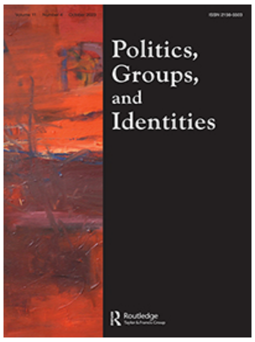

Politics, Groups, and Identities

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POLITICS, GROUPS, AND IDENTITIES
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# Envisioning a world without prisons: group concept mapping as a collective strategy for justice and dignity

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[a]A Group Moniker Representing Latin American Asylum Seekers, Who Are Collectively Making Efforts to Reject All Forms of Detention Deployed by IMMIGRATION and Customs Enforcement and the Agency's Private Contractors that Administer "Alternative to Detention" (ATD) Programs; [b]Department of Political Science, University of Missouri, St. Louis, USA; [c]Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project, St. Louis, MO, USA; [d]Interfaith Committee on Latin America, St. Louis, MO, USA; [e]Department of History, St. Louis University, Missouri, USA

**ABSTRACT**
People with lived experiences of violence have minimal opportunities to address policies that affect them, which poses challenges to producing relevant results beyond academia. In this paper, we ask: in what ways can groups formulate a collective plan to address policy decisions that harm them? We used a framework called group concept mapping (GCM) with Central American and Mexican asylum seekers (named Migrantes Unidos), who are committed to ending the use of ankle monitors and other forms of detention in immigration enforcement. They identified distinct actions and group values, providing mutual support to each other, developing leadership skills, and receiving strength and knowledge to navigate the immigration system as top priorities. Our field work also showed how GCM participation led to actual subsequent political activism. Our results uncover new attitudes and ideas that add more depth to immigrant political behavior and advocacy. While our results demonstrate that GCM is a useful method to center voices of impacted community members' ideas for change, we also argued that academics and their partners must value reciprocity regardless of the method or framework chosen to answer empirical questions.

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Asylum seekers; participatory research; group concept mapping; Latino political behavior; civic engagement

## Introduction

Amidst growing public concern over political science's disconnection from civic life (Smith 2020), more political scientists are bringing attention to research that involves academics collaborating with people and groups beyond the academy to co-produce, share, and apply knowledge related to improving governance or advancing social change (Bullock and Hess 2021; Gabel and Goodman 2021; Levac et al. 2022; Rasmussen et al. 2021). Black Queer Feminist scholarship has also shown that centering the most

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marginalized is vital to understand the complexity and richness of their experiences and utilize their grounded expertise towards justice (see Jackson, Shoup, and Williams 2021 for review). However, to our knowledge, there are few research frameworks to guide political scientists and impacted community members as they collaborate to produce knowledge and just solutions to community-identified questions about governance and power.

In this study, we ask: in what ways can groups formulate a collective plan to address policy decisions that harm them? To answer this question, we situate our study in the Latino political behavior literature and use a framework called group concept mapping (GCM), which is a structured and multi-staged process for building a map that informs the strategic plan for subsequent engagement and collective action (Trochim and Kane 2005). We leverage over two years of field work with Central American and Mexican asylum seekers during their efforts to remove ankle monitors and other digital surveillance tactics that immigration authorities use to monitor asylum seekers while they wait for immigration courts to rule on their cases. Through GCM, we document the work of asylum seekers who were given an opportunity, space, and resources to collectively derive a shared agenda to address state-sanctioned violence.

Our project provides important contributions. First, we bring more attention to asylum seekers in the United States. We highlight the goals and activism of asylum seekers who oppose the US immigration system that uses invasive digital surveillance tactics to manage asylum appeals. Second, we bring GCM scholarship into conversation with political science to help make studies of political attitudes more relevant in addressing social problems. Our study offers an example of how political scientists can partner with people beyond academia, particularly in centering impacted immigrant communities (Solano 2022). Finally, our work significantly alters the position of asylum seekers in producing knowledge on justice, abolition, and racism. Most dominant approaches conceptualize asylum seekers as the beneficiaries or recipients of other people's activism, knowledge, and empathy. In contrast, our approach rejects such narratives and positions asylum seekers are organic intellectuals and movement leaders.

We organize our paper as follows. We first bring more attention to asylum seekers and their experiences with digital surveillance in the context of literature on Latino political behavior. We find few studies that provide opportunities for asylum seekers to engage with others and critically evaluate their different ideas for system-level changes. We then argue that GCM is a framework that can effectively fill this gap of research. After presenting our results from GCM, we end the paper by discussing how our approach contributes to political science and has the potential to encourage more work that centers impacted community members as knowledge producers.

## Asylum seekers in Latino political behavior research

The scope of research on Latino political behavior has expanded from formal acts such as voting and naturalization (Alvarez and Bedolla 2003; Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Jones-Correa, Al-Faham, and Cortez 2018; Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001), civic life of mixed-status families (Fraga et al. 2010), to informal acts (Okamoto and Ebert 2010) of undocumented immigrants who face the everyday threat of deportability (De Genova 2002). Studies on undocumented immigrants have focused on engagement in local politics (García 2019; Steil and Vasi 2014); political campaigns (Martinez 2010;

Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Voss and Bloemraad 2011), protests (Zepeda-Millán 2017), and signing petitions as well as posting social media messages about current issues (Wong, García, and Valdivia 2019).

However, few studies have focused specifically on the political behavior of Latin American asylum seekers (Menjívar 2006), who offer valuable insights on governance through their distinct experiences and interactions with the state. Asylum can be sought affirmatively or defensively. To file affirmatively, the asylum seeker must live in the US with a current visa at the time of filing. A defensive asylum is an option for individuals without a visa who express fear of returning to their home country either immediately after reaching the border or after being apprehended by immigration and facing deportation. Defensive asylum is also referred to as being in removal proceedings. Unless a person can build a convincing and credible argument for asylum, they are deported.[1] During the years between expressing fear of returning to their home country and their final hearing – a process which may take several years – some asylum seekers are eligible to receive a work authorization and social security number. These do not give lawful status but allow for lawful employment and function as valid forms of identification. As such, unlike undocumented immigrants who are living “in the shadows,” the government has a record of asylum seekers and implements several methods of surveillance to ensure appearance at their final hearing. If granted asylum, the individual becomes eligible for a green card and, years later, citizenship. In 2022, over 1.5 million individuals are waiting for asylum hearings in the US (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse 2022).

