Rejection and Solidarity



The Impact of Operation Charlotte's Web on the Latino Community

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This report is dedicated to

Maria Laura Monachesi

who passed during the writing of this report.

Originally from Argentina, she moved to Charlotte in 2006. For over a decade, Maria Laura poured her life into helping fellow Latino immigrant families in the city.

Rejection and Solidarity:
The Impact of Operation Charlotte's Web on the Latino Community

Rapid Appraisal Report

Description:

A report presenting the findings of a qualitative rapid appraisal consisting of 16 semi-structured interviews with Charlotte Latino community members.

Report Version:

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Summary

In the middle of November 2025, federal immigration agents were mobilized to the Charlotte area to conduct a large-scale immigration enforcement campaign called Operation Charlotte's Web. For around 2 weeks, federal immigration agents carried out their operations mostly in areas densely populated with immigrants. For days, images and videos of the operation showing immigration agents chasing after Latinos, breaking car windows, and detaining workers rapidly circulated in news and social media. Local school systems reported significant student absences and mutual aid efforts were carried out to help families staying indoors to avoid immigration agents.

In an effort to document experiences and perspectives of the event, Camino Research Institute conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with Latinos living in the Charlotte area. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes common across participant narratives of Operation Charlotte's Web. This report presents the results of the study.

Overall, participants with a vulnerable residency status stayed inside their homes and were not able to work, which minimized income and left them more economically vulnerable. Participants with a more secure residency status reported assisting with mutual aid efforts, but still felt vulnerable due to the perceived discrimination of immigration agents. Participants with children also had their routines interrupted and struggled to manage emotional stress during the operation. Participants also reported feeling alienated and disturbed by the images and videos of Latinos getting chased after and detained while also encouraged by seeing Latinos and non-Latinos alike protesting and participating in mutual aid efforts.

Participants recommended that local governments take more action to resist the actions of the federal government regarding immigration enforcement. They also recommended more financial and mental health support for families impacted by the disruption caused by Operation Charlotte's Web.

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Preface

It is difficult to describe the feeling of seeing the city you live in projected on televisions and news feeds of national media conglomerates and seeing the storefronts and traffic lights you usually drive by to be the setting of viral videos of immigration agents going after working Latinos. It's a type of surrealness that disorients and forces one to view these things almost like an outsider, even though I have been living in the Charlotte area for over 20 years. After seeing the first initial wave of videos and images of the operation, I called my immigrant parents, who also live in the area, and told them to be careful and to have their US passports with them at all times *"por si acaso [just in case]."*

I share this because I want readers to know how personal this project was for me. When Operation Charlotte's Web was happening, I felt useless. Sure, I helped support some aid efforts happening around the city and had the hotline number ready in case I witnessed something, but I could not help feeling like I was sitting in a stew of cynical and fatalistic despair. Ultimately, I thought we were at the mercy of the whims of Border Patrol while local governments had to wade in their impotence as nonprofits, churches, schools, and grassroots organizations hastily responded to the crisis. Perhaps having such feelings was socially engineered to ensure compliance and discipline to power.

This report is probably my attempt to contribute something that might be useful and help document how this event impacted the Charlotte Latino community. Maybe it is, selfishly, my own catharsis and to not feel so useless. At the very least, I wanted to *"poner mi granito de arena"* and contribute a bit towards the herculean (or Sisyphean?) task of an immigration reform that will liberate those hiding in the shadows of the system. Admittedly, this project was a spontaneous effort with little to no budget, but I felt it was important to, at least, do something.

While I originally wanted to quickly turn this project around into a simple report, the contents of the interviews were so rich that it took longer to engage with the transcripts than I anticipated. Moreover, as I was writing the report, I became aware of my own ignorance of the historical discourse of immigration and retreated into the archives a bit to help contextualize Operation Charlotte's Web as part of a long chain of events instead of an isolated phenomenon. Therefore, some readers might find my historical review of US immigration policy, nationally and here in Charlotte, as too indulgent. For that, I apologize. Nevertheless, I found it necessary to ground what happened here in Charlotte as part of an unfolding process instead of a floating signifier.

Hopefully, this preface tells readers that it was impossible for me to write this report without bias because I am a Charlottean (or at least I consider myself as one) and I am a Latino (albeit one that was born in the US). I thank my colleagues and coauthors for their encouragement and contributions, and community members for their willingness to participate and share their story for this project.

Lennin Caro
Director of Camino Research Institute
Charlotte, North Carolina
August 13th, 2026



My mother working as a busser in Connecticut back in 1993. She moved from Colombia to the US to give me a better future.

Introduction

Charlotte, NC: November 19th, 2025
During an unusually warm November day, another researcher and I decided to go eat together at a recommended Colombian restaurant. Things were slow in the office. What was usually a lively office full of chatter and laughter was instead quiet and somber. One could only hear clicking keyboards and squeaking chairs.

We left to visit a Latina business owner to discuss a possible research collaboration. It was a smooth, but eerie ride down I-85; there was almost no traffic. We arrived at her office building and parked in a sparse lot. The door was locked, so we pressed the doorbell and were then let in to find that her office was also nearly empty. We asked her how her construction business was going considering the circumstances. ***"Our clients have to understand that we are going to be behind schedule,"*** she said.



Many Latino businesses were empty due to the impact of Operation Charlotte's Web | Source: Camino Research Institute

After the meeting, we decided to grab lunch at a Colombian restaurant. Instead of the usual lunchtime congestion, there was barely any traffic. We turned off South Boulevard and into a shopping plaza. Only a few cars were in the parking lot. We walked up to the restaurant and pulled on the door. It was locked. I tried peering into the tinted windows, but couldn't see anyone. We figured that the restaurant was closed and decided to go try to eat somewhere else. As soon as we turned around, the door suddenly opened and a waitress popped out. She greeted us with a ***"¡Bienvenidos!"*** and took us inside into a nearly empty restaurant. Behind the bar was someone sitting in boredom. Two other employees were sitting at a table casually chatting.

The waitress seated us at a table as far away from the windows as possible. We asked her how business has been. She gave us the obvious answer: ***"Almost no one is coming, people are scared, it's terrible what is happening."***

I noticed that the only other patrons were seated in the middle of a sea of empty tables and booths. They appeared to be White and talked loudly enough to discern that they were speaking in English. The waitress asked what we wanted to drink while we decided on what to eat. We gave her our order and she walked away.

While perusing the menu, I heard the door rattle. I looked over and saw two men. One was wearing a wide-brimmed sun hat and the other one was carrying a box. The waitress walked over and opened the door. The two men came in, spoke to the waitress, and were directed to go to a table. Soon, another person, who I assumed was another restaurant employee or manager, walked from the kitchen to speak to the men who were pulling flyers from the box showing messages indicating that ICE and Border Patrol did not have a right to enter private property, along with what appeared to be *Know Your Rights* materials. They gave these materials to the employee, said their goodbyes, and left.

Scenes of empty roads, sparse parking lots, and quiet businesses were very common during Operation Charlotte's Web, an immigration enforcement operation that brought a surge of federal immigration agents to the Charlotte area in the middle of November 2025. Local and national news broadcasts heavily reported on the impact of the operation on the Charlotte community. Cell phone videos of agents arresting and detaining Latinos in Charlotte streets rapidly circulated across social media and news channels. For two weeks, Charlotte was at the center of the national debate on immigration.

Report Overview

To document the voices and experiences of Latinos of the Charlotte area, this report presents and discusses the results of a qualitative study involving interviews with 16 Latinos who were impacted by Operation Charlotte's Web. In the first section of this report, we quickly review the history of immigration policy in the United States and detail the events that occurred during the second Trump administration that led to Operation Charlotte's Web. Next, we present the methods used for this qualitative study and present the themes that emerged through our analysis of participant narratives. We then discuss these results in connection with previous literature on community responses to immigration enforcement. Finally, we conclude this report with recommendations, based on the results of this study, to better support the Charlotte Latino immigrant community during such crises.

US Immigration Policy:
A Brief History

Immigration Concerns and Quotas

Since the colonial era, there have been continuous debates and disagreements over immigration in the US. In 1751, Benjamin Franklin worried about how German immigrants would ***"swarm into our settlements"*** and turn Pennsylvania into a ***"colony of Aliens who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them."***[1] A century later, during the industrial revolution, the nativist, anti-immigrant Know-Nothing Party movement pushed for legislation to restrict the naturalization of immigrants and their ability to participate in elections.[2-3] Legislation like the Page Act of 1875, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 sought to restrict immigration from groups deemed undesirable, including Asians and Southern and Eastern Europeans. Echoing Franklin's concerns from over a century ago, Congressman Albert Johnson, the original sponsor of the Emergency Quota Act, was concerned about the social effects of nonassimilating immigrants,

> ***"If we continue to admit great numbers of those who fail to assimilate, we will be in danger of ourselves being assimilated. Our customs will be changed for us...When we read the authentic and official reports as to the great number of those who are trying to get to the United States from central Europe, we should realize that the quicker we shut down immigration to the vanishing point the better off we will be."***[4]
>
> *- Congressman Albert Johnson, March 1st, 1924*

Due to these restrictive policies on Asian and European immigration, agricultural and industrial labor demands began attracting Latin American migrant laborers to the US.[5] Labor shortages caused by WWII prompted the development of the Bracero Program, allowing the recruitment of Mexican guest workers.[6] Nevertheless, labor demands and administrative issues drove unauthorized immigration as well.

