, immigration remains a question that is widely and often hotly debated. The media play a major role in both informing the public and intervening in the debate.

The French-American Foundation – United States has organized two symposia, the first in Paris, the second in Miami, to contribute to a dialogue among media professionals on the characterization of immigrants and immigration in all types of media, and to improve the quality and depth of reporting on immigration issues in North American and European societies. Most programs of the Foundation are bilateral in nature—focusing on an exchange of ideas and best practices between France and the United States. In order to best address the scale of the debate, we made a decision to go beyond our traditional focus and examine immigration coverage in the context of the political and societal tensions that the United States, Canada and countries across Europe have experienced.

Fostering exchange among media professionals has been an integral part of the Foundation’s mission for over thirty years, and we are glad to share with you the results of our Media Coverage of Immigration program. The success of this program could not have been achieved without the generosity of foundations, corporations and individuals who sustain the work of the French-American Foundation – United States.

Please note that this report does not reflect the views of the French-American Foundation – United States but rather the conclusions drawn by conference participants themselves. I hope you enjoy the results of what were informative and lively debates.

Antoine G. Treuille
President



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RÉSUMÉ EXÉCUTIF

Dans le cadre de son programme Media Coverage of Immigration (MCI), la French-American Foundation a organisé deux colloques internationaux en novembre 2009 et mai 2010, pour examiner la façon dont les médias couvrent l'immigration en Amérique du Nord et en Europe. Réunissant professionnels des médias américains et européens et experts en immigration, le colloque a servi de forum aux participants pour analyser les meilleures pratiques journalistiques en la matière et identifier les faiblesses de la couverture médiatique afin de promouvoir une meilleure information sur les questions d'immigration et d'intégration des deux côtés de l'Atlantique.

Le mot immigration évoque les questions complexes des droits de l'homme, des variations démographiques, et de l'identité nationale, le tout dans un contexte de vastes changements économiques. La presse nord-américaine et européenne faisant face à une diminution de leurs ressources ainsi qu'à des changements importants dans le paysage médiatique, il peut être difficile de fournir une couverture médiatique qui soit à la fois complète, nuancée et précise. Ce n'est pas sans conséquence: les médias jouent un rôle majeur dans l'information du public et l'orientation du débat politique sur l'immigration.

La French-American Foundation a choisi Paris pour la première conférence et Miami pour la seconde afin d'offrir aux participants l'expérience de l'immigration en Europe et en Amérique du Nord. Les médias représentés aux colloques incluaient des publications nationales, tels que le New York Times et Le Figaro, ainsi que des publications et des réseaux locaux et spécialisés, tels que les médias de la diversité ou encore des acteurs du web. Les participants représentaient dix-huit pays, principalement d'Europe et d'Amérique du Nord.

Chacune des deux conférences offrait des séminaires approfondis animés par d'éminents journalistes, universitaires et experts, ainsi que des visites de terrain d'une demi-journée. Au cours de ces visites de terrain, les participants ont pu rencontrer les représentants locaux de communautés d'immigrants et d'organisations non gouvernementales. Le programme MCI s'est révélé être tout à fait opportun, chaque conférence ayant eu lieu au milieu d'un débat local actif sur l'immigration. Pendant la conférence de Paris, un débat sur l'identité nationale dominait les ondes françaises et la conférence de Miami suivait de près l'adoption d'une loi controversée sur l'immigration en Arizona.

Au cours des colloques, les journalistes ont identifié les lacunes communes dans la couverture de l'immigration, soulignant notamment qu'elle est souvent trop épisodique et présente les immigrants en termes simplistes (le «bon» immigrant qui s'oppose au «mauvais» immigrant par exemple) sans la moindre nuance. La représentation des immigrants par la presse des deux côtés de l'Atlantique comporte des tendances comparables, et insiste souvent sur la «différence» des immigrants. Les participants ont également abordé les défis similaires qu'ils rencontrent lors de leurs reportages: celui d'intégrer les opinions variées sur les questions d'immigration, d'accéder aux sources et de développer des relations avec les communautés immigrées, dont les membres peuvent être réticents à parler à la presse. Ils ont convenu qu'une meilleure compréhension de la dynamique des forces économiques et des religions représentées pourrait considérablement améliorer la qualité de leur travail. Ils ont également constaté qu'une plus grande collaboration entre les médias traditionnels et les médias de la diversité était possible. Enfin, ils ont examiné les implications plus larges de leur travail dans le cadre de leur contrat avec la société. Ils ont conclu que la condition préalable à une meilleure couverture de l'immigration, et à un meilleur journalisme en général, est une plus grande diversité dans les rédactions qui refléterait le large éventail des opinions et des points de vue de nos sociétés modernes.

Ce rapport présente les informations et commentaires saillants des débats qui ont eu lieu au cours des deux conférences à Paris et à Miami et se penche sur les conclusions tirées par les participants. Veuillez noter que les opinions exprimées dans ce rapport ne représentent pas les opinions de la French-American Foundation, ni de ses administrateurs, dirigeants, employés ou représentants.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2009 and in May 2010, the French-American Foundation convened two international symposia as part of its Media Coverage of Immigration (MCI) program, bringing together American and European media professionals and immigration experts to examine how the media cover immigration in North America and Europe. The symposia provided participating journalists with a forum to examine best practices with respect to immigration reporting as well as to identify weaknesses that often characterize coverage—all part of an effort to promote better reporting on immigration and integration issues on both sides of the Atlantic.

Immigration evokes complex questions that encompass issues of national identity, human rights, and demographic shifts, all against a backdrop of vast economic change. With the North American and European press facing shrinking resources and significant changes in the media landscape, it can be difficult to provide coverage that is nuanced, accurate, and compelling. This is not without consequence: the media play a major role in informing the public and in shaping the public policy debate on immigration.

The two conference locations—Paris, France for the first conference, Miami, Florida for the second—were chosen to give participating journalists firsthand exposure to the immigrant experience in Europe and North America. The media represented at the symposia included national outlets, such as *The New York Times* and *Le Figaro*, as well as local and specialized publications and networks, such as ethnic media and online entities. Participants represented eighteen countries, primarily from Europe and North America.