By bringing asylum seekers more to the fore of Latino political behavior research, our study sheds light on the expansion of the US immigration system that has normalized electronic surveillance to manage asylum inflows and expedite deportation. Studies have shown that ICE has increasingly forced asylum seekers to enroll in its Alternative to Detention (ATD) Programs (Gómez Cervantes, Menjívar, and Staples 2017; Martinez-Aranda 2022). ICE does not enroll every person in defensive asylum into ATD. People released on parole, bond, and orders of recognizance are often instructed to check in with ICE periodically or attend scheduled court hearings. Asylum seekers, who are actively monitored in ATD Programs, are mainly enrolled in the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP), which employs two surveillance methods: ankle bracelets with GPS location capabilities and a smartphone application called SmartLINK. As of June 2023, ICE records indicate that ATD Programs are monitoring nearly a quarter of a million families and single individuals; there are 4407 asylum seekers who have ankle monitors and over 200,000 asylum seekers have the SmartLINK app (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse 2023). Surveillance ends only after the individual has successfully won their asylum case, which could take years and seldom occur.

Immigration authorities have misconstrued ankle monitoring as a “humanitarian” approach to not confine individuals within a physical space. However, studies have shown that digital surveillance comprises another form of punishment, rather than an alternative (Martinez-Aranda 2022). People who seek asylum experience trauma before and after migration (Dreby 2015; Jannesari et al. 2020). Electronic monitoring retraumatizes asylum seekers and subjects them to stigmatizing methods to assert control over their bodies and trivial aspects of everyday life (Gómez Cervantes, Menjívar, and Staples 2017; Martinez-Aranda 2022).

## Contexts of immigrant reception

The context in which immigrants live is an important factor that influences political behavior. Studies have shown that subnational policy contexts shape acculturation (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), trust (Rocha, Knoll, and Wrinkle 2015), and can expand or restrict political socialization, efficacy, and participation (García 2019; Williamson 2018). While an immigrant's context of reception remains a critical determinant, there are limitations. First, studies suggest that impacted communities are rarely the ones who pursue social change, but are often viewed as problems. Steil and Vasi (2014) have shown that the presence of immigrant community organizations and sympathetic local political allies facilitate the adoption of pro-immigrant ordinances; in contrast, rapid increases in local Latino population and negative immigrant stereotypes in the media were framed as threats, which prompted the adoption of anti-immigrant ordinances. Second, asylum seekers' experiences of digital surveillance strongly question the value of *reforming* violent contexts of reception. Attorneys, advocates, and case managers can work tirelessly towards getting asylum seekers proper housing, employment, health services, and legal protections. Nevertheless, until digital surveillance is abolished, asylum seekers are unable to live their lives completely free of stigma as well as perpetual surveillance and fear.

As Angela Davis (2003) has argued, violent systems cannot be reformed; they must be dismantled outright and radically reimagined. Some studies have answered her call. Escudero and Pallares (2021) have examined civil disobedience as a movement tactic that differs from marches or other forms of protest, as it emphasizes the intentional defiance of the law. Others have focused on mutual support to build collective resistance (Davis and Fayter 2021; Medina 2012; Villarreal Sosa, Diaz, and Hernandez 2019), free movement to contest stereotypical depictions of migrant communities (Escudero and Pallares 2021), and disrupting anti-Blackness narratives in immigrant detention (Solano 2022). Indeed, prior studies have illuminated more radical forms of immigrant political behavior. However, scholarship thus far has focused more on critically analyzing actual individual or group acts of resistance than engaging in a process that directly impacts communities can co-create a shared collective agenda for social change. To our knowledge, no study has yet to position immigrants to deliberate with their peers, critically evaluate ideas, and derive shared priorities for reimagining a system free from all forms of detention, including digital surveillance.

## Centering asylum seekers in research frameworks

Group concept mapping (GCM) is a structured method for translating qualitative data of people's different statements about their attitudes, ideas, visions, and solutions for change into a pictorial form that displays the interrelationships among statements (Kane and Trochim 2007; Shorkey, Windsor, and Spence 2009; Trochim, Cook, and Setze 1994; Windsor 2013). Studies have shown GCM as a valuable tool for mental health services, teaching measurements, archival research, planning, and engaging impacted communities (Shorkey, Windsor, and Spence 2009). To our knowledge, few GCM studies have centered on asylum seekers or are used to address violence in immigration systems (but see Ahmad et al. 2012; D'Alonzo et al. 2020). Following is a discussion of the main phases of GCM.

## Community preparation

Before GCM commences, the impacted community must first be prepped and informed (Windsor 2013). We situate GCM within a broader community-driven process to provide emotional support to asylum seekers who are interested to abolish the use of ankle monitors and other forms of detention (Davis and Fayter 2021; Finn 2020; Villarreal Sosa, Diaz, and Hernandez 2019). Starting in January 2019, asylum seekers who expressed interest in abolishing the use of ankle monitors were recruited at a local advocacy organization, free legal clinics, and regular intake meetings during legal consultations with attorneys. To elevate the trustworthiness (i.e., credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability) of our study, we illustrate our process – the RICA Model – in Figure 1, which is further described in the online appendix.

Beginning in November 2020, the academic researcher and service provider authors co-designed a support group for asylum seekers to meet. Due to COVID-19, meetings were held over Zoom. Asylum seekers were named the "core team" while community organizers, service providers, and academic researchers were named the "support team."[2] The support team thought of themselves as "stagehands," while the core team were the central actors. The core team voted to name themselves as "Migrantes Unidos" (MU). MU members elected four "liderazgo" officers (two males and two females) to meet more frequently with the support team than the general monthly meetings to set meeting objectives.