Mexican agricultural laborers topping sugar beets in the Stockton, California area circa 1943 | Source: Marjory Collins/*Library of Congress*



To address this, the Eisenhower Administration, in collaboration with the Mexican government, conducted a mass deportation campaign called Operation Wetback.[7] In a speech defending the operation's necessity, Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr. argued that the removal of undocumented immigrants is important for the health of the nation,

> ***"The other kind of Mexican alien found in our country comes illegally. He is called a 'Wetback' because many of them swim or wade the Rio Grande in the Texas area to get into this country unnoticed. Others come hidden in trains, trucks and cars. Since they are here illegally, they will work for starvation wages and live in sub-standard housing often without sanitation facilities. These conditions breed crime and disease. Many become a burden on the welfare resources of cities and communities. They cause other serious social and economic problems for the United States"***[8]
>
> *- Attorney General Herbert Brownell Jr., January 26th, 1955*

The operation itself lasted less than a year and the number of immigrants deported by the operation is not certain; estimates vary from over one million to less than 100,000.[9] While the operation targeted undocumented immigrants, several citizens were deported as well.[10]

By 1964, the Bracero Program ended and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was passed, which capped the number of immigrants allowed from the Western Hemisphere and prioritized highly skilled immigrants and those related to families already living in the US.[11] However, the number of undocumented immigrants continued to grow; 3 to 5 million undocumented immigrants were estimated to be in the US by 1986 when the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed during the Reagan administration. The IRCA provided amnesty to an estimated 2.8 million undocumented immigrants while also attempting to prevent future unauthorized immigration by increasing border security and ensuring employers do not hire undocumented workers.[12] Senator Alan K. Simpson, a sponsor of the bill, said that the IRCA was ***"a sincere effort to reduce the single most powerful magnet that illegally draws people to the United States: jobs."***[13] Several years later, during the Clinton administration, Attorney General Janet Reno used a similar logic in support of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), arguing that it will improve Mexico's economy and decrease unauthorized migration,

> ***"The bottom line, though, is this: Mexicans come to America illegally because they seek work. It's that simple. We will not stop the flow of illegal immigrants until these immigrants find decent jobs, at decent wages, in Mexico. Our best chance to reduce illegal immigration is sustained robust economic growth. That is why passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement will help me protect our border."***[14]
>
> *- Attorney General Janet Reno, October 22nd, 1993*

In the end, neither the IRCA nor NAFTA succeeded in suppressing unauthorized migration. The number of undocumented immigrants continued to climb throughout the '90s until the 9/11 terrorist attacks when border security became a national priority.[15] In 2002, the Bush administration pushed for the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), under which Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) became established through institutional re-organization.[16-17]

During this transitional period, local sheriff and police departments began to collaborate with ICE through a program known as 287(g). The passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996 added a new provision (codified as *287(g)*) that authorized state and local law enforcement to ***"perform specified immigration officer functions under ICE's direction and oversight."***[18] The first 287(g) agreements were not signed until 2002 during the Bush administration and the establishment of DHS and ICE. The program was slow to grow; only seven agreements were active by 2005. However, between 2006-2008, over fifty new 287(g) agreements were signed, with Mecklenburg County leading the way.[19]



An Anti-287(g) protest in uptown Charlotte | Source: *La Noticia* - May 5th, 2010

Charlotte's History of Immigration Enforcement

In 2006, under Sheriff Jim Pendergraph, Mecklenburg became the first county in North Carolina to join the 287(g) program, allowing local law enforcement to identify and detain undocumented immigrants for removal. During media interviews, Pendergraph shared his frustration with the federal government's lack of immigration enforcement as well as his concerns that undocumented immigrants are burdensome to taxpaying citizens.[20] In his 2006 testimony at a House subcommittee hearing, Pendergraph argued that programs like 287(g) need to be paired with more restrictive immigration policies for safety and financial reasons, stating:

> ***"The average citizen has no idea what illegal immigration issues costs us in infrastructure tax dollars. These include the criminal justice system, hospital emergency rooms, County Departments of Social Services, schools, etc. A recent report from the Mecklenburg Health Department stated that the County spent $400,000 last fiscal year for interpreters for people who could speak little or no English that were seeking health services. The County's Health Director predicts that in less than 5 years, fully 20 percent of the children starting school in Mecklenburg County will be children of illegal immigrant parents with little or no English skills."***[21]
>
> *- Mecklenburg County Sheriff Jim Pendergraph, August 25th, 2006*

Since its implementation, Pendergraph boasted that his office marked around 1,000 undocumented immigrants for deportation within the calendar year.[22] However, official numbers that show how many people were detained and/or deported are difficult to find.[23] During a steering committee meeting in 2017, officials stated that over 15,000 individuals were deported from Mecklenburg County since the initiation of the 287(g) program.[24-25]

Many prominent local Latino leaders were critical of the 287(g) program, arguing that it was discriminatory, eroded the Latino community's trust in police, and deported immigrants arrested for minor infractions like speeding or driving without a license.[26-27] Latino community members recalled how police checkpoints would be placed in front of predominantly Latino communities, schools, and workplaces and how families were separated due to deportation proceedings.[28] Rafael Prieto, former editor of a Spanish-language newspaper in Charlotte, said that these checkpoints were ***"casting a net and scooping up everyone in it…They're lobbying prosecutors to convict more undocumented immigrants."***[29] Indeed, in 2013, emails uncovered by the American Civil Liberties Union revealed efforts by ICE to increase arrest and deportation quotas by implementing more traffic checkpoints in Mecklenburg County and throughout North Carolina.[29] Throughout the 2010s, there were multiple marches and art displays protesting such immigration enforcement and calling for the end of 287(g) in Mecklenburg County.[30-32]

End of Mecklenburg's 287(g) Era

The end of the 287(g) agreement was brought through the 2018 election of Sheriff Garry McFadden. As a former Charlotte detective, McFadden said that the program prevented him from gaining trust among Latinos and stated that ***"victims will not come forward to testify or even give me their information about crimes…These people are scared. Everybody's scared to talk because they're scared of ICE. They're scared to be deported…"***[33]

After winning the election, his first notable action as sheriff was ending 287(g) with a ceremonial signing at Manolo's Bakery, a business owned by local immigrant rights activist and entrepreneur Manolo Betancur.[34] The signing took place in the presence of other prominent Charlotte Latino community leaders such as German DeCastro, co-founder of the Hispanic American Democrats of Mecklenburg County, and immigrant rights advocate Stefanía Arteaga, co-founder of Carolina Migrant Network.

The end of 287(g) caught the attention of NC state representatives that supported the program. In response, they attempted to pass legislation like House Bill 370 that would force all local law enforcement to cooperate with ICE.[35] Representative Destin Hall, one of the bill sponsors, argued that this bill was necessary ***"because there are a small number of sheriffs in some of our state's largest counties who have decided that they are no longer going to cooperate with federal immigration authorities."***[36] While this effort initially failed, it was successful six years later when the Criminal Illegal Alien Enforcement Act passed during the Summer of 2025, gaining enough votes to override Governor Josh Stein's veto on the bill.[37]

Sheriff McFadden commemorating the end of the 287(g) at Manolo's Bakery | Source: Nick de la Canal/WFAE - December 5th, 2018



Immigration Policy during Trump 2.0

The passage of the immigration enforcement bill in 2025 reflected the Trump administration's renewed emphasis on immigration. During his 2024 presidential campaign, Trump connected issues of safety and affordability to immigration. Images of Trump supporters holding "Mass Deportation Now" signs during rallies demonstrate just how central immigration was to the campaign's messaging. Trump outlined his immigration platform during a Florida campaign rally,

> ***"When I return to the White House, we will stop the plunder, rape, slaughter and destruction of our American suburbs and cities and towns. We're going to stop it. We will shut down deadly sanctuary cities. I will shift massive portions of federal law enforcement to immigration enforcement. We will close up our border, and we want people to come in, but they have to come in legally. They have to come in legally. On day one, we will begin the largest domestic deportation operation in the history of our country…all net job creation over the last year has gone to migrants. Did you know that? Almost every job that was created has gone to migrants? In fact, more than every job. It's crushing wages for American workers, draining resources for American citizens, and stealing American jobs, and they are stealing them at levels that nobody's ever seen before."***[38]
>
> *- Presumptive Republican Presidential Nominee Donald Trump, July 9th, 2024*

Since inauguration, the Trump administration took immediate action to restrict immigration and expand deportation efforts, mostly through executive orders. As Stephen Miller, Trump's Deputy Chief of Staff, told reporters in April 2025: ***"Everyone Biden let in has to go home. ICE is going to continue to focus on raids on criminal aliens. We'll use the entire force and power of the federal government to get them all home."***[39]

While most of Trump's efforts were pushed through executive orders, other branches of the federal governments also contributed. By July 2025, Congress, with pressure from the administration, approved $170 billion to the Department of Homeland Security through the passage of One Big Beautiful Bill Act.[40] In September 2025, the Supreme Court issued an order, often called the "Kavanaugh Stop," which allowed ICE to continue stopping and detaining individuals based on factors including appearance, occupation, speech, location, etc.[41] In his supporting opinion of the decision, Justice Brett Kavanaugh explained,

> ***"To stop an individual for brief questioning about immigration status, the Government must have reasonable suspicion that the individual is illegally present in the United States….Whether an officer has reasonable suspicion depends on the totality of the circumstances…Here, those circumstances include: that there is an extremely high number and percentage of illegal immigrants in the Los Angeles area; that those individuals tend to gather in certain locations to seek daily work; that those individuals often work in certain kinds of jobs, such as day labor, landscaping, agriculture, and construction, that do not require paperwork and are therefore especially attractive to illegal immigrants; and that many of those illegally in the Los Angeles area come from Mexico or Central America and do not speak much English…apparent ethnicity alone cannot furnish reasonable suspicion; under this Court's case law regarding immigration stops, however, it can be a 'relevant factor' when considered along with other salient factors."***[42]
>
> *- Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, September 8th, 2025*

Legal scholars and advocacy groups argued that this ruling gave immigration agents the legal wiggle room to racially profile anyone who appears undocumented.[43-44] In her dissent on the ruling, Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote, ***"We should not have to live in a country where the Government can seize anyone who looks Latino, speaks Spanish, and appears to work a low wage job"***[45]