Each of the two conferences included in-depth seminar-style meetings, moderated by prominent journalists, academics and experts, as well as a half-day “reporting opportunity.” During each reporting opportunity, participants met with local immigrant communities and NGOs, giving participants firsthand awareness of the issues at stake in local immigrant communities in Paris and Miami. The MCI program revealed itself to be timely—each conference took place amid an active debate on immigration: the conference in Paris occurred while a debate on national identity in France dominated the airwaves, while the Miami conference followed on the heels of Arizona’s passage of a controversial immigration law.

During the symposia, journalists identified some of the common flaws in immigration coverage, which is often too episodic in nature and presents immigrants in stark terms as either “good” or “bad.” The characterization of immigrants by the press on both sides of the Atlantic displays similar tendencies, often emphasizing the “otherness” of immigrants. Participants also described similar challenges in their reporting—that of including all voices in their stories, of gaining access to sources and developing relationships with immigrant communities, whose members may be reluctant to speak to the press. They agreed that a better understanding of the dynamics of economic forces and religion can tremendously improve the quality of their work. They also found that there was greater opportunity for collaboration between mainstream and ethnic media. Finally, they examined the wider implications of their work as part of the media’s contract with society, and concluded that a prerequisite for better immigration coverage—as well as journalism as a whole—was greater diversity in newsrooms in order to reflect the expanded range of modern societies’ opinions and views.

This report presents the highlights of the debates that took place during the two conferences in Paris and Miami, and reflects on the conclusions drawn by participants. Please note that the views expressed in this report do not represent the views of the French-American Foundation nor its directors, officers, employees or representatives.

I

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUE

The MCI program served as a forum for journalists to examine and identify best practices in immigration coverage, address the influence of the media over public debate and compare and contrast how the media approach the topic in North America and Europe.

Common Flaws in Immigration Coverage

Participants identified several common mistakes in immigration coverage. They generally agreed that immigration reporting is often too episodic and too focused on illegal immigration. Reporting is also often distorted by individual narratives that exaggerate the role of immigrants while ignoring larger economic forces. Several participants mentioned that mainstream print media have generally strived for nuance and balance, while mainstream broadcast media, particularly cable news in the United States, are more prone to employing sensationalism and stereotypes in their coverage. Participants agreed that the characterization of immigrants by the press is often similar from one country to another: there is a general tendency to “demonize” immigrants and to emphasize their “otherness,” as one speaker explained.

Participants identified a few main narratives about immigrants that dominate media coverage: the immigrant “problem” or “threat” (e.g., to employment opportunities, to public order); the immigrant “striver” or “hero” (for taking the jobs that no one wants); the immigrant victim (of racism, discrimination, abuse, or economic hardship). Each of these narratives can be problematic because it presents immigration in terms of “good” versus “bad”: the model immigrant versus the troublesome immigrant.

Participants acknowledged that the media are generally good at covering events but not processes. This is especially problematic in the case of immigration coverage—participants agreed that immigration is a story that develops over time

and that it cannot be fully captured in the coverage of daily news events. One speaker likened this to covering the almost imperceptible movement of a glacier. Immigration coverage tends to focus on major news events, in which heightened emotions often preclude balanced coverage.

Media and Political Power

Whatever its flaws, media coverage has an impact. During the discussions, a number of participants argued that, as a journalist, it is essential to be aware of the power of the media and the influence that the media can exert on political debate. There was a general consensus among participants that this influence is a collective power exercised by journalists as a whole, rather than individually. As several participants pointed out, information and statistics provided by the media often feed directly into political debates and are even sometimes used to create legislation. How the media portray immigrants greatly influences the nature and success of their integration into their host society. As a result, media professionals should be more attuned to both this influence on immigration policies and citizens’ perceptions of immigrants.

A few participants noted that journalists sometimes unwittingly express their opinions in their work—not only in how they present an issue or what tone they employ, but also in what they decide to address and what they choose



Participants meet with Parlez Cités, an association that has organized “citizen media” initiatives in low-income suburbs of Paris.



David Gura (NPR) during a conference session in Miami, FL.

not to cover. This in turn affects how the public perceives the issue in question. Journalists should be conscious of what drives them to choose certain topics for coverage, and should also keep questioning their own judgment, in order to ensure that they remain objective and provide the “full picture” to their readers or viewers.

State of Public Opinion

A recent transatlantic survey of public opinion on immigration in North America and Europe reveals how the public’s understanding of immigration is limited. The second conference in Miami opened with a presentation by representatives of the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) about the “Transatlantic Trends” survey on immigration. As part of the survey, around 1,000 people over the age of 18 from the United States, Canada and several European countries (including France, the United Kingdom and Germany) were interviewed.

The GMF survey revealed that a significant “perception-reality gap” on immigration exists throughout Europe and North America: in every country participating in the survey, respondents overestimated the number of immigrants actually living in the country. This result was true even in countries such as Canada, where a majority of respondents did not feel that immigrants were too numerous. Participants

“I’m sure I will be a better reporter because of this conference.”

Karla Gomez-Escamilla, Reporter,
Univision Arizona

discussed how the media could play a greater role in correcting such misimpressions by the public.

Survey results also showed that people generally have a negative perception of illegal immigrants. Survey respondents often associated illegal immigrants with an increase in crime and terrorism and viewed them as a general burden upon the social services of their country.

Important differences between public opinion in Europe and the United States were also reflected in the survey. The overall desire to legalize immigrants appeared to be on the rise in Europe, while it was falling in the United States. At the same time, respondents in both Europe and the United States generally favored policies that would reduce illegal immigration, but were divided about which measures should be taken to address the issue (e.g., reinforcing border control, increasing development aid, etc.).