Monthly meetings were conducted in all Spanish. Few Central Americans in the group spoke Mayan and preferred to have meetings in Spanish. Asylum seekers were assured that no one worked with or for the US government, and their information would

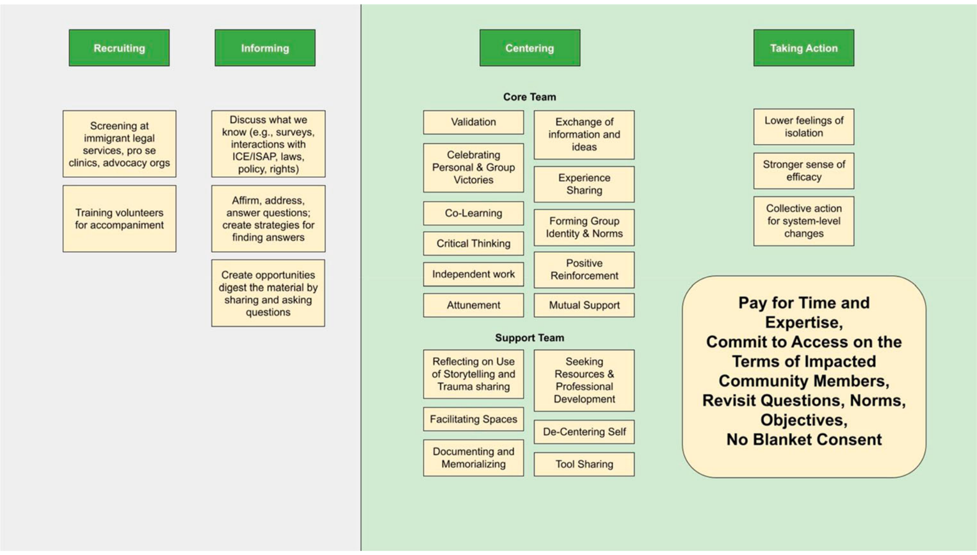
Recruiting
Informing
Centering
Taking Action
Screening at immigrant legal services, pro se clinics, advocacy orgs
Training volunteers for accompaniment
Discuss what we know (e.g., surveys, interactions with ICE/ISAP, laws, policy, rights)
Affirm, address, answer questions; create strategies for finding answers
Create opportunities digest the material by sharing and asking questions
Core Team
Validation
Exchange of information and ideas
Celebrating Personal & Group Victories
Experience Sharing
Co-Learning
Forming Group Identity & Norms
Critical Thinking
Independent work
Positive Reinforcement
Attunement
Mutual Support
Support Team
Reflecting on Use of Storytelling and Trauma sharing
Seeking Resources & Professional Development
Facilitating Spaces
De-Centering Self
Documenting and Memorializing
Tool Sharing
Lower feelings of isolation
Stronger sense of efficacy
Collective action for system-level changes
Pay for Time and Expertise,
Commit to Access on the Terms of Impacted Community Members,
Revisit Questions, Norms, Objectives,
No Blanket Consent

**Figure 1.** Framework to recruit, inform, center, and take actions (RICA) with impacted community members.

never be shared with ICE or ISAP unless they asked us to communicate with them. The first hour provides opportunities for asylum seekers to share experiences and seek advice or assistance; the second hour focuses on consensus building towards what actions should be taken to end the detention of asylum seekers. There are no participation requirements in meetings. No matter what form of engagement in the meeting, asylum seekers are paid for the time and presence they give.

As of writing this article, MU is comprised of 38 active members, who are representative of broader U.S. immigration trends. Since the 1990s, US immigrants have traveled to "new destination states" like Missouri. Their median length of time wearing ankle monitors is over a year and a half (18.5 months). A majority of members are female (71.4%). A majority originate from Honduras (53%), Mexico (27%), and Guatemala (12%) with the remaining from El Salvador (5%) and Nicaragua (3%). Meetings have averaged about 50 percent of all active members.

## *Brainstorming*

Creating a concept map can involve the participation of different group sizes at different stages (see Cook and Bergeron 2019), which we show in Figure 2. In brainstorming, people are invited to answer an open-ended prompt that is intentionally aimed to inspire statements of action. Statements were gathered in two ways. First, information shared at 10 monthly meetings was used. The support team analyzed the transcripts of monthly meetings to identify statements that pertained to taking actions to resist, reject, or eliminate ankle monitors or other forms of detention experienced by MU members. Statements made by support team members were also included, as there was still a role to educate asylum seekers on how to handle interactions with ISAP and ICE and dispel misinformation perpetuated by agent discretion and unclear guidelines. Second, we invited all MU members to complete the following open-ended prompt: "To end all forms of detention, it is necessary that … " Responses were collected through various modes over two months. An online tool called JotForm provided MU members anonymity and the choice to either type their responses or leave a voice recording, which was later transcribed. Twenty-nine MU members (60%) participated in brainstorming. We also reviewed the list with MU members at monthly meetings. Each statement was evaluated based on its relevance to abolishing all forms of detention; redundancy; and clarity of meaning (Abdul-Quader and Collins 2011).

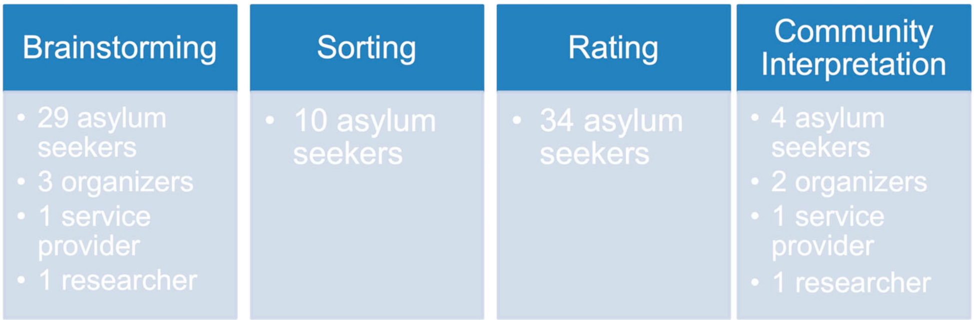

**Figure 2.** Participation in group concept mapping of strategies to end all forms of detention.

A brainstormed statement should ideally be one sentence that is action-oriented, phrased in a constructed and positive manner, and focused on one idea (Trochim and Kane 2005). Following other GCM studies (Abdul-Quader and Collins 2011, 779), the support team reviewed each statement to edit, consolidate, eliminate redundancy, and minimize any confusion in meaning. Through this process, the support team consolidated an initial list of 325 statements into 38 statements. We reviewed the list with MU members at monthly meetings to validate the distinctness and meaning of each statement.