With the legal and financial infrastructure coming together, large-scale immigration enforcement efforts were implemented in various cities, starting with Los Angeles and then Chicago. Led by Gregory Bovino, hundreds of Border Patrol agents would descend on hardware stores, construction sites, car washes, and immigrant neighborhoods.[46] Agents

used controversial tactics like smashing car windows, raiding apartment buildings, throwing tear gas, and shooting pepper balls at protesters.[46-47] Bovino confirmed to reporters that the aggressive actions were also meant to encourage self-deportation, ***"That's part of any policing strategy — deterrence — whether it's to deter a shoplifter in a department store or to deter illegal aliens from both coming across the border and/or remaining here"***[48]

Operation Charlotte's Web

On November 13th, 2025, after days of speculation, Sheriff McFadden announced that he was told by Border Patrol that Bovino will be coming from Chicago to Charlotte to continue his immigration enforcement campaign.[49] A couple days later, on November 15th, DHS publicly announced its launch of Operation Charlotte's Web.[50] DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin stated that,

> ***"Americans should be able to live without fear of violent criminal illegal aliens hurting them, their families, or their neighbors... We are surging DHS law enforcement to Charlotte to ensure Americans are safe and public safety threats are removed. There have been too many victims of criminal illegal aliens. President Trump and Secretary Noem will step up to protect Americans when sanctuary politicians won't."***[50]
>
> *- Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin, November 15th, 2025*

For around two weeks, immigration agents patrolled around Charlotte, especially along Central Ave and South Blvd; both are known as areas where many Latino immigrants reside. Video clips of agents smashing car windows of individuals who did not want to leave their vehicles,[51-52] arresting grocery store workers,[53] and detaining landscapers[54] quickly circulated in news and social media. These videos show documented and undocumented Latinos alike being confronted, detained, and arrested by agents. Due to fear caused by the operation, many Latinos did not leave their homes to go to work, shop, or take their children to school;[55] Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools reported that over 30,000 students (20% of the total student population) were absent on Monday, November 17th.[56]

Crowds gather in front of Manolo's Bakery to protest Operation Charlotte's Web | Source: Julian Berger/*WFAE* - November 2025



Latino Community Leaders Respond

Charlotte Latino community leaders strongly denounced the immigration enforcement surge. Manolo Betancur, owner of Manolo's Bakery, said ***"I think these are the saddest and darkest days in the history for our city, for our immigrant community. The amount of fear and terror that we are having is... I don't even have words to describe it."***[57] During a CNN interview, Charlotte City Council-elect Juan Diego Mazuera Arias objected to the surge, ***"I do not see this as an improvement to public safety. If anything, it is doing the opposite. It's causing chaos. It's causing fear. It's causing confusion."***[58] Stefanía Arteaga spoke out against the apparent targeting of Latinos, ***"We are seeing clear racial profiling on our streets and absolute militarization... This is about causing fear and destroying, really destroying our community."***[59]

Various protests and forms of resistance took place in Charlotte during the operation. Volunteers organized drives to deliver food and basic necessities to families that stayed home to avoid arrest. Nonprofit organizations provided ICE verifier training and Know Your Rights workshops to the community. Latino and non-Latino community members alike followed behind immigration agents and blew whistles to alert others of their presence. Protesters regularly gathered at Manolo's Bakery chanting anti-ICE slogans and waving American and Latin American flags.[60]

Aftermath

On November 20th, less than a week after its official commencement, Sheriff McFadden shared that federal officials told him that Operation Charlotte's Web was coming to an end.[61] According to ICE, over 1,300 arrests were made throughout the operation,[62] but only an estimated 30% of those were convicted of a crime.[63] Many businesses around Charlotte reported experiencing a sharp decline in customers and sales due to the operation's disruption of the local economy.[64]

Eventually, Border Patrol moved on to launch operations in other cities, including New Orleans and Minneapolis. The aggressiveness of the operations continued to ramp up, culminating in the fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by federal agents in Minneapolis, MN. After these deaths, the Trump administration removed Bovino from his commanding position and scaled down the operations.[65] Nevertheless, immigration enforcement continued in and around the Charlotte area. For example, in Caldwell County, an hour from Charlotte, an immigration enforcement operation was carried out at a popular creek in Pisgah National Forest, resulting in the arrest of 13 individuals.[66]

Current Study

Although Operation Charlotte's Web has received considerable media coverage, the lived experiences and the impact of Latinos in Charlotte remain unexplored in the research literature during the time of the writing of this manuscript. To address this gap, Camino Research Institute, a Charlotte-based research group dedicated to amplifying Latino voices through data, conducted a rapid qualitative appraisal study to capture the reactions, thoughts, and perspectives of Charlotte Latinos regarding their experience of the operation. This report presents the main findings based on the analysis of 16 interviews with Latinos in the Charlotte area.

Methods

Rapid Appraisal

This study used a qualitative rapid appraisal approach to explore the experiences, perceived impacts, and responses of Latinos living in Charlotte during Operation Charlotte's Web in November 2025. This approach was selected to generate timely, context-specific findings to inform policy and community responses.[67-68] Rapid appraisal methods have previously been used to study time-sensitive events and public health emergencies, including the 2013-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa[69-70] and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.[71-72]

Interview Guide

A semi-structured telephone interview guide was developed to collect participant information, including number of years living in Charlotte, and explore participants' experiences before, during, and after Operation Charlotte's Web. The interviewer probed participants about various dimensions of their experiences, including questions about methods of communication and news throughout the operations, economic and mental impacts, aid and community networks, abstaining from leaving home for school or work, and what local governments could do to help impacted families. Participants who were in Charlotte since the 2000s were asked to compare this event to the 287(g) program which enabled the collaboration of local enforcement agencies and federal immigration agencies. Participants who were parents were asked to describe the impacts they noticed on their children and how they adapted, reacted, and conversed about the event.

Sampling and Recruitment

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling using existing community relationships and the personal networks of research team members. Community contacts, including community health workers (*promotoras de salud*), shared information about the study with potential participants and asked whether they were interested in participating. This approach was selected given the sensitive nature of the topic and potential concerns participants may have had about trust and confidentiality. Using the existing level of trust between the health workers and community members, interviews could be completed with limited hesitancy and increased open communication.

Data Collection

A total of 16 telephone interviews were conducted between December 2025 and April 2026. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, and lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. Informed consent, including permission to audio record the interview, was obtained from each participant. Participants received a $20 electronic gift card as compensation for their time.

Each interview audio file was then processed by an AI transcription service that encrypts files for privacy. Each initial transcription was then manually reviewed and edited by a research team member alongside the audio to verify accuracy. Filler words, false starts, and other non-essential speech elements were removed to facilitate systematic analysis while preserving the intended meaning of participant responses. All interview audio and interview files were stored in encrypted, password protected cloud servers accessible only to the research team. For this report, all participant names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

Analysis

All transcripts were then analyzed by three research team members using QualCoder, a qualitative analysis software. A preliminary codebook was created based on the patterns and themes noted during interviews and transcription reviews. During analysis, additional codes were added to capture other emerging themes. Throughout analysis, team members wrote annotations and notes to journal additional observations and insights. Once each team member analyzed each transcript, they compared coding frequencies and insights to agree on which themes were considered significant.

Results

Participant Demographics

A total of 16 participants were interviewed. Most participants were foreign-born women (n = 14) while the only two male participants were born in the US. The plurality (n = 6) of participants were born in Mexico while others were born in Honduras (n = 4), Colombia (n = 1), Guatemala (n = 1) and Nicaragua (n = 1). Most (n = 13) participants were between 30-64 years old, with the average age being 44.4. Among foreign-born respondents, the majority (n = 8) have been living in the US for at least 20 years. Only one interview was conducted in English while the rest were in Spanish.

Interview Participant Demographics

	n	*%*
Gender		
Women	*14*	*87.5%*
Men	*2*	*12.5%*
Age range		
18-29	*2*	*12.5%*
30-49	*7*	*43.8%*
50-64	*6*	*37.5%*
N/A	*1*	*6.3%*
Birthplace		
US	*2*	*12.5%*
Mexico	*6*	*37.5%*
Honduras	*4*	*25.0%*
Colombia	*1*	*6.3%*
Nicaragua	*1*	*6.3%*
Guatemala	*1*	*6.3%*
N/A	*1*	*6.3%*
Years in US		
US-Born	*2*	*12.5%*
<5	*2*	*12.5%*
5-9	*2*	*12.5%*
10-19	*2*	*12.5%*
20 or more	*8*	*50.0%*

Table 1 | Interview Participant Demographics

Fear

The most common and dominant theme present across all interviews was fear. Participants were afraid and uncertain of what exactly would happen if they were stopped and detained by immigration agents. Participants, especially those with a vulnerable immigration status, were afraid of being detained and deported, leaving behind the life they have built here in the US. For example, Carla, a Mexican immigrant who has been living in Charlotte since 2000, struggled in managing her emotional health,

> ***"I felt like I couldn't even sleep anymore... [voice quivers]. My biggest fear was that they would send me back to my country, where I have nothing. Besides, things are very, very difficult in my country right now because of the cartels... I kept having dreams over and over that [immigration agents] would catch us. I was so scared."***
>
> *- Carla*

Another participant, Emilia, a woman in her thirties who moved to the Charlotte area from Nicaragua as a teenager and is a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, shared her anguish in the possibility of being deported from the city she considered home,

> ***"But this situation made me feel very unsafe... I have DACA, but even so, I was filled with fear. I was fearful for my family... I arrived here as a teenager and I've grown up here... This has been my home... Yes, I did live in Nicaragua for a while... Even though that's my nationality and everything, I feel like I don't belong there anymore, right?... I feel like I belong here [in Charlotte] more... I've pictured my future here. I've had many accomplishments here, I've grown professionally, now, I'm a mother. I mean, everything—a whole life I've built. And when all this happened, I felt like at any moment [pauses and quietly sobs]... Sorry, it just makes me emotional to think about it...That it could all end just like that... In Nicaragua—well, I have nothing there; I have no ties. My parents, my siblings—everyone is here."***
>
> *- Emilia*

While both Carla and Emilia lived in the Charlotte area while there was an active 287(g) agreement in place (2006-2018), they emphasized that Operation Charlotte's Web was much more aggressive than whatever happened before. According to Carla, the enforcement efforts before were ***"very different for me because last time it was just a passing thing"*** while the recent operation ***"was much, much stronger than that time."*** Helena, a Mexican immigrant who has been living in Charlotte for nearly 30 years, said that ***"Under 287(g), [Latinos] would go out and work regardless. Now, they don't want to leave to go to work, even if [their bosses] would tell them 'I'll fire you.' Well fire me! I don't care, I'm not leaving to go to work."***

Further analysis of participant narratives shows that this fear is primarily driven by three components: (1) The potential of family separation that participants may experience if they encounter immigration agents, (2) the perceived discriminatory behavior of immigration agents in going after anyone that looks Latino, and (3) the consumption of media circulating through news and social media platforms. We present each of these subthemes below.