An Examination of Journalistic Practices: Immigration Coverage in the United States and Europe

Participants observed that there used to be a sharp distinction between the way journalism was practiced by the mainstream media in the United States and in Europe. In Europe, it has long been recognized that even leading mainstream newspapers represent one side of the political spectrum. However, in the United States, there has been a sense that the mainstream media were impartial, fact-finding, nonpartisan and independent. This idea has eroded in the last decade. For example, one speaker observed how right-wing media in the United States have made immigration a major part of their coverage; in the absence of any pushback, the speaker claimed that this has had an insidious effect on immigration coverage. Moreover, new media, especially the blogosphere with its tendency to address a niche audience, have made the media landscape and immigration debate even more complex.



Participants visited a refugee center in a southern suburb of Paris (photo by Claudia Núñez).

Participants reflected on how this changing media landscape has altered their own obligations as journalists. Virulent anti-immigration comments posted by readers are widely found on the online versions of newspapers, which are often poorly monitored. Participants generally recommended that news websites should be better moderated to prevent the diffusion of hateful comments by readers. In particular, anonymity was cited as a problem, since it allows intolerant remarks without risk of consequence for the writer.

Analysis: Immigration Coverage in the United States and France

Much discussion during the two conferences was dedicated to a comparative examination of how media in France and the United States cover immigration and integration:

- **Themes:** Participants discussed how the French media are preoccupied by the theme of integration, while the conversation in the United States is dominated by themes centered on motion, border crossing, and security. In addition, in France more often than in the United States, the media cover immigration from an angle that stresses national cohesion and that puts a greater focus on the global economy. On the other hand, the American media more often approach immigration with respect to the local and national job markets, considering factors such as fiscal policies and the country's need for both skilled and cheap labor.

- **Format:** French and U.S. newspapers approach immigration stories differently. French media often feature numerous articles on a single story or event on a single page, presenting analyses, a debate or a collection of diverse editorials; U.S. newspapers tend to only present one feature article at a time. Participants agreed that both methods have advantages and limitations. In other words, French publications focus less on telling a story and more on presenting multiple viewpoints on a single topic, while American publications adopt a more narrative approach and invest more time and money in putting together a single, in-depth version of a story.

- **Sources:** U.S. and French newspapers rely on similar sources for their coverage—government and major political parties are dominant voices in both—but research has shown that French journalists tend to interview representatives of civil society and minor political parties far more than their American counterparts. In the United States, pollsters and unaffiliated citizens are more often cited by the media than in France. The perspectives of business and immigration source countries do not receive much coverage in either country.

- **Immigration Coverage and the Question of National Identity in France:** In the fall of 2009, the French government launched a controversial debate on “*identité nationale*” (national identity) in France. The first MCI conference took place against the backdrop of this debate, and participants from other countries sought to better grasp the nuances of the debate and its relationship with immigration coverage. One speaker—a Frenchman

“My experience is to do less with more. Fewer stories with more impact. It’s more important than ever to do stories that others are not doing.”

Nina Bernstein, Immigration Reporter,
The New York Times

of Moroccan descent—described the barriers he himself had faced in France, notably his difficulty finding a well-paying job, despite having an MBA. He criticized the French media for its tendency to label children of immigrants—who are French citizens—as immigrants. He noted, “The way things are portrayed [in the French media] is highly stereotyped... For example, until this day, I have never been introduced by any French corporate news as French. It was always ‘He was born in France,’ or ‘He’s French with Moroccan parents,’ or ‘He is a French first-generation immigrant.’”

Another speaker maintained that the French media’s coverage of immigration has focused on the *banlieues*, poverty, unemployment, and the sense that immigrants are socially “stuck.” The French media have seemed interested in immigrants and people of immigrant descent only when a riot or other violence originating in an immigrant neighborhood has occurred. The speaker claimed that since journalists have not done their job properly, inhabitants of the *banlieues* have lost confidence in the French media. At the same time, more and more children of immigrants are college-educated and are slowly entering the French media; over time, they should assume a more important role in the conversation. Participants suggested that the French media should seek to write more neutral stories on the *banlieues*, as a means of initiating a rapprochement and reconciling the *banlieues*, the media and other French citizens.

The Importance of History

Participants stressed the importance of history as part of a discussion on immigration and the media. One speaker observed that the United States is often viewed as having a successful history of immigration, while Europe is seen as having failed to live up to its own self-proclaimed idea of being an open society. In reality, during the post-war period, the history of immigration to Europe and the United States has been quite similar, as one speaker explained. For instance, the level of immigration to the European Union and to the United States has been comparable, and the level of segregation in major American and European cities is similar. Furthermore, as seen in the results of the GMF survey, public resistance to increased levels of immigration is also comparable in the United States and in Europe.

At the same time, important economic differences characterize immigration to the United States and in Europe. As this speaker noted, in New York, for example, more than 90% of first-generation immigrants work, while in Amsterdam, fewer than 50% of first-generation immigrants are employed. The welfare state in Europe, with its relatively comprehensive social benefits, plays an important role in explaining this disparity. In turn, the speaker posited that popular acceptance of immigration depends to a certain extent on whether or not immigrants are viewed as contributing economically to society.

¹ The French term referring to the outskirts of a city, inhabited chiefly by lower-income people of immigrant origin, living in public housing.



III

CHALLENGES FACED BY JOURNALISTS

During the two conferences, participants examined challenges that journalists covering immigration often face and identified strategies to address them.

Integrating All Voices

Good reporting and good stories are built on objectivity and a careful presentation of all sides of an issue, whether or not the ideas are representative of the journalist's opinions. However, when covering immigration, being objective can sometimes prove especially difficult, as this is a topic that usually evokes strong feelings and often has the power to inspire controversy. Journalists must contend with the reality that their audiences and sources approach immigration with their own personal histories, beliefs, and frames of reference, which often include stereotypes. Still, professional journalists need to be able to detach themselves emotionally when writing, and provide their readers with a complete account.