### *Sorting*

The value of GCM is driven by groups that are directly impacted by policy decisions, programs, organizations, or systems. The process of sorting and then naming piles of statements intentionally provides underserved populations, who are often marginalized in society and the academic research process (Cook and Bergeron 2019), the opportunity to make meaning out of qualitative data. In our work, sorting maintained the positionality of asylum seekers as knowledge producers and critical thinkers who have agency in data interpretation.

COVID-19 presented considerable challenges and delays during the sorting stage of the project. In December 2021, MU and the support team felt relatively safer to meet in person and decided to use this opportunity to conduct the sorting activity. The event would be the first time that MU members would meet each other and their families in person, even though they have worked with each other remotely over 8 months. Ten MU members and their families attended the in-person meeting. The agreed-upon time still conflicted with some people's work schedules while others were still uncomfortable attending the event. Despite the small group, the 10 MU members are among the most active in group meetings. A smaller sorting group is common in other GCM studies (see Cook and Bergeron 2019). Trochim and Kane (2005) also found sorting is a higher-level activity requiring a better grasp of content and is more time-consuming, which tends to involve a smaller number of participants than the brainstorming and rating stages.

At the meeting, sorters were provided a stack of cards that each had a statement with a number written on it.[3] MU members were reminded that these statements were made by MU and support team members. Each MU member was provided their own table to work. MU members were instructed to read through the statements, spread them on a table, and then group statements into piles in a way that makes sense to them.[4] MU members were reminded that there are no right or wrong answers and that they can make as many piles as they wish if it makes sense to them. After MU members were done making piles, they were then asked to write down the number next to each statement belonging to a pile onto a blank index card. Lastly, MU members were asked to write down a name that they felt best describes the theme or contents of a pile. This last step was repeated for all the piles created.

### *Rating*

Rating each statement further assisted MU members in collectively deciding and prioritizing group actions. At the time of the rating stage, the delta variant of COVID-19 rapidly increased the infection rate in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Troubled with a low vaccination rate, MU and the support team all expressed their discomfort in meeting in person. The support team decided to do the rating activity remotely while hoping for better conditions to meet in person. MU members were invited to participate in an online survey that was designed in Qualtrics. The survey was written in Spanish. MU members were presented with each statement and asked to answer two questions:

- How important is the statement you just read for Migrantes Unidos's efforts? (Not important at all; less important; important; or extremely important)
- How much of an impact does the statement you just read have on your daily life? (Not at all; sometimes; a lot; or too much).

The order of statements was randomized, and the survey was formatted such that one could complete it on a smart phone. Thirty-four MU members participated (89%).

### *Mapping*

To analyze the data, the support team used Group Wisdom, an online platform used for GCM projects (Trochim and Kane 2005). Multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used to identify dimensions that best capture the similarity (or dissimilarity) of data collected in the sorting stage. The frequency of co-occurring statements in a pile provided the means to measure how similar (or dissimilar) each statement is from others. To this end, a point map was generated, such that each point represents an action statement. Figure 3 shows the point-cluster map which displays the distribution of statements in relation to one another. Each number corresponds to a statement, which we provide in our online

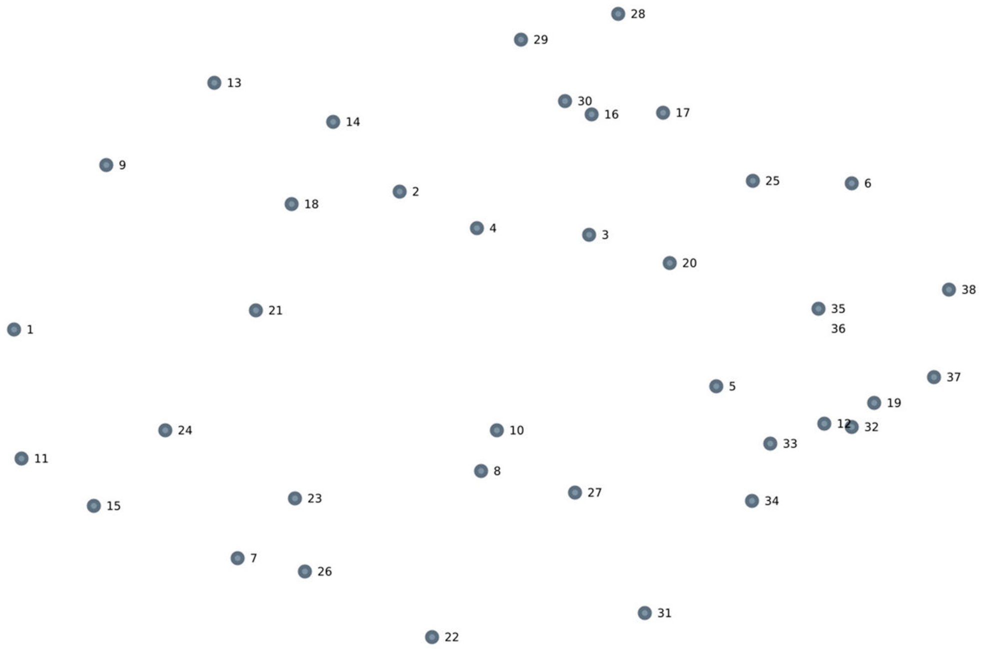

**Figure 3.** Point map of similarity of statements to reject all forms of detention.

Appendix. The distance between points represents the similarity of statements, which is measured by the frequency of a statement that is sorted into the same grouping.

Hierarchical cluster analysis was then used to identify common dimensions among clusters of statements. The academic researcher and service provider members of the support team met to discuss the clusters of statements. GCM studies use a stress value to measure how often ideas are sorted together (Cook and Bergeron 2019). Our concept map yielded a stress value of 0.27, which is below the average stress value (0.28) calculated from pooled GCM study analyses (Cook and Bergeron 2019; Rosas and Kane 2012). Lower stress values than the pooled average indicate that MU sorters grouped the statements in a similar manner.