Family Separation

The potential of experiencing family separation, especially parents from their children, was a key component driving most participants' fear. They expressed worry about what would happen to their children if they were held and/or deported. For example, Paula, a Mexican immigrant with US-born children, said that ***"what worried us the most [was] our children… In fact, the youngest ones, well, they've never been to our home countries… So I think that was our biggest concern—thinking about that, and especially about them, leaving them alone… since they were born here."*** Gabriela, a Mexican immigrant who has children and works as a hairstylist in Charlotte, also shared such worries. While she is not so worried about her own personal wellbeing if deported, she is very worried about being separated from her children,

> ***"[I'm not worried about] me, I'll leave, I know I'll be okay. But what about my children? That's what I'm worried about. What about my children? Will I die of grief if I'm separated from them? My older children told me, "We're not going to follow you…" I've been through some really tough times just to keep them with me, and now they're going to come and separate me from them just like that. I feel like that would be the worst."***
>
> *- Gabriela*

Several participants mentioned that the possibility of family separation was a difficult subject to discuss with their children. Depending on age, parents recalled the worry their children felt about coming back to an empty home. Parents admitted that it was difficult to minimize exposing their children to all the news and worries about the operation. For Ana, she considered it impossible to hide what was going on from her daughters, ***"There was no filter on social media either, it was on every page, it was everywhere, and it was impossible to hide it because the information was right there in plain sight."*** When we asked Paula about her US-born children's reaction to the operation, she responded,

> *Paula:* ***"Well, bad—they felt bad—because imagine hearing all that kind of news out there, and then your own children tell you that they're going to school and that they're afraid that when they get home, we won't be there… it made me feel terrible to hear my little girl say that…"***
>
> *Interviewer:* ***"The young one who's ten?"***
>
> *Paula:* ***"Yes, her."***

The possibility of family separation was a difficult topic for Emilia to discuss with her preteen son, but she did so for the sake of keeping her family prepared in case they do get detained and deported.

> ***"Well, it was inevitable… He's already [a preteen]. He's not a little kid anymore… But I tried not to let him sense so much fear and worry from me, either. The three of us—my husband and I—were talking and having conversations like, 'What will happen if this happens? What if the police suddenly arrest me, or any one of us? What will happen?'… Because I am not safe with DACA here. Neither is my husband. If this happens, what's going to happen to my son? So I had to have a conversation with him—a tough conversation—and tell him, 'This could happen. And we need to be prepared.' It's hard because I don't want my son to be worried. But if something happens, I want him to know that everything's going to be okay… if I get deported."***
>
> *- Emilia*

While participants discussed their fears of family separation, only one participant actually experienced a close member of their family being taken away by immigration agents. Other participants shared that they learned of other families having members taken away. For example, Daniela shared that one of her students had their stepfather detained by immigration agents, but now her mother is ***"afraid to go out and get detained because who will look after her children?"***

The one participant who experienced family separation was Nadia whose husband was reportedly one of the first people detained by immigration agents. Although her husband was in process for his asylum case and had a REAL ID and a valid Social Security number, he was still taken. At the time of the interview, Nadia's husband was still in detention and, with the help of her daughter, she hired a lawyer to build a legal case to get him out. While she and the rest of her family were still emotionally recovering from the detention of her husband, they saw a social media post that showed a picture of him, which her grandchildren saw,

> *Nadia: "**When [my grandson] speaks, he asks me, 'When is abuelo coming?' He doesn't know, he's only four years old. My granddaughter had anxiety attacks, too. When they posted him on the page… she saw it and she got very upset because [the post said] they were criminals and there was a picture of her abuelo. And she said, 'Mami, why did they put him there because my abuelo is not a criminal, my abuelo is a good man. My abuelo is a hardworking man. Why is that man posting that he is a criminal?'"***
>
> *Interviewer: "**They posted a picture of your husband?"***
>
> *Nadia: "**Yes, they posted it… And they're giving him a bad reputation by calling him a criminal… My husband isn't a criminal. All my husband does is work. And my husband has his work permit. And that's how they asked him for his ID. He pulled out his REAL ID, his driver's license, and the man who stopped him said, 'We need to check with the boss.' [My husband] then said, 'So, my REAL ID isn't good enough, even though it's genuine?' The officer said, 'I have nothing to discuss with you… you'll have to take that up with a judge.'"***
>
> *Interviewer: "**So, your husband is documented or is in process?"***
>
> *Nadia: "**It's in process. He has an asylum case pending. But he has his REAL ID, his Social Security number—he has everything… He was working legally and had all his paperwork in order."***

In Nadia's case, the detention and ensuing criminalized depiction of her husband greatly upset her and her family. Nadia emphasized that her husband was following the law, seeking legal status, and had legitimate documentation that permitted him to work. Despite all of this, her husband was still whisked away to a detention facility where he waits to see what happens.

Discrimination/Criminalization

Alongside the potential of family separation, another element that appears to be driving fear among participants is the discrimination and criminalization of Latinos, regardless of documentation status or criminal record, by immigration agents. Participants were frustrated and angry that immigration agents seemed to treat anyone who looked Latino as a delinquent. Ana, an immigrant with a legal status who moved to Charlotte around 5 years ago, was initially not very worried when she first heard that immigration agents were traveling from Chicago to Charlotte, stating that,

> ***"We knew they were coming, but I kept saying, 'They're doing things right; they go straight for the people they're after—the ones they're looking for, the ones with deportation orders, the ones with preliminary criminal charges.' That's what I thought… I wasn't afraid because I'm not afraid of the police, nor am I afraid of immigration because, to me, they're serious institutions that fulfill a role and do their job… so I was calm. But when we started seeing the videos of how they were operating, that's when I panicked."***
>
> *- Ana*

For Ana, the fear does not necessarily stem solely from the presence of immigration agents, but rather ***"how they were operating"*** and their behavior towards Latinos. She was very fearful of what might happen if she encountered any immigration agent because, as she explained, ***"They were looking for anyone that simply looked Hispanic and take them away for no reason at all, because the procedure was to take them and ask questions later…"*** She concluded that all Latinos were at risk, no matter their documentation status or criminal background. Viviana, a Honduran immigrant, explained that this was the case because anyone with Latino features was targeted by agents,

> ***"If you have black hair, have dark skin, or just look more Latino with more Latino traits—you're more exposed, because they were racist. They went straight for this person… even if that person happened to be a permanent resident, they'd go after him, because that was their motive… So I think human rights were definitely violated, and there was a lot of racism, too."***
>
> *- Viviana*

Due to this indiscriminate treatment, participants were frustrated that Latinos who may be undocumented but are diligent workers that do not commit crimes were being treated as dangerous criminals. Gabriela said that the whole operation made her feel ***"like a criminal, as if you're doing something wrong, just for being here and coming here looking for a better future and working. Having to hide as if you were doing something wrong."*** Echoing this sentiment was Maria, a Guatemalan immigrant, who said that immigration agents shouldn't ***"just go around arresting any hardworking, humble people who are out there earning their daily bread"*** and said that they have heard of ***"families coming home from work who've been arrested just because they're Hispanic, just because they have dark skin, or even just because they speak Spanish."***

Other participants went deeper, and shared that this experience made them feel as though they do not truly belong to this country. As Ana puts it, the whole experience made her feel "rejected":

> ***"It's really a feeling of, what I would say, rejection, because we know there are a lot of bad people out there; we know there are many people who have broken the law and committed crimes, and we agree that laws are meant to be obeyed. But the way they were acting didn't seem legal, it was discriminatory simply because they were Hispanic."***
>
> *- Ana*

Carla expressed a similar sentiment in which she feels convinced that she will never feel like she belongs in the US,

> ***"Everything I went through was really scary, really traumatic… I still remember it, and it really gets to me, but the reality is that we're not from here. I mean, right now I mentally accepted that I'm not from here—my only hope is that God will protect me—and everything has changed, but here we are."***
>
> *- Carla*

Participants who were citizens or legal residents began carrying documentation with them in case they were stopped by immigration agents. Sabrina, a naturalized citizen from Mexico, and Leo, a US-born citizen of Salvadoran heritage, shared how they carried their passports while traveling around the city.

> ***"I kept going out to run errands, to the store, to do things I had to do with my son. Yes, I was afraid because we carried our passports with us. My husband carried his passport, he had it hanging around his neck because he also kept working. I also took mine with me when I ran errands, always afraid, always on high alert, looking to see if I'd run into them—or rather, to avoid them."***
>
> *- Sabrina*

> ***"Since I'm a US citizen, I carried my passport with me those two weeks because they're looking for Latino people who work in Latino jobs. I work in construction, so I fit the stereotype they're talking about—you know what I mean? I carried my documents with me, too."***
>
> *- Leo*

Media As A Double-Edged Sword

While concerns of family separation and discrimination appear to drive the fear experienced by participants, the consumption of images, videos, and alerts through news and social media platforms also played a complex role. While having such information keeps community members informed about what is going on in the city, seeing such aggressive enforcement tactics through media reinforced fear of family separation and criminalization. In fact, multiple participants said that they did not directly witness immigration agents detaining Latinos, but rather through screens, be it a cell phone or TV.