In immigration coverage as in journalism in general, conference attendees generally agreed that every voice needs to be heard: the rational, fact-based voices, as well as the irrational ones. In the context of immigration, journalists should include everyone's opinions in their stories, whether these opinions adopt a pro-immigration perspective or a more restrictive, anti-immigration angle. Immigration is about politics and debate, and therefore different voices are inevitably a part of the story. However, reporters should always clearly identify, categorize, and tag these voices so that their audiences can effectively draw their own conclusions. This is not without its challenges: the question of access came up as part of the discussions. Indeed, some reporters explained that they did not always have access to certain kinds of sources.

The media have the ability to steer relevant discussions on immigration and, with that, also have a major responsibility to apply their discretion wisely regarding what information to present. Several participants noted that journalists should not focus solely on the most strident voices (whether pro-

or anti-immigration) but that they should also cover the voices of people in the middle, who do not necessarily have the most "newsworthy" views or activities, but whose opinions are equally valuable.

While considering and including a wide range of sources and opinions, journalists also need to cross-check data and report reliable facts. They need to judge the validity of claims and arguments expressed by different groups, by asking: Are these comments based on factuality, popularity, political strength or are they simply centered on an effort to garner attention? Participants concluded that journalists need to carefully assess to whom they will ultimately give a voice in their stories.

Choosing the Right Words

Journalists have to be careful with the vocabulary they choose to use when covering immigration, considering how readers will interpret the words they have employed. During the two conferences, participants examined the political and cultural context surrounding the specific vocabulary employed as part of immigration coverage and political debates surrounding immigration.

One speaker presented the lexicon used to describe immigrants by different sides of the political spectrum, focusing on the United States (see chart on the next page). Reporters must keep in mind that each interest group employs different terms to describe an immigrant (alien vs. immigrant) as well as policy decisions with respect to immigration (amnesty vs. legalization).

"I found the interaction with the reporters who cover the topic in diverse countries to be most enriching. Their comments and critiques widened my horizon on covering this subject."

Claudia Núñez, Reporter,
La Opinión, Los Angeles



Angela Maria Kelley, vice president of Immigration Policy and Advocacy at the Center for American Progress.

Significant discussion was also dedicated to the vocabulary employed in the French media. In France, the term diversity is widely used to refer to immigrants. Diversity has a positive connotation, while the term *communautarisme* (the closest equivalent in English would be “identity politics”) retains a negative connotation. There is a specific context for understanding and defining identity that centers on France’s republican, “colorblind” ideal. This is the idea that anything in the public space has to be neutral and that specific manifestations of one’s religious beliefs and one’s culture should be restricted to the private sphere. According to this standard, in France, the assertion of a minority identity is not considered as consistent with being integrated into French society and explains why many immigrant groups may be hesitant to define themselves in ways other than French and integrated.

Interacting with Immigrants

The relationship between journalists and immigrants is central to immigration reporting. Strong communication between them is key to quality immigration coverage. Reporters need to try their best to understand the immigrants they interview for their stories, and they should not hesitate to seek outside help—from an interpreter, a member of the community, or an advocacy group—to achieve this.

After meetings with representatives of immigrant communities in Paris and Miami, a number of conference participants explained that they sometimes sensed fear among immigrants of sharing information with the media. One reason is that immigrants are often afraid to speak with journalists because they fear deportation by the government. On the other hand,



Moïse Gomis, the director of a French radio station interviews fellow conference participant Levon Sevunts, producer at Radio Canada International.

Rhetorical battle of name-calling, euphemisms

Expand immigration	Limit immigration
Undocumented (sans papiers)	Illegal
Undocumented taxpayers	Illegal users of public services
Immigrants, workers	Aliens
Earned legalization	Amnesty
Workers employers need	Cheap labor for employers
Racial, ethnic profiling	Targeted enforcement
Best and brightest	Cheap technical labor
Nazi, Stalinist, fascist	Normal local enforcement
ID: infringement on privacy	ID: normal check on eligibility
Employer sanctions	Labor law enforcement
Denying migrants basic human right to work	Reducing magnet of unlawful employment
Opponents are “restrictionist”	Opponents are “admissionist”
Opponents want “closed borders”	Opponents want “open borders”
Hardworking migrants	Criminal aliens, drug cartels, etc.
Family reunification	Uncontrolled chain migration; nepotism
Promote competitiveness	Undercut workers wages/benefits

This table was created and presented by speaker and participant Dr. Michael S. Teitelbaum, Demographer, Harvard Law School and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

other immigrants also told participants how important the media is in their lives in helping them get more attention and assistance. In any case, the relationship between immigrants and journalists is a complex one, and journalists should not expect access to immigrant communities to be an easy process.

Media professionals should strive to understand the social dynamics of the immigrant groups they are studying before they commence their reporting. For example, one participant encouraged media professionals to consider the factor of class: while some of the immigrants with whom they interact may lack economic resources, these same immigrants may be highly educated. Some participants also noted that developing contacts in immigrants' countries of origin can prove to be a great source of information, as well as a great way to gain access to the bigger picture.

Finally, participants all agreed that media professionals should never compromise their adherence to journalistic ethical standards as a way to acquire easier access to immigrant sources. Immigrants often have few resources (legal, linguistic, educational) in their host countries, so media professionals find themselves in a position of great power, and they should not take advantage of immigrants' vulnerability.

Collaborating with Advocacy Groups and Finding Balance

Another challenge that participants discussed was the complex relationship between immigration reporters and immigration advocacy groups. Representatives of advocacy groups who attended the conference reflected on how they interact and collaborate with reporters. They recommended that journalists view advocacy groups as useful sources of both information and contacts, especially in immigrant communities.

The relationship between the press and advocacy groups can be intense and even contentious. One speaker described his organization's efforts to "manage" journalists and how advocacy groups now lobby media harder than legislators as part of their efforts to influence immigration policies. Participants concluded that, while the media have the power to influence the political agenda, advocacy groups have the power to "twist" that same agenda. Journalists noted that one challenge of collaborating with advocacy groups is that they often expect journalists to reflect their side of the story in their work. As some participants attested, journalists who themselves are immigrants are particularly subject to this

pressure since pro-immigrant groups generally expect them to be on their side, and groups with a more restrictive view of immigration have accused them of being partial and refused to speak with them.