GCM projects also use "bridging" to measure the variation of statements and relationships between clusters. Bridging values are measured from 0 to 1, where lower scores indicate more coherence to the meaning of the cluster, also known as anchors; and higher scores indicate less coherence, also known as bridges (Ogden, Barr, and Greenfield 2017). For example, statements such as "rejecting the practice of ICE telling us what our rights are through videos, emails, and phone apps" and "recognizing that ICE and ISAP are trying to instill fear in us" were most likely found in other clusters of statements. The researcher and social service provider considered various cluster solutions ranging from 4 to 15 clusters to achieve the optimal number of clusters with the lowest average bridging values. The 7-factor solution yielded the most coherent clusters (see Table 1). The number of groups proposed by the sorters ranged from 2 to 10, with 4.5 as the median number of groups. A 7-factor solution was proposed to MU leadership (see Figure 4). The names of each cluster were offered by the academic researcher and social service provider of the support team, who reviewed the names of the clusters provided by MU members during the sorting stage as well as the relationship between similar statements within a cluster. Most of the final group names were originally offered by an MU member.[5]

## Findings

Consistent with Escudero and Pallares (2021), we find that MU believed in intentionally defying ICE and ISAP, which included more formal calls to abolish ankle monitors (statement #4) to informal resistance of not letting authorities know they are tired (statement #21). Also consistent with their study, our results show that MU believes that protesting has more in common with dominant forms of political participation than tactics of disobedience. Nevertheless, as the shape and size of clusters reflect the breadth or specificity of the clusters (Abdul-Quader and Collins 2011), we find that fighting ICE/ISAP has a relatively broad meaning due to a larger distribution of points within the cluster. The results suggest that MU members varied more in their ideas on how to fight immigration authorities compared to other clusters. In comparison, the closer proximity of statements within the mutual support cluster indicates more similarity in beliefs about the necessity of mutual support in a world without detention, which is consistent with other studies (Davis and Fayter 2021; Medina 2012). Statements within the sustaining a better future and political participation clusters had more in common with each other than other statements found outside of their respective clusters.

In contrast to public opposition to the free movement of detainees (Denney and Valdez 2021), MU expresses a clear agenda of how to live in a world without detention,

**Table 1.** Bridging values for statements about rejecting all forms of detention by cluster.

| Number | Cluster and statements | Bridging | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Cluster name: Understanding oppression** | Mean = 0.62 | sd = 0.211 |
| 1 | Cooperate and give immigration authorities everything they ask for | 0.46 | |
| 11 | Reject the practice of ICE telling us what our rights are through videos, emails, and phone apps | 0.99 | |
| 15 | Recognize that ICE and ISAP are trying to instill fear in us | 0.69 | |
| 24 | Stop humanizing ICE officers & ISAP staff | 0.45 | |
| 26 | Understand that following ICE and ISAP rules does NOT protect us | 0.48 | |
| | **Cluster name: Fighting against ICE/ISAP** | Mean = 0.22 | sd = 0.138 |
| 2 | Avoid trouble | 0.06 | |
| 4 | Eliminate ankle monitors | 0.03 | |
| 8 | Stop being afraid to speak our minds | 0.43 | |
| 10 | Accompany each other in groups so that ICE and ISAP keep seeing our faces and our demands | 0.3 | |
| 21 | Never show ICE and ISAP that we are tired | 0.23 | |
| 23 | Acknowledge the system hurting us is not doing it by accident; it's designed to treat us this way | 0.25 | |
| | **Cluster name: Immigrant Ally work** | Mean = 0.22 | sd = 0.12 |
| 7 | Demand that immigration authorities have clear and accountable guidelines on how to remove ankle monitors | 0.4 | |
| 22 | Recognize ICE and ISAP do not have the power to give us our freedom | 0.35 | |
| 27 | Obtain medical referrals and evidence that show how ankle monitors harm our bodies | 0.1 | |
| 31 | Have a document or card that explains why you have à bracelet | 0.26 | |
| 33 | Acknowledge the lands of Native Americans and indigenous peoples who were removed unjustly in the U.S. | 0.09 | |
| 34 | Go to the media to apply pressure on ICE and ISAP | 0.14 | |
| | **Cluster name: Political participation** | Mean = 0.10 | sd = 0.05 |
| 3 | Eliminate borders | 0.03 | |
| 12 | Fully own and control important documents that allow us to work and travel (passports/EADs) | 0.12 | |
| 19 | Protest | 0.08 | |
| 32 | Build coalitions with other advocacy groups that do not work on immigration issues | 0.14 | |
| 35 | Send a letter to President Biden | 0.05 | |
| 36 | Send a letter to Vice President Harris | 0.08 | |
| 37 | Gather signatures on a petition to the President | 0.2 | |
| | **Cluster name: Sustaining a Better Future** | Mean = 0.17 | sd = 0.09 |
| 5 | Protect the freedom of movement of all people | 0.2 | |
| 6 | See ourselves as leaders | 0.17 | |
| 20 | Struggle | 0.11 | |
| 25 | Celebrate and support any immigrant who experiences a win. | 0.05 | |
| 38 | Meet with elected officials (representatives and senators) to get their support. | 0.31 | |
| | **Cluster name: Mutual Support** | Mean = 0.06 | sd = 0.08 |
| 16 | Welcome recent arrivals, those with open cases, and people who have survived the system to find solutions together. | 0.001 | |
| 17 | Stay open and listen to the experiences of other immigrants, even if they are different from our own. | 0.03 | |
| 28 | Hold group meetings so that people can receive support to build courage | 0.19 | |
| 30 | Listen to other people's stories and learn from their experiences | 0.001 | |
| | **Cluster name: Strength and knowledge to navigate the system** | Mean = 0.36 | sd = 0.136 |
| 9 | Give strength to others in their pain and suffering | 0.58 | |
| 13 | Access helpers (attorneys, case managers) who are ethical, diligent, and transparent | 0.42 | |
| 14 | Gain a clear understanding of the intentions/interests of everyone in our path. | 0.38 | |
| 18 | Advocate for one another so that no one feels alone | 0.18 | |
| 29 | Hold group meetings to share information and discuss how to solve problems | 0.26 | |

though the concept map reflects various tensions that migrants confront in their struggle. For example, the concept map illuminates the need to simultaneously survive within the immigration system (e.g., navigating system and mutual support) and resist it (e.g.,