The use of WhatsApp groups was ubiquitous among participants who were able to get updates from other community members uploading pictures of immigration agents in different parts of Charlotte. Ximena, a Spanish teacher from Honduras, explained how community members ***"were constantly checking those WhatsApp groups, saying, 'Look, [ICE] is over there,' 'Look, they're over there,' 'Look, they're here.'"*** The size of these groups varied from around a dozen to hundreds of members. Some participants were in multiple WhatsApp groups, as was the case for Gabriela, ***"I was part of two different groups—one from a church and the other from my workplace. And everyone kept passing on updates to us: 'Don't go out,' 'They're in such-and-such an area,' 'Don't go out,' 'They're heading this way,' 'They're heading that way.'"***

For example, Maria, who lives 20 minutes north of Charlotte and outside of the epicenter of the operation, admitted that although she was very fearful, she never saw immigration agents in person, "***I can't tell you that I saw them because I didn't go out, but people said that they were around here, by the gas stations… But all of this shocked me."*** She then shared,

> ***"I watched the news on Facebook, the news on WhatsApp, they were sending us alerts of everything that was happening… We'd go to stores like Compare in Charlotte because that's where we'd shop… And we heard about everything and saw what they were doing there… There was no doubt—we saw for ourselves that what they were saying was true… Everyone we've talked to has felt the same fear… because even from Chicago we watched the news and saw everything that was happening. So, when we found out they'd be close to us, especially at the stores we used to go to, we don't go there anymore because we're afraid."***
>
> *- Maria*

Participants also commonly mentioned coming across such videos through popular platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok. For example, Emilia explained how seeing videos of people getting captured impacted her,

> ***"These days, you find out about everything. If you have, for example, TikTok or Facebook, all these social media platforms or WhatsApp groups, you really see what's really going on. I mean, you see it. So, for me, it was like, "Wow! It really is happening! They're taking people away!" And it really shocked me that they weren't giving anyone a chance—parents, even if they had children with them... And that's when I said, "No, this is dangerous! It's dangerous, and it could happen to me! It could happen to a family member of mine right here at home!". And that's when the fear and uncertainty set in..."***
>
> *- Emilia*

For participants like Emilia, social media platforms provided a sort of window into what was *"really happening"*, that immigration agents were indiscriminately chasing down anyone that looked Latino, and assessed it as a threat against them and their family. To be clear, the use of quotations around the phrase *"really happening"* is not to suggest that whatever Emilia thought was happening was fake or exaggerated, but to emphasize the role that such content makes in mediating her understanding of reality, of what is going on in Charlotte during the operation.

One thing that was particularly upsetting to multiple participants was recognizing the locations in these videos showing immigrant arrests. The previous quote from Maria highlights how seeing immigration agents present at the stores she frequented deterred her from leaving her home. Similarly, Tomás, a US-born Latino of Mexican heritage, appeared to be disturbed by seeing videos take place in areas where he used to live,

> ***"I think it wasn't until later that week...Thursday that you started seeing the actual videos of ICE, genuinely chasing people down. I think that was one of the more depressing weeks just because it was really hard to watch. I couldn't believe this is actually going on in Charlotte. In a lot of the videos, I recognize a lot of the places. One of them was by University, which is where I studied...Like I was there for a couple of years. So that was definitely very hard to watch... seeing them get chased down, tackled. I definitely think what made it difficult was that I'm, obviously, just picturing my parents. But yeah, I think it was really crazy. I think it was one of those things that having social media makes it useful to be aware for knowledge, for awareness. But I think it also makes it really hard because of the fact that you're so aware of everything that's going on. You see even the most minor instances."***
>
> *- Tomás*

Here, Tomás is affected by the videos of immigration agents chasing down Latinos, but its impact is enhanced due to its setting as well as comparing the victims to his parents. In addition, while he acknowledges the importance of having access to videos like this to stay updated and in the loop of what is going on, he also sees it as emotionally burdensome. Leo, also a US-born citizen, practically echoes this perspective,

> ***"My mom, she's a legal resident here in the United States, sent me a photo of a restaurant we go to a lot, almost every week, where two officers are grabbing a man and putting him in the back of a police van. And I was shocked because it's one thing to see it on TV in places you don't know, but when you see it in the places you usually go, where you walk with your family, seeing that the officers are literally–I think they assaulted that person. It's totally different. At that moment, I knew this was going to be worse than anything we'd seen before."***
>
> *- Leo*

While some participants highlighted the emotional toll in consuming such media, other participants shared concerns of misinformation circulating in social media, like WhatsApp groups, that might cause unnecessary stress, anxiety and fear.

As Fernanda, a community health worker, shared, ***"So, what happens on WhatsApp—and what I think might happen in other groups as well—is that a lot of things get passed around; you share things that aren't true, including fear."*** As a solution to minimize misinformation, Ximena thinks that more official or regulated channels of communication would be beneficial to the community during times of crisis,

> ***"So there should be organizations that provide information above all else, because many people are misinformed and get swept up by everything they see on social media—and believe me, that's even worse… I suggest things like official support networks, so to speak, so people can stay informed and know what to do if a situation like this happens again."***
>
> *- Ximena*



An immigrant community member who stayed home during the duration of Operation Charlotte's Web | Source: Anonymous

Staying Home

In the section above, we discussed fear as the primary emotion generated by Operation Charlotte's Web felt by everyone regardless of immigration status. In response to this fear, many participants stayed inside their house or apartment to avoid immigration agents while missing work and school. Some participants did not start leaving their homes until the end of the operation while others took several additional weeks or months before they felt safe enough.

Some participants were so fearful that they were wary about even stepping outside to get the mail or take out the trash. This was the case for Viviana: ***"I wouldn't even go out onto the balcony because of that, because of that fear. It was a really tough week, and the second one was just the same; during the second week, I felt like I wanted to go out, but I didn't feel safe…"*** Likewise, Maria reported that many Latinos were on high alert anytime they stepped outside, ***"There are a lot of people, and I talk to several of them, and they say they're afraid to go out. You step out into the yard, you go out, and you keep looking around because you see a car and immediately start thinking all sorts of things… The mind betrays you."***

Economic Impact

One of the most significant consequences of staying indoors is the loss of household income due to not being able to go to work. Several participants and their partners worked jobs that required physical, in-person labor like construction and landscaping, meaning they weren't able to get paid while staying home. This made it very difficult for participants to pay for their rent, bills, and basic necessities.

Many Latino families did not have enough savings to absorb the financial shock. As Nadia, a Honduran immigrant, explained, many Latinos in Charlotte are financially precarious, ***"You know we [Latinos] work hard here. We take it one day at a time earning our daily bread."*** Fernanda, a community health worker, shared that she knew families with infants that did not have enough savings to buy formula to withstand the length of the operation. According to her, the financial health of these Latino families is ***"not going to recover easily."*** Ximena also worried about the long-term financial impact on many Latino families,

> ***"A lot of people lost their jobs, lost or sold their cars because they didn't work for three weeks. Since then, many, many families have told me that their work has slowed down, but I think the economic impact of all these situations on the Hispanic community is immense and will take a long time to recover, to get back on track. Because it's as if they've used up all their savings, so it's like they're starting over. So I think that's also been very difficult, because there's a real sense of loss in the Hispanic community."***
>
> *- Ximena*

This financial vulnerability is probably best exemplified by Gabriela, who couldn't pay her rent and lost her apartment due to loss of work and low customer volume,

> ***"We didn't work at all that week and we went back, but there were no customers. We ran out of work, people weren't coming out anymore…So, I still couldn't pay my rent; I was living alone with my kids… I had to give up the apartment…I couldn't pay it, and I couldn't work. I had to really cut back on food for my kids… I had to move back in with my daughter's father, since I was a single mother."***
>
> *- Gabriela*

Children's Education & Services

Some participants who were parents shared that they did not send their children to school throughout the period of the operation and kept them indoors for safety. Betty, a Honduran immigrant who works as a teacher in a local school, said that as the enforcement operation went on, ***"many families still weren't sending their children to school, and to be honest, that was very concerning."*** This was the case for Viviana who kept her son at home, ***"I didn't send my son to school; I didn't send him to school during that entire period for that very reason—because of feeling unsafe."*** Gabriela also explained that she did not take her children to school due to concerns that her children might be held hostage by immigration agents,



Teachers shared how many of their Latino students were absent during the initial days of Operation Charlotte's Web | Source: Anonymous

> ***"I didn't take them because of fear, insecurity, and rumors. There was one instance where a bus that had already picked up the children turned back with them and handed them over to their parents because they received a notice that people were going to be snatching the children, like a kind of kidnapping, [to lure] mom and dad and then take them…So that bus did turn back, from here in Charlotte, and handed the children over to their parents. And at my older children's school, one of their teachers told them, 'Leave, you have to go.' He said it was because they wanted to kidnap them so that their dad and mom would come and take them away."***
>
> *- Gabriela*

The immigration sweep also interrupted the education and the delivery of therapeutic services for children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). Sabrina is part of a support group of parents who have children with IDD and she shared how the operation impacted the delivery of therapy services for these families,

> ***"Yes, most of them switched to online. A few had some therapy sessions canceled, but most, thank God, were flexible and switched to online sessions. But on the other hand, children with autism sometimes have very specific routines. And some families faced the problem that they couldn't take their children out at the times they were used to. For example, they have to go out for a walk because it's part of their routine and because they need to somehow burn off their energy… My son is used to us going out for a walk around the neighborhood in the afternoon… So that was also a problem some families faced. Changing their children's routines, especially with children with autism—is a problem"***
>
> *- Sabrina*

In addition to the disruption of services, Sabrina mentioned the importance for children with IDD to maintain routines. However, even simple activities like going out for a walk was not an option due to fear of immigration agents. Viviana, who also has a child with IDD, spoke to the added stress of breaking these routines that their child depended on,

> ***"This lockdown situation is a little more stressful because they're very routine-oriented. They have their school routine and their home routine, but above all, what they miss the most is their school routine—they're very used to routines… For him, those two weeks were pretty stressful, much more so than for the others, because we tried to find movies, videos, and ways to distract ourselves from the chaos… They're more into keeping routines, walking, exercising, and biking, so the lockdown really affected him."***
>
> *- Viviana*

Community Support

While participants expressed feelings of fear, uncertainty, and described how the operation impacted their daily lives, they also shared stories and examples of how the community came together to support and protect each other. Participants who had either citizenship or permanent residency shared how they contributed to help other families that stayed indoors to avoid immigration agents.