During discussions, participants were careful to differentiate advocacy from journalism. They agreed that their priority should be to achieve fairness and accuracy in their reporting. The reporters recognized they had to be careful not to become platforms for interest groups; instead, they felt that they should focus on delivering balanced reporting and remain skeptical of the information they received, regardless of the source.



Immigrant women cooking at a refugee center in the southern suburbs of Paris visited by participants.

III

DESCRIBING THE BIG PICTURE

A recurrent theme for the journalists during the MCI conferences was the importance of providing enough context and objective information to allow their audiences to form their own opinions. Participants identified economic and religious questions as two key elements of immigration stories that should not be overlooked when reporting on the topic.

The Economic Aspect of Immigration

In the media's coverage of immigration, there is often a strong focus on symbolic questions, such as the debate about headscarves in a number of European countries, yet, there is also a need for a greater study of other, more concrete aspects of the topic, such as the economics of immigration. Immigration is a complex economic story that requires an understanding of factors that include globalization and international trade, and how they impact the developing world. Research on immigration and economic policies can lead to a greater understanding of more concrete costs and benefits of immigration, which can then allow media professionals to provide solid facts about immigration to the general public.

One participant pointed out that many people, both in the media and the general public, tend to think solely about immigrants as individuals with manual jobs and forget about the whole range of individuals who constitute immigrant communities. This participant explained that this "other" type of migrant is too often absent from the media and therefore remains invisible.

Several participants pointed out that, when discussing immigration, the media often focus on the impact of immigrants on host societies but rarely mention the countries where these immigrants are from. Studying these countries of origin and developing local sources could add greater depth to reporters' stories and to the public's understanding of the

dynamics of immigration. As one participant explained, this type of coverage will not only allow people in host societies to understand immigration better, but it could be an efficient way to pressure the countries from which large immigrant communities come to improve internal conditions that drive out their citizens.

Participants agreed that using more economic data in their stories is an effective way to make their readers understand that immigrants are not stealing jobs, and that they instead play a vital role in the host country's economy by accepting jobs that most natives do not want. In the United States, immigrant labor—mostly from South America—has filled these "unwanted" positions. As one speaker argued, without the help of immigrants, many more companies would be likely to leave the United States to relocate to countries where the workforce is cheaper. With the help of immigrants, however, companies have been able to stay, expand and pay taxes. Furthermore, immigrants who fill these "unwanted" positions protect, not only the industries they work for, but also the Americans who work in these industries, as well as in ancillary industries.

Media Coverage of Immigration and Religion

Religion is another aspect of the immigration narrative that is under-covered, despite the fact that it is crucial to understanding culture and immigration patterns. Participants agreed that journalists should be better informed about different religious traditions and practices, in order to improve their work on immigration.

Much like immigration itself, the topic of religion can be so complex and delicate that it is often overlooked, and journalists fail to identify the religious angle in their stories. One speaker explained that there is a widespread problem of religious illiteracy—an issue of "blindness" with respect to religion—in the United States. Consequently, journalists often do not know how to deal with the subject properly. As an example, the speaker asserted that many journalists cannot recite all of the Ten Commandments. As another speaker suggested, journalists should be more knowledgeable about religion, so that they can deepen their understanding of



Participants met with students of immigrant origin at a high school in the southern suburbs of Paris.

various immigrant groups, and better inform their audiences without feeding into stereotypes.

Participants pointed out that journalists often group immigrants with similar religious beliefs into a single category, and likewise fail to distinguish between different cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, Hispanics and Latinos are frequently treated as one ethnic entity, while from an anthropological viewpoint, there is much to distinguish the two groups. Participants agreed that it is paramount for the media to be more sensitive to these nuances.

Participants agreed that journalists rarely turn their attention to the value that religion can have for people, and the positive influence religious institutions can have on lives (the power to integrate for example). Conversely, they noted that not enough coverage is devoted to what drives people to become religiously radical and to move against such positive forces.

Another challenge for journalists who are trying to tackle religious questions is that religious authorities, such as bishops and priests, can sometimes intimidate reporters, which can lead to more cautious coverage and self-censorship. Moreover, journalists are often careful about what they write because of their own religious beliefs. Instead, they should distinguish between the religious institution and religious faith, and remain objective.

The Coverage of Muslims

The media's coverage of religion can have an important effect on public opinion. Conference participants acknowledged that this influence has particularly shaped the public's view of Muslims and other non-Christian groups. One speaker asserted that the media are responsible for the public's generally negative opinion of Muslims. Another speaker pointed out that there are many conversations about Muslims in the media but very few opportunities for Muslims to actually be heard. The same speaker continued by saying that it is

indeed rare to hear Muslims speak for themselves, and that when they do, journalists usually look for a specific kind of Muslim who fits their preconceived notions of Muslim identity, thus limiting their research and coverage. Accordingly, they often choose to interview “angry bearded men” and women wearing the full Islamic veil. More moderate Muslim voices are rarely acknowledged.

The same speaker noted that, after September 11th, Muslims in the United States were suddenly forced onto the national stage to speak on behalf of all Muslims throughout the world. However, U.S. media have done a poor job of representing the complexity and diversity of Muslims within the country in regard to African-American Muslims, Muslim women with headscarves, and issues such as racism within the Muslim community itself.

Another speaker explained that Europe was not doing better work on the topic, and that immigrants’ “otherness” is often explicitly framed in terms of religion, with the word “immigrant” often being used as a synonym for Muslim. The speaker admitted that it can be difficult for journalists to know which sources they should use and that more Muslims should reach out to the media to try to have their voices heard. It is important that the media also interview Muslims about non-religious issues, in order to expand the conversation.

“The exchanges of experiences, the contacts we made . . . we have improved our way to work as journalists of the migration subject.”