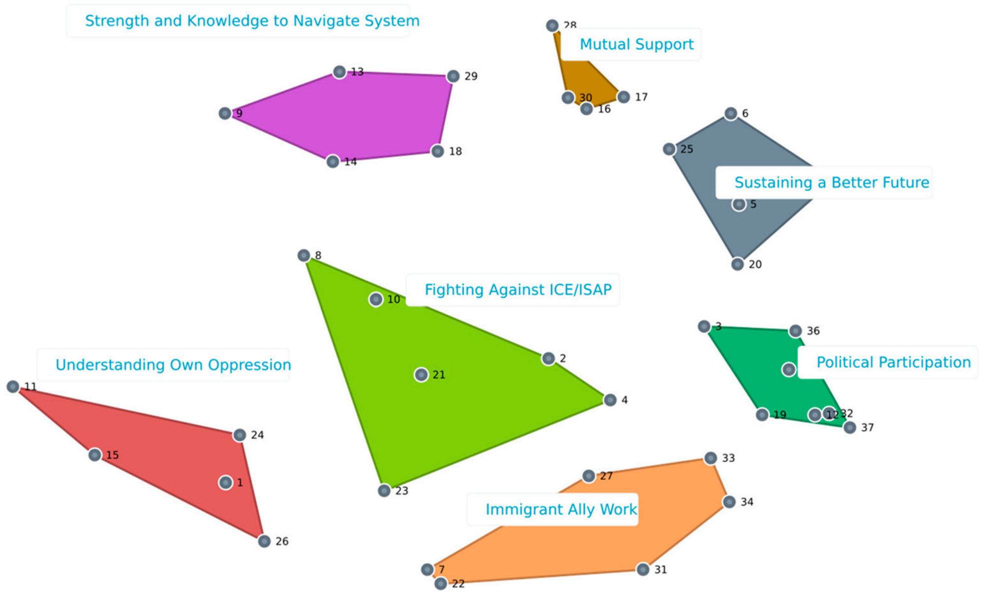
Strength and Knowledge to Navigate System
13
29
9
14
18
28
Mutual Support
30
16
17
6
25
Sustaining a Better Future
5
20
8
10
Fighting Against ICE/ISAP
2
21
4
3
36
Political Participation
19
12
32
37
Understanding Own Oppression
11
24
15
1
26
23
27
33
Immigrant Ally Work
34
7
22
31

**Figure 4.** Cluster solution for rejecting all forms of detention.

fighting ICE/ISAP) under extraordinary circumstances. Asylum seekers are the very people who hold the expertise and knowledge on how to best reject the system that oppresses them. However, there are few mechanisms for asylum seekers to escape a cycle of violence. At the time of this study, 17 MU members successfully appealed to remove their ankle monitors. While certainly an accomplishment, ISAP requirements continue to coerce movement and sustain trauma. As soon as ankle monitors were removed, the SmartLINK app is quickly installed onto their phones. An MU member has called the app as “another form of control. [It] is like having a bracelet that you are not carrying in the foot.” Another member claimed, “They took the monitor off, but they continue to torture us.”

The results attest to the durability of settler colonial mechanisms of control, which amplify all proposed strategies to achieve a world without detention. Following other GCM studies with immigrants (Ahmad et al. 2012; D’Alonzo et al. 2020), we utilize importance and impact scales to calculate mean scores for statements within each cluster. In these studies, immigrant participants were systematically marginalized in health systems such that taking any action directed at system-level changes was better than the status quo. Similarly, we find high levels of importance and impact scores with low variation among asylum seekers: on average, MU-rated statements as having a high level of importance and impact. Figure 5 plots the average importance and impact scores of each cluster. We note that average cluster scores reflect a high degree of importance and impact according to the substantive meaning of each scale. There are some notable results. Mutual support, providing strength and knowledge to navigate the immigration system, and sustaining a better future have relatively higher importance and personal impact than all other statements. Second, MU envisions their collective work to extend beyond only sharing stories of their oppression to providing mutual support to one another in their struggle for freedom. We find that MU expressed a

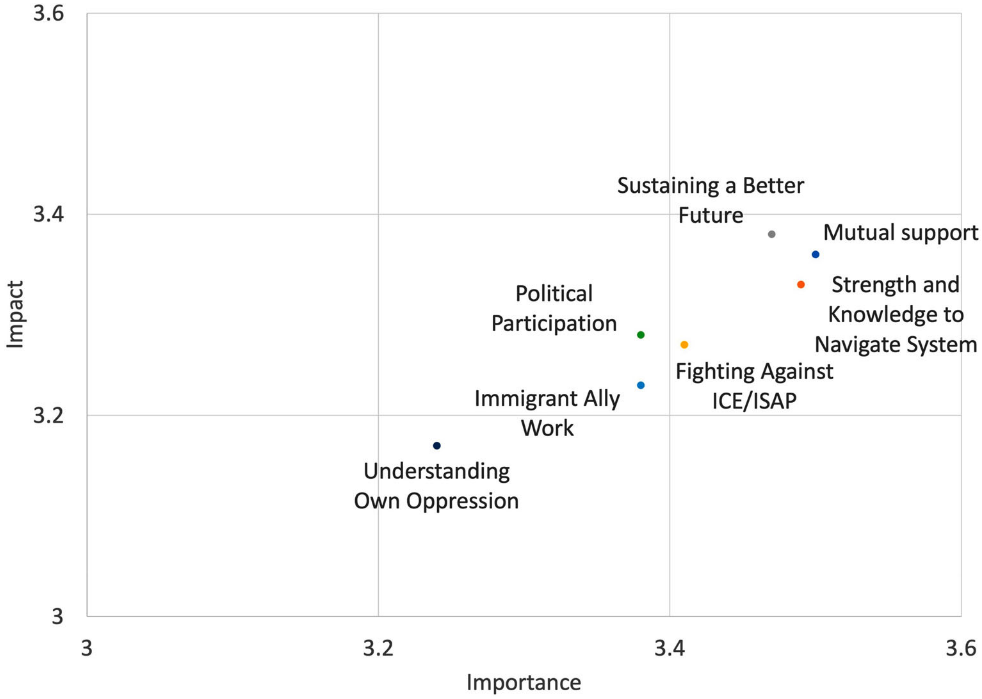

**Figure 5.** Comparison of clusters across the importance of accomplishing as a group and impact on personal life.

significantly higher importance for MU to provide mutual support than understanding one's own oppression as a group goal ($b = 0.26$; $df = 7$; $t$-value = 2.39; $p = 0.0485$). Weaker support shows that understanding one's own oppression also had lesser importance as a group priority than providing strength and knowledge to navigate the system ($b = 0.24$; $df = 8$; $t$-value = 2.2778; $p = 0.0522$) or sustaining a better future ($b = 0.22$; $df = 8$; $t$-value = 2.0992; $p = 0.0690$).