Aid Distribution

One of the most common ways participants provided or received help from others was through the delivery of groceries and essential goods. Many participants that stayed indoors relied on the ability to have their food and needed items delivered to their door. However, due to loss of income from not being able to work, it was not easy for participants to afford the purchase and delivery. Instead, they relied on organizations and volunteers to donate and/or deliver food to their door. For example, Carla relied on help from the clinic she goes to for supplies,

> ***"Thank God, people helped me out a little with food, because I did get through those weeks—I always live day to day or paycheck to paycheck, you could say…There were people who could help me at the clinic where I get treated; they brought me some vegetables and food, and I was okay those days, thank God."***
>
> *- Carla*

Schools also provided support to these families in collecting, organizing, and distributing aid to families staying in their homes. As Ana shared, volunteers from her children's school delivered essential supplies to their home, ***"They brought me dry goods, canned goods, and pasta. And they gave me a $50 Walmart gift card; I used it to buy personal hygiene products, deodorant, sanitary pads, toilet paper…"*** Emilia received similar support from her child's school,

> ***"I was actually very surprised by the response from the school my son attends because it's a school where there aren't many Latinos…They told us that our children wouldn't face any issues if they didn't attend school on those days. They understood that safety came first and that they were there to support us…The other moms at the school [sent] messages asking if I needed a ride to take my son to school…Another thing was that the school distributed food. They organized volunteers there to hand out food."***
>
> *- Emilia*



Nutritionist Reatna Taylor begins organizing donated baby products for distribution to families impacted by Operation Charlotte's Web | Source: Camino

Participants who had citizenship or permanent residency were involved in collecting and distributing goods to vulnerable families. Betty described how she assisted in making purchases for other families,

> ***"My sister and my cousin live near my house in an apartment complex. So, they obviously didn't go out because their [immigration] status situation isn't that great. So, I would do the grocery shopping for my cousin and my niece, and they had a lot of neighbors in the apartment complex. Some of them would ask me if I could buy something at the store—they didn't have diapers or food. Obviously, I did it for free. They'd send me the money, and I'd buy the items and deliver them to their home. But, obviously, I didn't charge them for the errand."***
>
> *- Betty*

Daniela, a Colombian immigrant who is a permanent resident that works as a teacher at a school, described how she assisted in delivering food to other families who stayed indoors,

> ***"We also helped prepare Thanksgiving meals and brought them to the parents. On the days they were also stuck inside, we put together food baskets and took them to the families, since they obviously needed them. But when you knocked on the door, you had to introduce yourself like this: 'Oh, hi, I'm Miss [Daniela], don't worry,' because they didn't even want to open the door."***
>
> *- Daniela*

Local Government

Participants regularly referenced how institutions that are part of local government provided support to families during the length of the operation. In the previous section, participants discussed how public schools were part of the aid distribution efforts. Other participants mentioned how the local county health department and the local police department also provided support. During his interview, Tomás shared how local law enforcement provided a layer of protection during his own encounter with immigration agents. Tomás, who is a US-born Latino Charlotte resident, described being stopped by immigration agents at a gas station in Charlotte. Concerned about the possibility of the

encounter escalating, he called 911 and specifically requested that a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) officer be present, explaining that he was Latino and feared he was being stopped because of his ethnicity. CMPD agreed and sent an officer to the scene,

> ***"The police officer comes and I'm just like, 'Hey, I'm about to exchange my documents…' So, I hand over my ID first to the police officer… I'm like, 'If you could please hand it to them and make sure that I get it back. I'd appreciate it.' He hands it over. I think those comments [from the immigration agents] start arising, 'Where are you from? Where are you going? When did you get this ID? Like, is this real? Or do you have a green card? Are you a citizen?' There's all these questions…'Do you have your Social Security card? You have a passport?'***
>
> ***Once everything started, I did start carrying my Social Security card around in my glove compartment just because my passport wasn't renewed at the time. So I handed that over to the police officer as well. I'm like, 'Hey, this one specifically, I really don't want them to rip this open or anything. If you need to run my Social Security or my name through your system, please go ahead…' They did ask the officer to stay out of it a couple of times. Just trying to push them to the side or whatever it may be…And then I think after maybe five minutes, I did tell the officer, 'Hey, this seems like it's escalating a little bit, they're getting a little aggressive. They have their hands on my car. They're trying to push the window down. Can you do something about this? Can you deescalate this? Can you get them away?' So, it's kind of when he steps back in, I think after 15-20 minutes, they just let it go… They gave my ID and my Social Security number back to the officer. The officer did wait until they pulled away…"***
>
> *- Tomás*

For Tomás, CMPD acted as a mediator between himself and immigration agents that protected him during the interaction. Later during the interview, Tomás credited CMPD in keeping the encounter under control and later reflected that he believed it could have gone very differently without CMPD's presence,

> *Interviewer:* ***"Do you think it would have gone much differently if CMPD wasn't there?"***
>
> *Tomás:* ***"100%… I think CMPD, at least on my end, was a good third party to have there. Because on both sides, I think at this point, I'm also very emotional about everything that's happening… seeing a lot of the fear in our community. So I don't know how I would have reacted. If I would have purposely given them a harder time, just to waste their time just to do whatever. And if they would have reacted very negatively towards that, become even more aggressive. So I just think it was a good third party to have for both parties involved."***

Tomás' account illustrates the important role that local governmental institutions can play in protecting Latino communities during periods of heightened federal immigration enforcement, while also highlighting a tension between local and federal interests. While federal agencies were conducting immigration enforcement, Tomás perceived CMPD as a source of safety and protection rather than an extension of that enforcement.

Teenage Children As Guardians

Various participants highlighted how the teenage children of immigrant families, who are commonly US-born citizens, provided crucial support during the operation by running errands for families and providing lookout for their neighborhood. When dropping off food and aid at apartment complexes and mobile home communities, Helena was impacted by seeing children and teenagers keeping watch in these neighborhoods,

> ***"When I would go drop off food, all those people were there behind the closed blind windows, looking at me with fear. Since I have a black car, I had to put the flag there showing that I'm a promotora, you know what I mean? Because it's very, very sad to see the kids with that look of panic on their faces. That hurts me the most. We can bear it as adults, but a child—seeing a child terrified… And seeing the teens now, those teens we moms sometimes say, 'Hey, flojo, why don't you ever leave your room?!' Those teens were on the corner by the apartment complex keeping watch. The ones who were born here. When I'd call, I'd say, 'Look, I'm coming in; I'm driving a black car, blah, blah, blah' they'd say, 'Oh, well, just keep your hand out because there are some kids watching the entrance.'"***
>
> *- Helena*

A few participants mentioned how their own US-born teenage children would be the ones to run errands for their family. This was the case for Paula, who, along with her husband, stayed inside throughout the operation and shared how both her teenage daughter and son ran errands for the family during the operation,

> ***"My oldest daughter was the one who brought home food…She was the one who brought home food for us so we'd be okay…[My son] also helped his sister go shopping for whatever she needed to buy. Things for here, at home. Now that things have started to get a little better again, my daughter was the one taking [her father] to work. In the afternoon, she'd go and pick him up from work so he wouldn't have to drive."***
>
> *- Paula*

Similarly, Gabriela shared how her older US-born children, as well as the children of other families, were the ones taking on the responsibility of running errands and doing any chores that required going outside,

> ***"Now, I really did thank my older kids so much, we call them the 'No Sabo' generation—because when you ask them something, they say, 'No Sabo.' And I'm like, 'Wow!,' in the stores you'd see only 'No Sabos' doing Mom and Dad's shopping because they had to protect them. And [during the operation] my kids had to go out and run errands, take the dog out to do its business…"***
>
> *- Gabriela*

Demonstrations

Across various interviews, participants shared their appreciation of non-Latinos involved in aid campaigns and demonstrations against ICE and Border Patrol in solidarity with Latino immigrants. For Ximena, seeing such acts of solidarity ***"was a really beautiful gesture from the gringo community because you feel like you belong and fit in."*** Sabrina shared how she was moved by seeing people of other races come together during demonstrations to support Latinos,

> ***"I also saw many Blacks confronting the officers. I saw many people—especially older [White] Americans—standing on street corners with signs in support. That felt really good, too, because we could see the empathy and solidarity of those people. It's reassuring to think that not everyone is like those officers or is racist. There are also people who appreciate the presence of Latinos and value it."***
>
> *- Sabrina*

Other participants appreciated how non-Latinos also contributed to the distribution of aid to immigrant families. Leo mentioned how some of his friends ***"who were not Latino felt the impact of what was happening"*** and helped organize food drives to help Latinos. For Gabriela, White non-Latino members from her church provided her important support,

> ***"I go to classes on Fridays at a church. They're retired people. They're White. They were all there with us. They were giving us information, 'They're in such-and-such place!…Don't go out, be patient! Do you need anything?' They were always looking out for us. I went back to those classes today and the teachers were so happy to see us. They hugged us. It was kind of like, 'Wow, we missed you.'"***
>
> *- Gabriela*

Participant Recommendations

At the end of each interview, participants were asked to recommend any actions that the local government should take in the wake of Operation Charlotte's Web. Overall, common suggestions included (1) find ways in which local and state governments can protect immigrants from aggressive federal immigration enforcement, (2) provide economic support for impacted Latino households, and (3) provide mental health resources for those that need support.