Luis de Vega, Correspondent in Maghreb,
ABC Madrid

In France, there is a specific context to understanding how religion, and specifically the Muslim faith, is viewed. Historically, the French fought to remove religion from the public sphere. As a result, public demonstrations of religious faith are often considered controversial in a much more significant way than in North America. As in many other countries in Europe, the story of immigration and of integration in France is inextricably intertwined with the question of Islam, since the majority of migrants in France are from Muslim countries. One speaker observed that second- or third-generation immigrants have used Islam as a way to oppose French society, from which they often feel alienated.



Jennifer Hill (left), attorney at the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center in Miami, FL, talked with conference participants about her work helping immigrants.

IV

ETHNIC MEDIA

Each MCI conference included a discussion dedicated to ethnic media. An important thread that emerged from the discussions was the eagerness of participants to find concrete ways to move toward greater collaboration between ethnic media and mainstream media. A number of participants acknowledged that ethnic media outlets have a certain advantage because they have much closer ties to their respective communities than mainstream media. As a result, increased interaction between ethnic and mainstream media could open new doors for journalism, especially in these times of crisis for the media industry.

Despite difficulties wrought by the economic crisis, ethnic media in the United States are well positioned and often considered reputable. For instance, according to New America Media, the audience for ethnic media in the United States stood at 50 million people in 2009, and it is the fastest-growing sector of American journalism. A 2009 New America Media poll showed that one out of four adults in America access ethnic media for news, information and entertainment, and that there is not a single state in the United States that does not have ethnic media. One speaker explained that ethnic media have long been compared to mainstream journalism, but that it has in fact always played a distinctive role in journalism. Ethnic media is a genre that has to be seen on its own terms.

Immigrant communities, understandably, have different interests and perspectives than mainstream audiences. For example, as one participant pointed out, when it comes to history, Mexican immigrants often reflect upon the invasion by the United States of Mexico in the 19th century, unlike most Americans who rarely consider this moment in history. Audiences need to be able to relate to what they read and view, which is why ethnic media play such an important role. They offer a distinct perspective on the immigrant experience by studying it from the immigrant's point of view. Ethnic media give a voice to communities whose voices are not usually heard, and thus create opportunities for broader debate.

At the same time, ethnic media faces its own set of challenges. First of all, presenting views unpopular with one's own community can be a challenge. In addition, as part of conference discussions, journalists who are immigrants themselves admitted that they face another set of challenges: pro-immigrant groups generally expect them to be on their side, and groups with a restrictionist approach to immigration may refuse to speak with them, accusing them of being partial. One speaker pointed out that stereotypes of ethnic media journalists exist and that these journalists are sometimes considered less educated, and are assumed to have inferior skills in the country's language.

Significantly, ethnic media in the United States are evolving alongside their audiences. The Project for Excellence in Journalism has observed that, as the proportion of American-born Hispanics continues to rise, some Hispanic media have abandoned a purely Spanish-language format, becoming bilingual or even adopting a solely English-language format. As one speaker underlined, ethnic media is a type of media that is "hungry" to be better at what it does.

"Wonderful opportunity to speak with immigrants on their particular traumatic experiences and how it signaled so many massive problems with the U.S. immigration system."

Iván Roman, Executive Director,
National Association of Hispanic Journalists



Immigrant family at a refugee center in the southern suburbs of Paris visited by participants.

By contrast, ethnic media in Europe often lag behind their peers across the Atlantic. For example, there are no Arabic newspapers in France, despite the sizeable Arab community in the country. The role and characterization of ethnic media in Europe is often influenced by the specific culture and history of a country, according to a report from the Institut Panos. It is known as “diversity media” in France, “multicultural media” in Italy and “community media” in Belgium.

One speaker explained that, growing up in France in the 1980s, he could not find any role models in the media that “really looked like him,” because of the virtual absence of ethnic media in France. This pushed him to move to the United Kingdom and then to the United States to create his own publication, with an “ethnic” minority readership in mind. He defined the perspective of his publication as “transcultural,” with the aim to find the “common ground between different cultures.” Once in New York, his publication was able

to grow rapidly. He explained that having a successful ethnic media depends largely on finding advertisers who value ethnic media, which is the case in the United States. According to him, France is years behind the United States in terms of targeting ethnic media, as the French establishment does not really believe that it is a viable sector.

A German speaker, based at a mainstream outlet, viewed the question from a different angle. In Germany after September 11th, he and his colleagues realized that they were neglecting a considerable portion of society as part of their coverage. He recognized that mainstream media in general were not offering enough to immigrant communities, which explained their reliance on ethnic media or satellite television. He felt it was important for mainstream media to reach out to immigrant communities and make certain they felt part of German society. Likewise, he felt it was important to promote more interaction between ethnic and mainstream media, making sure that ethnic media do not remain in a separate niche.



KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Need for Diversity in the Newsroom

Participants generally agreed that traditional media must take greater measures in favor of diversity (in the newsroom, in their approach to reporting, etc.), as part of the media's contract with society. Participants also agreed that newsrooms need to be diverse to better reflect the societies they serve, and that the promotion of diversity should be a priority for news organizations. Reporters from immigrant backgrounds should be recognized for the value they add to the newsroom, because they can offer their own insights and new perspectives on immigration stories as well as on other topics. Nevertheless, as one participant asserted, "It should be a goal for any newsroom to be as diverse as possible, and not solely for the coverage of immigration." Participants were careful to make the point that being from an immigrant background is in no way necessary for being a capable reporter on immigration.

Some participants contended that diversifying the newsroom should not be difficult, as there is an increasing number of highly qualified journalists from immigrant backgrounds in Europe and the United States. However, participants pointed out that the hiring process remains a major obstacle to diversifying newsrooms. This process often passes through already established social networks—which are not necessarily diverse—rather than functioning in a strictly meritocratic way. Some participants were more optimistic than others about these efforts to diversify their recruiting. Some media organizations have developed specific pipelines for recruiting talent, while some journalists remarked upon the

"I will remain very active on immigration issues and this experience; the contacts will be a great help in the outreach I am doing for the Council on Foreign Relations."