Another tension involves how asylum seekers are represented by immigrant advocacy groups and allies. Statements comprising the immigrant ally work and political participation clusters are consistent with the findings of Steil and Vasi (2014). MU members recognize that there are limits to what they can achieve in formal channels of political participation; they must in part depend on allies who are US voters. While a strong presence of immigrant groups is attributed to more pro-immigrant policies, we find that inclusive or accommodating contexts of reception can also obscure the dearth of skill-building and training specifically for asylum seekers to lead initiatives to address issues they deem important. Our results show the demand for such opportunities in the "sustaining a better future" cluster, which captured MU's interest in strengthening their own leadership capacity, engaging in public-facing advocacy, and community organizing for protesting.

## Community assessment and interpretation

The fifth stage involves convening the impacted community to discuss the derived map. A consensus-driven process was used to engage in further discussions with MU liderazgo to validate the cluster of statements and cluster names that best approximates their collective priorities. The academic researcher and service provider of the support team read the name of each cluster, associated statements, and discussed their logic when naming a cluster. After reviewing the map, they engaged in a discussion to answer questions. This provided time to explain how to interpret the map, which fostered engagement with the data. All liderazgo agreed with the names of the clusters, but still had questions. Following is a discussion of their biggest concerns.

MU liderazgo wanted to know how they might use this map practically. One proposal for using the map was to represent MU's core values and beliefs, or as a "coat of arms." As the action statements and clusters were all generated by MU, the concept map served as MU's institutional memory and record of people's ideas for change. The concept map also illuminated the different interests in MU and served as a reminder for leadership to offer discussion and initiatives that are inclusive of all ideas, not just one. The support team also thought that the "coat of arms" idea also communicated MU values for fostering advocacy coalitions to seek systemic changes, answering media requests to publicly speak, and recruiting more asylum seekers who are looking for accompaniment.

Thus, the map provided a means to work with liderazgo to engage with MU members to pursue their shared but different values. In discussions about how to foster a large group discussion about fighting ICE and ISAP, liderazgo proposed to invite an attorney to discuss options with them. One leader claimed,

> I think to take down a system we have to understand it. Its advantages and disadvantages. All the law has these advantages and in the last meeting I commented how we prepare ourselves with info, support from the attorneys so we can best understand.

MU privileges the knowledge and expertise of attorneys, as they are often the ones who gather resources and represent them in important decisions that impact their lives. Yet, asylum seekers still voice concern and discomfort with them. As one leader said:

> Questions for the attorney, if the US is a free country why does ICE put on AM? The question is why? Freedom of expression and sovereignty. I feel like a slave. I don't know if an attorney could answer this question. Why ankle monitors in the first place?

It was important for the support team to vocalize that while attorneys are important, they often advise based on current immigration laws, which have been historically designed to marginalize people from Latin American countries. The support team thought it was also important to also hear from Mexican and Central American abolitionists working in the US. Therefore, our work shows that reciprocity in research collaborations is crucial, further distinguishing our approach from more community-driven frameworks such as community-based participatory research (author citation). If our project norms elevated the core team's ideas over the support team, then MU's work would be hindered by subscribing to the racist laws that subjugate asylum seekers.

## Discussion

In this article, we amplify the efforts of Mexican and Central American asylum seekers who are working to resist the state as it attempts to violently innervate their everyday lived experiences, without much accountability. MU are members of a growing population of people perpetually coerced, surveilled, and detained by an expanding carceral state, but nevertheless aim to reject it outright. MU was formed through an interest in removing ankle monitors and stopping other forms of electronic surveillance that immigration authorities and their private contractors use to manage asylum appeals. To pursue these objectives, a team of academic researchers, service providers, and grassroots organizers used a participatory framework to support and center asylum seeker ideas and solutions for change.

Our results contribute to current scholarship on Latino political behavior. We mainly focus on asylum seekers, who are currently not given enough attention in American politics and race and ethnic politics. Through GCM, we "hand the microphone" to asylum seekers, who expressed interest in engaging elected leaders, community, protests, and abolition. Following the concept mapping process, our field work documents actual political participation. As of July 2023, the group has grown to 64 members. In an April 2023 protest of BI, Inc., the private prison tech contractor that administers ISAP (Heuer 2023; Sanchez 2023), 13 of the 16 MU members (81%) in attendance participated in GCM. GCM participants also accounted for 57% of MU members who met with a local elected official about how to strengthen local anti-discrimination protections for asylum seekers and 33% of MU members who met with the Office of Congresswoman Cori Bush to ask for assistance in reclaiming their passports that B.I., Inc. had taken from them against their will. GCM participants accounted for 63% of MU members who participated in leadership and community organizing training conducted by a DACAmented Latina organizer. Lastly, five members have been removed from ISAP, all of whom were GCM participants. As a demonstration of asylum seeker collective power, four of the removals occurred after the BI., Inc. protest.

In this article, MU is also affirmed as an author, who contributes to a deeper understanding of immigrant agency. Studies on asylum seekers from Latin America have given more attention to how internal immigration enforcement has increasingly used electronic surveillance as part of the asylum process and to gather personal information to facilitate deportation (author citation; Gómez Cervantes, Menjívar, and Staples 2017; Martinez-Aranda 2022). Yet, to our knowledge, this study is the first to document a coherent collective agenda of how asylum seekers can resist the state as it attempts to violently innervate their everyday lived experiences.

To this end, we answer Solano's (2022) call to center directly impacted communities. In rejecting and resisting all forms of detention, asylum seekers clearly stated that work is needed to confront immigration authorities. However, MU discussions further demonstrate that it is not simply enough to fight against ICE and ISAP. Efforts must also be taken to provide asylum seekers to receive information and support as they navigate the immigration system. This suggests a two-pronged approach that manages the tensions between surviving violent systems and rejecting them (Davis 2003; Solano 2022): while asylum seekers are focused on attaining a future without imprisonment, they also must receive strength and advisement to cope with and circumvent violence that they are currently experiencing. For this reason, our results importantly amplify mutual support as a crucial dimension of abolitionist work. Further subgroup analysis of the concept map and mutual support meetings revealed that female MU members viewed mutual support as more important and impactful than males.