Local Governmental Resistance

For Nadia, she wanted to see local and state governments prevent future enforcement operations from happening, ***"[Local government] shouldn't support and not permit that this keeps happening...I would like to hear the governor come out and say 'My people, you can go out to work without fear. There will be no more raids!'"*** Sabrina expressed a similar opinion, but was uncertain on what exactly local governments can do,

> ***"Well, as for the local government, I think they should stay out of it, not support ICE agents, and respond to calls when asked... To be honest, I'm not really sure what they can do, but they should follow the law and look out for the citizens."***
>
> *- Sabrina*

Some participants suggested that changing immigration policy is one way to protect immigrants from enforcement. For example, Emilia would like to see local politicians push in giving certain working undocumented immigrants an ability to get status and identification in the US,

Individuals of different races and ethnicities participated in protests and demonstrations against Operation Charlotte's Web | Source: Julian Berger/WFAE



> ***"I feel that local officials could advocate a little more for changing those policies and help us more in securing a legal status because there are people who have been in this country for years, working and paying taxes, and they don't even have an ID. They're forced to pay taxes, to work, to pay for everything they have here because we all pay for everything—nothing is free here. But in the end, they don't give us any benefits. So, I feel that for me, that would be the most beneficial thing."***
>
> *- Emilia*

Economic Support

Due to the economic disruption, many participants suggested that local governments should provide some financial support to help Latino immigrant families that missed work to economically recover. According to Ana, the local government should help ***"people who were unable to work [and] unable to earn money"*** because their ***"debts are piling up."*** Leo echoed this,

> ***"Well, I think that, more than anything else, what could help us would be providing some kind of assistance to people who have been financially impacted—people who may now be behind on their bills or who may have had to take their children out of school."***
>
> *- Leo*

Mental Health Support

Participants also wanted to see the local government take action in helping alleviate the mental and emotional stress caused by the operation. As Daniela explained, there should be efforts in ***"supporting families in that regard"*** because of ***"how they feel cornered, how they feel bad, how they don't know the language, and how their children at some point were afraid, thinking, 'I don't want to go to school because if I come back, my mom won't be there anymore.'"*** Betty noted how addressing mental health may not be a priority for immigrant families due to financial constraints,

> ***"Mostly, I think about the emotional aspect, being able to help mothers or fathers cope with this stress. But even so, I think people here in the United States live in a state of high alert, in a state of stress, but they don't place much importance on mental health. Obviously, there are bills to pay, and all those other things to take care of."***
>
> *- Betty*

Discussion

Differential Impact

Collectively, participant narratives show a Latino community differentially impacted by documentation status. On one side, there are the Latinos with a more "secure" residency status, like being a permanent resident or citizen. On the other side are Latinos who are either undocumented or have a more "precarious" immigration status like Temporary Protected Status, DACA, humanitarian parole, or asylum-seeker. Based on participant interviews, the enforcement surge did not evenly impact both groups. Those with a more precarious status were more restricted in their mobility and likely to stay inside to avoid detention and deportation, even if they are legally allowed to be in the country. Latinos with more secure statuses mobilized to help the other more vulnerable group, but were also at risk of being profiled by immigration agents. This division even existed within mixed-status families; participants with US-born teenage children would support and protect their immigrant family members during the crisis.

Previous studies that focused on local reactions to heightened federal immigration enforcement also observed how securely documented segments of the community supported undocumented and precariously documented families.[73-74] For example, during the first Trump administration in southeast Michigan, Valentín-Cortés et al. described how more documented Latinos supported their undocumented counterparts to avoid immigration agents,

> ***"[The] immigrant communities have shown resilience by coming together and supporting each other through social media, providing transportation, and relying on family members with documentation to support those who are undocumented. However, our findings indicate that the primary coping mechanism used by undocumented immigrants and members of mixed-status families is concealment by staying indoors and avoiding interactions with ICE and law enforcement."***[73]

Impact on Children

Previous research has shown that the increase of immigration enforcement efforts can directly and indirectly impact the social, economic, and emotional wellbeing of the children of immigrants, both US and foreign-born.[75-77] Restrictive immigration legal structures and the fear of deportation can cause children to ***"absorb community-level stress"*** to promote ***"hypervigilance, regressive behaviors, and school absenteeism."***[78] In other words, even if a child did not have a household or family member detained or deported, the mere potential and possibility of that happening could be detrimental to their wellbeing.

Interview narratives show that amongst mixed-status family households, children are almost always US-born citizens with immigrant parents. This is not unusual since estimates show that over 76% of Hispanic children in Mecklenburg County are native-born citizens.[79] Therefore, according to participant narratives, US-born Latino children are often caught between the immigration legal structure and their immigrant parents. Similarly observed in previous studies, immigrant parents attempted, sometimes unsuccessfully, to shield their children from the stressful effects of hearing about the operation and its potential in separating the family and/or disrupting their lives.[78] [80-81] Nevertheless, several participants noted the difficulty in managing their child's emotional stress caused by Operation Charlotte's Web.

On the other hand, participants noted how older US-born teenagers of immigrant families acted as a protective barrier between immigration agents and their more vulnerable parents. Thus, the parent-child relationship can be said to have been reversed in which teens are playing a large role in protecting their parents. Because of their birthright citizenship, these older teenage children were more freely able to leave the house to gather resources for their family and participate in counter-surveillance activities to track the whereabouts of agents. This phenomenon is certainly not unique to this case; the impulse for children and teenagers to play a protective role was also observed in other studies of mixed-status families.[82-83] This protective impulse could be an example of what Gonzalez calls an ***"undocumented consciousness"*** in which US citizen children with undocumented parents ***"begin to make connections between illegality and mobility"*** and recognize their own positionality within the legal structure.[84]

Social Media Utilization

Results of this study also highlight the ambiguity of social media and how it simultaneously helps community members stay informed on enforcement activity as well as causes emotional stress. Many past studies and reports emphasized the utility of social media platforms in enhancing community organizing efforts.[85-86] Stuesse and Coleman observed how platforms like Facebook can quickly create large networks and how immigrant communities in the Atlanta metro area were ***"creatively using new communication technologies–specifically, cell phone texting and social media"*** to thwart immigration enforcement efforts.[87] The results of our study support the view that social media platforms like WhatsApp were indispensable for sharing information on the whereabouts of immigration agents as well as organizing aid efforts.

On the other hand, participant narratives also show that such easy access to information had negative psychological and/or emotional effects. Results show that social media platforms made it easier for participants to view many user-generated images and video recordings of dramatic scenes and arrests by federal agents. Participants shared that this (over)consumption of such media negatively impacted them and further fueled their fear. This echoes Roche et al. whose empirical study found how reactions to immigration enforcement actions and news among noncitizen Latinos were linked to further psychological stress.[88]

The utility and danger of being exposed to such media poses a challenge for immigration activists: How can they circulate information to promote community safety while minimizing its potential traumatic effects? Is the circulation of such information a means of community empowerment/resiliency or does it unwittingly play into the Trump administration's goal in generating fear and encouraging self-deportation? Future research specifically on how activists and community leaders navigate this dilemma can provide insight on the evolving ethics of immigration activism.

(Media)tion

An unexpected insight from our results is the role that user-generated social media content, as opposed to professional/journalistic news media, plays in how participants experienced and perceived activities during Operation Charlotte's Web. While most participants never directly encountered immigration agents, their experience of the event was mediated through content sent through group chat networks and social media algorithms. This poses additional questions: Should these experiences be discounted as "inauthentic" or should they be considered as a valid, maybe even as an "authentic," form of experiencing the event? In addition, the increasing use of AI-generated content in social media adds another layer of uncertainty, making it more difficult for Latino community members to discern whether what they are seeing is real or fabricated.

While proper exploration of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this report, Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality may be useful here. According to Baudrillard, a unique feature of the postmodern condition is the collapse between the sign and its referent.[89] In other words, people in postmodern capitalism live in a *"hyperreality"* that consists of a system of signs that only refer to other signs and is ultimately not connected to a concrete or traditionally grounded *"reality."*[90] For Baudrillard, to decipher postmodern social life requires one to pay attention to media, information, television, etc. This was most explicit when Baudrillard applied this lens on his analysis of the Gulf War by focusing on how it was represented in news media rather than on the concrete events that occurred in the Middle East.[91] While Baudrillard's ideas on simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality are notably critiqued,[90] using this theoretical lens may prove productive in examining the role of media and the representation of immigration enforcement in structuring the daily lives of immigrant Latinos and their self-understanding as immigrants.

Deviancy and Belonging

Results show competing factors that push and pull participants towards either feeling ostracized as criminal deviants or as more integrated members of the Charlotte community. Participant interviews oscillated between opposite ends of the spectrum as they recounted their experiences.

The most significant contributor to feeling like a deviant was perceived discrimination by immigration agents. Based on what was observed in person and through media, all participants shared the view that agents were indiscriminately detaining anyone that appeared Latino (darker skin, working class occupation, speaking Spanish or English with an accent, etc.). This, perhaps, reflects the impact of the "Kavanaugh Stop," which allowed ethnicity to be a factor to justify an immigration agent to stop someone for questioning.[42-44] Participants lamented that they felt criminalized by the actions of immigration agents even though they viewed themselves as hard workers who contribute to society. A couple of participants even contemplated the option of leaving the US, reflecting the administration's goal of promoting self-deportation through the spectacle of aggressive enforcement.[92]

On the other hand, the support participants received from Latinos and non-Latinos alike through aid distribution networks that emerged in response to the operation as well as the demonstrations against the immigration enforcement efforts contributed towards feelings of solidarity and a sense of belonging. While it remains to be seen if current protests and demonstrations against aggressive immigration enforcement will bring lasting policy change, participants described being positively impacted by seeing such efforts and enhanced their sense of belonging to the broader Charlotte community.