Edward Alden, Senior Fellow,
Council on Foreign Relations,
former Washington bureau Chief
for the *Financial Times*

relative "backwardness" of their organizations in this regard, highlighting the lack of gender as well as ethnic diversity.

In addition to asserting that media executives must strive to increase diversity in their organizations, participants thought that it was essential for universities to diversify their student bodies by recruiting more students from minority communities. Discussion turned to how discrimination often begins in schools, where many students of immigrant origin are placed on tracks that will never lead them to careers in professional journalism. Participants concluded that a thorough review of the entire pipeline for the recruitment of new journalists is necessary in order to address this problem.

Humanizing Immigration Stories

Individual voices are central to the narratives of immigration coverage. Participants asserted that journalists should find ways to bring their subjects closer to their readers, so that the latter can better relate to immigrants' stories. Individual stories are a powerful way to explain larger forces, and can serve to fight against both the dehumanization of the immigrant narrative and the increasing separation between audience and immigrant.

Participants felt that it was part of their responsibility as media professionals to find ways to give a voice to the "invisible" people among immigrant communities, and not only report on the most vocal and visible ones. As one speaker pointed out, the media should not focus on the "spectacle" of immigration-related phenomena (such as the French riots).

The media should attempt to eradicate stereotypes and educate both the receiving and sending countries about the challenges and process of immigration. For example, the media should better cover how the fear of deportation affects the lives of immigrants and their families. While it is essential to give more room to immigrants' voices in stories, journalists should recognize that fear can make it harder for immigrants to talk about their situations, and should fully consider the impact media coverage can have on their lives.



Participants met at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris to debrief on their meetings with immigrant groups and representatives.

Redefining the Audience and Educating the Reader

The two conferences took place at a time when media organizations on both sides of the Atlantic were facing financial strains and declining revenues, forcing journalists to reflect on the “current state of journalism” and its impact on their work. Participants observed that, in the current economy, journalists are so nervous about dwindling circulation and extensive layoffs that they try to cater to what they perceive as their “core” audience. These individuals are often imagined to be older and white, even though this may not be the case. The media should redefine their respective audiences to adjust for changing demographics, since people prefer news sources to which they can relate.

One speaker insisted that journalists must also be aware of the limits of their influence. According to this speaker, journalists can have a real impact on their audience, but they also have to understand that people read stories and assimilate them based on their own stereotypes. Indeed, immigration is an emotional topic and the public’s perspectives are informed by deep feelings, history, beliefs, and frames of reference that shape their opinions.



Erkan Arikon, reporter and editor at ARD-aktuell, during a conference session in Miami, FL.

Media professionals should work to overcome the misconceptions of their audience, and to further educate them. For instance, most people do not realize that, in the United States, there is virtually no way to become “legal” if you are currently “undocumented.” At the same time, there is a need for greater focus by journalists on solutions that are available to help immigrants, rather than only covering the problems and crises.

Thinking Outside the Box

As one speaker asserted, one cannot understand immigration and integration by adopting a moralizing approach, treating immigration solely as a societal enrichment. It is important to write about the dynamics of loss that occur as well. For immigrants, there is a loss of family traditions, of religion, and of children to host societies, etc. The sense of loss on the part of host societies should be acknowledged as well—the sense among native-born citizens that the world is changing around them. This understanding of loss should serve, not as a criticism of immigration, but rather as a way to acknowledge and understand the dynamics that define this process.

Additionally, the conflict between a host society and immigrants should be seen as a part of the processes of immigration and integration, and also as a sign of mutual engagement. This conflict should be placed within the context of the history of immigration. Conflict should not, therefore, be interpreted as a sign that the integration of immigrants is not working; instead, it should be recognized as a part of a long process.

The topic of immigration is often viewed as an isolated question that only concerns immigrants, when in reality, the fundamental questions being asked are questions about society at large. Immigration forces society to reflect upon its ideals, freedoms and institutions, and journalists, too, should reflect on these larger questions as part of their work.

“I did make lots of contacts who have helped explain European Union policies and individual countries’ policies.”

Susan Ferriss, Reporter, *The Sacramento Bee*

A Few Closing Recommendations

During the MCI conferences, participants articulated several general recommendations that may be useful to media professionals who work on the topic of immigration:

- Journalists should always focus on the quality of their stories, not on the quantity. They should concentrate on writing fewer stories that have greater impact;
- Journalists should fight for the stories in which they believe. They should be prepared to defend their stories to their editors and demonstrate the importance of immigration stories and what they tell us about society;
- Journalists should use history as part of their reporting: looking at the past adds depth to stories and can offer insight into potential future trends.



Participants met with elected officials of immigrant origin in the northeastern suburbs of Paris.

VI

CONCLUSION



Participant Moïse Gomis, director of a French radio station, interviews fellow participant Sandy Close, Executive Director of New America Media.

Regardless of changes in the media industry, the state of the world economy and even patterns of migration, the way immigrants are depicted by the media remains a crucial issue in Europe, the United States and Canada. For immigration reporters, the challenge is mastering a highly complex and emotional issue, defined by important economic, social and political forces. The language used to describe immigration can be highly polemical, and the way reporters select whose voices are represented and how they are labeled as part of coverage is essential in this context.

The relationship between the media, their audience, and immigrant communities is also complicated, and media must adapt to better identify their core audience, and to better connect with immigrant communities. Ethnic media target a more precise audience and often have deeper ties

within immigrant communities than do mainstream media, and opportunity remains for greater collaboration between mainstream and ethnic media.

Despite the challenges that participants in the MCI conferences described, they also admitted to great joy and discovery in their work. Participants also viewed their work as part of a fundamental dialogue on the broader values of their own societies: as one American participant shared, "Immigration is a great story. It is a complex story and a very hard story to get right. But, you know, I really think it is one of the great stories of our days. Not only because it opens for Americans a window on our traditions, but also because it opens a window on every aspect of American life. And maybe, even more important, what kind of country we want to be."