Our study contributes to scholarship that elevates grounded knowledge of systemic violence (Weaver, Prowse, and Piston 2019), and we make a case to use GCM to study political behavior. Bailer (2014) highlights how surveys may lead to mismeasurement since the intent of a question cannot be often personally explained or respondents may misunderstand the question wording while the major drawback to interviews is not allowing for reporting the degree of uncertainty of the investigator (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). Investigator uncertainty has consequences for the reliability of elite responses, as exaggeration is difficult to detect (Berry 2002). Some also argue that elite knowledge is both subjective and situational (Bailer 2014).

Jackson and Trochim (2002) argue that sorting avoids forcing an investigator's biases, interests, and uncertainty into the research. GCM leverages sorters' contexts and interpretation of their own social reality to allow them to construct and make meaning out of the data (i.e., brainstormed statements) for themselves. By using multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis to represent the similarity of judgments, Jackson and Trochim (2002, 330) assert that meaning and relationships are allowed to emerge through the aggregation of the "biases" or "constructions" of sorters. While brainstorming and sorting data are subjective, the rating stage provides an opportunity for the same or different group members to evaluate and weigh in on the brainstormed action statements and work towards consensus and identifying common ground across many subjective responses for problem solving. To this end, GCM is not antagonistic to traditional methods in political science, and offers ways to increase reliability and validity in instruments used in other preferred methodological approaches such as developing/reexamining coding schemes for textual analysis, developing follow-up interview questions, and creating closed-ended scale items for surveys (Jackson and Trochim 2002).

We note important limitations. First, Latin American asylum seekers were prioritized over other immigrant groups due to the existing working relationships with the grassroots organizers in the support team. At the time of this study, MU comprised asylum seekers from Mexico and Central America, who are mainly Brown and Spanish speakers. Black and indigenous asylum seeker voices are missing in the concept map, who could have offered more critical thoughts on social change, resistance, and rejecting violent systems. Second, MU's vision of living in a world without detention was not totally untethered from anti-Blackness (Solano 2022). Some MU action statements depended on narratives that differentiated asylum seekers from others who are perceived as "criminal." We found that statements such as "cooperate and give immigration authorities everything they ask for" and "avoiding trouble" to reflect some MU members' beliefs in ISAP's false promises that good behavior would be rewarded. Some MU members hoped they would no longer be treated as prisoners and have their ankle monitors removed. However, all consistently were let down. Nevertheless, our study identifies cooperating with authorities and avoiding trouble as nuanced forms of immigrant political behavior and efficacy, which deserve more attention in future studies.

Third, the academic researcher was not a fluent Spanish speaker. Significant resources and time were devoted to not only translating group discussions, instruments, and responses into English but for interpreters to also retain the original meaning and authenticity of MU members' words. To this end, limitations in speaking Spanish served to hold the academic researcher accountable. Bilingual interpreters in the support team played critical roles in ensuring that the academic research did not occur at a pace with which MU members were uncomfortable.

Finally, while asylum seekers found the GCM tasks interesting, some felt constrained by this approach. We initially uncovered these sentiments after receiving numerous non-responses in the rating stage. Interviews revealed that timing and COVID-19 were not surprising reasons for non-responses. Some were also confused about what was being asked of them. More tellingly, a common theme involved a preference to have more discussion about the meaning of each survey question. MU preferred to hear other members' interpretations and reflections on each question. They had a lot more to say about abolition and their freedom but were hindered by the GCM framework itself. Our experiences with GCM highlight the challenge of participatory research. While GCM provided asylum seekers agency and ownership over the tools to produce knowledge, the chosen research framework still privileged the academic researcher in dictating how conversations about abolition and freedom should transpire.

This should not mean that GCM is an inviable framework to use for research collaborations. Rather, it stresses the importance of academic researchers de-centering themselves. While GCM provided a means to achieve a deeper understanding of what structures are needed to support asylum seekers as knowledge producers, GCM research tasks were often tangential to MU discussions that sought to develop immediate solutions for their oppression. When developing timeframes for GCM, researchers must remain flexible and intentionally devote considerable time to allow for all group members to gain trust, learn from each other, and most importantly, allow impacted community members to respond to issues that they deem important and may have legal consequences if they do not act.

## Conclusion

Latino political behavior studies have brought more attention to important issues such as DACA, comprehension of immigration reform, border enforcement, and civic engagement. Our study amplifies the voices of asylum seekers to identify another important issue: the use of electronic surveillance to manage asylum inflows and expedite deportation. Yet, rarely do asylum seekers have opportunities to stand with one another and collectively find ways to address the injustices they experience. GCM provided a unique opportunity that is often not given to asylum seekers. That is, the time and space to think critically and reflect on their own role in abolition. As GCM can visualize collective priorities, shared values, and the tensions between them, its importance is further pronounced when one considers how asylum seekers must balance two kinds of short-term and long-term work – navigating current systems of oppression for survival while also rejecting those systems of oppression outright (Davis 2003). As political science continues to strive for making scholarship more relevant to addressing current problems, our work exemplifies how GCM offers a useful framework for political scientists and people beyond the academy to use research methods to achieve social change.

## Notes

1. A person must prove that they have (1) a well-founded fear of persecution, (2) based on past persecution or risk of future persecution, (3) because of their membership in a particular social group, and (4) by a persecutor who the government is unwilling or unable to control.
2. The support team consists of a second-generation Filipino American male, Mexican woman, Afro-Caribbean male, and two white women. They are immigrants or children of immigrants with no personal experience of digital surveillance or detention, but who are passionate about immigrant justice and developing best practices in centering impacted communities in advocacy.
3. Group Wisdom can be used to collect data electronically. Users are invited to create personal accounts and can perform the sorting, rating, and answer other survey questions at their own pace. After a considerable number of MU members expressed hesitation to do the sorting activity online, we elected to use a paper-and-pencil approach to collect sorting data. MU members also wanted the support team to be available for questions during the in-person activity.
4. One member who was present did not feel comfortable reading or writing. The member's partner (non-MU member) worked with them to describe the statements to facilitate the sorting and naming of piles.
5. The only exceptions were "sustaining a better future" and "immigrant ally work," which the researcher and service provider created after reviewing the statements.

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