Participant interview narratives also show that different governmental and civil institutions contribute to pushing Latinos towards either end of the spectrum. Federal government institutions like ICE and Border Patrol contribute to making participants feel like deviant criminals while local governmental institutions like public schools, police departments, and churches promoted their sense of belonging. For decades, scholars have commented on the multiscalar and fragmented nature of the American immigration legal infrastructure and how its components (local governmental entities, civil institutions, federal agencies, etc.) can interact in shaping the immigration experience.[93-94]

Liminality

This tension of Latino immigrants belonging and not belonging in US society is reminiscent of the concept of liminality used by migration scholars. Originally from van Gennep and famously developed by Victor Turner, the liminal is an analytical category conceptualizing the transitional stage a person or group traverses as they leave one status and enter another.[95] The stereotypical "college experience" is a simplified example of how (post)modern societies still have (at least partially) liminal experiences that young adults go through to become full adults. Once graduated from high school, young adults leave their parental homes to share life together with their peers on a college campus and spend time studying, partying, and experimenting until they graduate and re-integrate back into mainstream society and establish their own households and families.[96-97]

From their 2006 paper, Menjívar used the Turnian concept to analyze immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala who were caught in a "liminal legality" in which they had precarious legal statuses like TPS and in process of an asylum case. In their research, Menjívar detailed how this liminality shaped and structured their social lives. For example, the travel restrictions imposed on such immigrants made it difficult to maintain connections in their country of origin, thus impacting and reconfiguring spousal, parental, and other familial relationships. Menjívar's emphasis on the stress that immigrants endured while under the uncertainty of their liminal legality mirrors the stress some participants experienced during Operation Charlotte's Web due to their own "liminal" precarious documentation status.[98]

However, Menjívar's use of liminality is perhaps better suited (or, according to some scholars, inadequately used)[99] to describe individuals caught in a legal limbo in which legal proceedings and policy move glacially, thus leaving immigrants suspended. The acute and sudden nature of Operation Charlotte's Web is perhaps more reminiscent of how natural disasters produce liminal experiences and enhance community solidarity of affected populations.[100] Turner theorized individuals sharing liminal experiences form particularly strong affective bonds into what he referred to as a "communitas" that then fade after the shared experience.[95] For example, Schrauf and de Victoria Rodríguez examined how solidarity amongst Puerto Rican community members was initially strong during the first few weeks after Hurricane

Maria before waning after more time passed while noting how some individuals were still committed to continuing solidarity efforts.[101]

Using Turner's concept of liminality, the efforts of solidarity reported by participants could be interpreted as evidence of an emerging or reemerging communitas in which Charlotte Latinos felt (individually and collectively) threatened by the presence and actions of immigration agents. The circulation of images and videos showing the aggressive tactics of immigration agents on Latinos can propel more Latino community members into feeling a strong sense of belonging, as part of the same communitas, and motivate them to contribute towards mutual aid efforts.

Recommendations for Action

The short-term and sudden nature of Operation Charlotte's Web surprised many of the participants and possibly most of the community. Consequently, many of the actions taken by the community to rally around impacted Latino families were more reactive, although partially building on previous efforts in resistance to 287(g). We urge local government agencies and community-based organizations to proactively plan for how to best support Charlotte residents in the event that something similar to Operation Charlotte's Web happens again.

Given the economic consequences of not going to work due to fear of leaving home, coordinated financial aid efforts are necessary to provide a safety net for families who are unable to work. Although the City of Charlotte approved $100,000 in emergency funds to help impacted families, media reports show that none of these funds were used because recipients were required to provide a Social Security number, something that undocumented immigrants–who are arguably the most vulnerable and affected segment of the immigrant population–cannot legally provide.[102] One way around this is for the federal, state, and local government to provide less restrictive funds directly to identified safety net community-based organizations (CBOs) and churches who are already connected to and serving local communities. Such processes were used during the COVID-19 pandemic to successfully distribute funds and services to families who needed them most. Select CBOs can be responsible for the coordination of relief efforts, including communication of efforts through formal channels to help alleviate misinformation.

In addition to the financial implications of Operation Charlotte's Web, the community will be reeling from the psychological and emotional impacts for years to come. There is a need to provide additional behavioral health services, including therapy, peer support services, and prevention programs. Efforts like virtual teletherapy provided by the local healthcare system in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are a promising way to increase access to therapy services for children and youth, and may have potential to be replicated to CBOs or churches to ensure access for Latino adults in places they trust. However, the need for therapy services in Spanish has long outweighed the availability of Spanish-speaking therapists in the Charlotte area. Long-term efforts should focus on early recruitment of Spanish-speaking individuals into behavioral health fields. In the short term, support groups organized by Latino community members or CBOs provide a way to share experiences and relate to others which may create continued solidarity and feelings of belonging across the Latino community.

As evidenced by participant narratives, non-Latinos also rallied around Latinos to show their support in different ways, whether by protesting or delivering food to those who could not leave their house. An increase in coordinated efforts and awareness of how Latino allies (individuals or entire organizations) can best help their fellow Latino Charlotteans could result in greater support efforts. It is likely that some non-Latinos may have wanted to help but did not know how or who to ask. Local advocacy organizations and groups can prepare talking points or other resources for how to best support, whether that be financially or otherwise, if a situation like this happens again. Many businesses and CBOs rallied around Latinos by visibly displaying signage that showed immigration agents were not welcome in their establishment. Continued efforts to educate Latinos and non-Latinos on their rights and on what to do if encountering immigration agents may provide low-hanging fruit to show support of Latinos across the Charlotte community broadly.

Limitations

While this report documents the experiences and perspectives of Latinos who were living in the Charlotte area during Operation Charlotte's Web, it is important to acknowledge its limitations.

First, almost the entirety of the sample featured the voices of foreign-born Latino immigrants rather than US-born Latinos, whose citizenship status would have undoubtedly impacted their experiences. It is also important to note that Latino immigrants come from diverse cultural, class, and national backgrounds that are not all represented in this specific study. While a broad part of the Charlotte Latino community is of Mexican heritage, Latinos from other regions of Latin America are also growing in the city. In addition, while this report specifically focuses on the Latino immigrant community, it is important to note that immigrants from other regions outside of Latin America are also present in Charlotte and may have experienced Operation Charlotte's Web differently from what was presented here.

Second, men are heavily underrepresented in our study sample. This report, therefore, reflects more of the perspectives and experiences of Latina immigrants. The underrepresentation of Latino men has been a lasting issue for Camino Research Institute; our previous research efforts have also seen more engagement from Latina women than men. Efforts must be made to create an infrastructure or network that can ease the recruitment of Latino men for rapid research projects.

Third, the small sample size of this rapid appraisal study (n = 16) and the use of convenience (non-probabilistic) sampling to recruit participants weaken the generalizability of the findings detailed in this report. We also caution against generalizing this report's findings to other non-Latino racial/ethnic immigrant groups and locations that also experienced similar surges in immigration enforcement like Los Angeles, Chicago, New Orleans, and Minneapolis. Multi-site research studies consisting of more representative samples that reflect the immigrant population could produce more generalizable results.

Conclusion

The Impact of Operation Charlotte's Web

The results of this study illustrate the detrimental effects of Operation Charlotte's Web on the Charlotte Latino community. Participants, regardless of residency status, were fearful of immigration agents due to perceived discrimination and potential family separation. While social media helped participants stay informed and coordinate aid, it also facilitated the circulation and consumption of disturbing images and videos of Latinos getting detained and arrested in the city. Some participants with precarious statuses coped by staying indoors while more privileged participants tried to support other families by delivering food and essentials to their homes. Participants who stayed home experienced significant financial stress, fell behind on paying rent/bills and had difficulty affording food. Participant narratives also featured instances of feeling alienated and experiencing a lack of belonging. However, results also showed instances of community solidarity in which an array of individuals, organizations, and institutions collaborated to support vulnerable families.

Overall, participants recommended more action from more local governments to somehow counteract the immigration enforcement efforts of the federal government, economic assistance for those negatively impacted by the operation, and mental health support for families that experienced significant emotional stress. However, such recommendations may be challenging to implement. Even participants themselves were unsure of what can realistically be done since immigration enforcement is in the domain of the federal government. Therefore, while local and state policies can try to ease the blow of aggressive immigration enforcement, reform at the federal level is necessary to bring significant and lasting relief to immigrant families.

Postscript: Bovino Comes Back to Charlotte | August 24th, 2026

While wrapping up the writing of this report, a curious incident happened in Charlotte on Sunday, August 23rd, 2026. Former Border Patrol commander Greg Bovino, who led Operation Charlotte's Web, showed up in East Charlotte at Manolo's Bakery, apparently filming content in front of the store.

According to the business' press release, Manolo Betancur confronted Bovino and told him he was not welcome at his store or in Charlotte, declaring, ***"This is bigger than Manolo's Bakery. Families are afraid, employees are afraid to go to work, customers are afraid to leave their homes…"*** Julian Berger of WFAE reached out to Bovino to comment on his appearance. At first, Bovino simply responded ***"Non assimilative immigrants are anti American."*** When Berger further prodded, Bovino continued that he was dissatisfied with the Trump administration's current approach to immigration enforcement and wanted to

> ***"show America that mass deportations are not being carried out in any form or fashion…I went to places the US Border Patrol shut down in Charlotte, and it appears they are flourishing. Massive amounts of illegal aliens walking in broad daylight with impunity. No mass deportations are occurring…"***[103]
>
> *- Gregory Bovino*

This encounter, in a way, is representative of the contradictory nature of US immigration policy in which immigrants are simultaneously characterized as a sociocultural asset and a threat to the nation; as economic contributors and burdens to taxpayers; as community members that are part of the American tapestry and foreign outsiders that must be treated with suspicion. The question of "Who belongs in America?" will likely never be settled, but immigrant advocates must never let the conversation end.

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