VIII

APPENDIX

Quotes from Participants

PARIS SYMPOSIUM

"[The conference] provided new information and a new way of looking at the conflicts and clashes that come with immigration."

Emily Bazar, Immigration Reporter, *USA Today*

"I was hoping to get in contact with colleagues covering immigration as well as with scientific experts in order to network and get inspiration and a new view on immigrant politics, as well as on media covering. The conference totally met all my expectations. To me it was a great inspiration."

Andrea Brandt, Correspondent, *Der Spiegel*

[Speaking about the reporting opportunity in Paris' Chinatown] Moïse Gomis explained that while he has been producing a radio show about "immigrant memory" in Haute Normandie, it was "thanks to you [that] I was able to gain new tools in order to have a better approach and comprehension of Asian [immigrant] communities."

Moïse Gomis, Directeur, *Radio des Hauts de Rouen*

"This was truly an enriching experience that has begun to reveal itself in my reporting."

Claudia Núñez, Reporter, *La Opinión*, Los Angeles

MIAMI SYMPOSIUM

"I learned a great deal about some of the subtle and not so subtle forms of abuse that some migrants face. I suspect I will write and research more on the issues of low-wage migrants (much of my writing has been about high-skilled immigration)."

Edward Alden, Senior Fellow,
Council on Foreign Relations,
former Washington bureau Chief for the *Financial Times*

"I've learnt a lot and met very, very interesting people and professionals. The conference opened a lot of doors and questions and ideas. Above all, it made migration (and its coverage) appear clearly what for what it is, an international question (we share more than we think, professionally speaking)."

Pascale Egré, Reporter, *Le Parisien*

"I want to write a column comparing some European challenges on immigration and demographic change with those in the U.S. I've picked up some ideas for comparing labor issues, reactions to the economic crisis, and the scapegoating of immigrants and challenges each continent faces as it comes to terms with ethnic diversity."

Susan Ferriss, Reporter, *The Sacramento Bee*

"Plan to use what I've learned in the efforts by our organization to promote, advocate for, and push for the improvement of immigration coverage in the U.S."

Iván Roman, Executive Director,
National Association of Hispanic Journalists

OTHER RESOURCES

Further reading on migration and media in Europe and the United States:

- Statistics and other resources from the OECD: see www.oecd.org (see Topics/International Migration)
- Country resources from the Migration Policy Institute, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank in Washington, DC, dedicated to analysis of the movement of people worldwide:
<http://www.migrationinformation.org/Resources/>
- “Current Immigration Debates in Europe,” a series of country-specific reports published by the Migration Policy Group, an independent European nonprofit organization dedicated to strategic thinking and acting on equality and mobility:
http://www.migpolgroup.com/publications_detail.php?id=119
- “Democracy in the Age of New Media: A Report on the Media and the Immigration Debate” by Banu Akdenizli, E.J. Dionne, Jr., and Roberto Suro. This report examines the impact of the U.S. media on policy making on immigration. It includes an analysis of how the media have covered immigration going back to 1980, along with an analysis of public opinion survey data regarding the development of attitudes toward immigration and the media’s role in shaping them:
http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2008/0925_immigration_dionne.aspx
- A list of resources from the Religion Newswriters Association. It includes a section dedicated to religion and immigration: <http://www.religionlink.com/>

Public Opinion Surveys on Immigration:

- “47-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey: World Publics Welcome Global Trade — But Not Immigration” by the Pew Research Center: <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=258>
- “Transatlantic Trends: Immigration” by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Barrow Cadbury Trust and the Fundación BBVA. This study compiles the results of a public opinion survey addressing immigration and integration issues including national identity, citizenship, migration management policies, national security, and the economic opportunities and challenges brought on by migrants. It measures broad public opinion in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain: <http://www.gmfus.org/trends/immigration/index.html>

Media Guides and Reporting Toolkits:

- “Reporting Immigration” by Stephen Franklin and Teresa Puente (International Center for Journalists):
http://issuu.com/icfjournalists/docs/icfj_immigration_eng
- “A Diversity Toolkit for factual programs in public television” by the European Broadcasting Union’s Intercultural and Diversity Group (IDG):
http://www.ebu.ch/en/union/under_banners/CulturalDiversity_2008.php
http://www.ebu.ch/CMSimages/en/toolkit%20low_tcm6-56142.pdf
- The Ethical Journalism Initiative (EJI), launched by the International Federation of Journalists, contains guidelines on ethical journalism and includes a chapter on “Journalism in the Face of Intolerance and Racism:”
A link to the site: <http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/en>
And to the book: http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/pdfs/EJI_book_en.pdf

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Andrew Carnegie envisioned Carnegie Corporation as a foundation that would “promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.” In keeping with this mandate, our work incorporates an affirmation of our historic role as an education foundation but also honors Andrew Carnegie’s passion for international peace and the health of our democracy. While Mr. Carnegie’s primary aim was to benefit the people of the United States, he later determined to use a portion of the funds for members of the British overseas Commonwealth. Currently, this area of our grantmaking focuses on selected countries in sub-Saharan Africa.



Unbound Philanthropy works in the field of human migration to transform long-standing but solvable barriers to the human rights of migrants and refugees and their integration into host societies. We seek to strengthen social, civic, and economic opportunities and relationships of mutual responsibility and respect across communities.



We are a national foundation with local roots. We choose, as the Knight brothers chose, to seek opportunities that can transform both communities and journalism, and help them reach their highest potential. We advance journalism in the digital age and invest in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers.

We focus on projects that promote informed, engaged communities and lead to transformational change. We believe that information is a core community need. We want to ensure that all citizens get the information they need to thrive in a democracy and act in their own best interest.

And we ask, as we evaluate opportunities and grants, “Is this truly transformational?” Because grant making requires a sound financial base, we preserve the Knight brothers’ gift through prudent investment and careful management.



The Open Society Institute works to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve its mission, OSI seeks to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI builds alliances across borders and continents on issues such as corruption and freedom of information. OSI places a high priority on protecting and improving the lives of people in marginalized communities.

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