

Tutorial-08

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Visual Communication

Learning Objectives

Today we will look at examples of visualisation and communication. We will practice:

- identifying key messages
- identifying the audience
- assessing if the key messages are communicated well

Preparation

Take some time to read this [article](#) by the Washington Post.

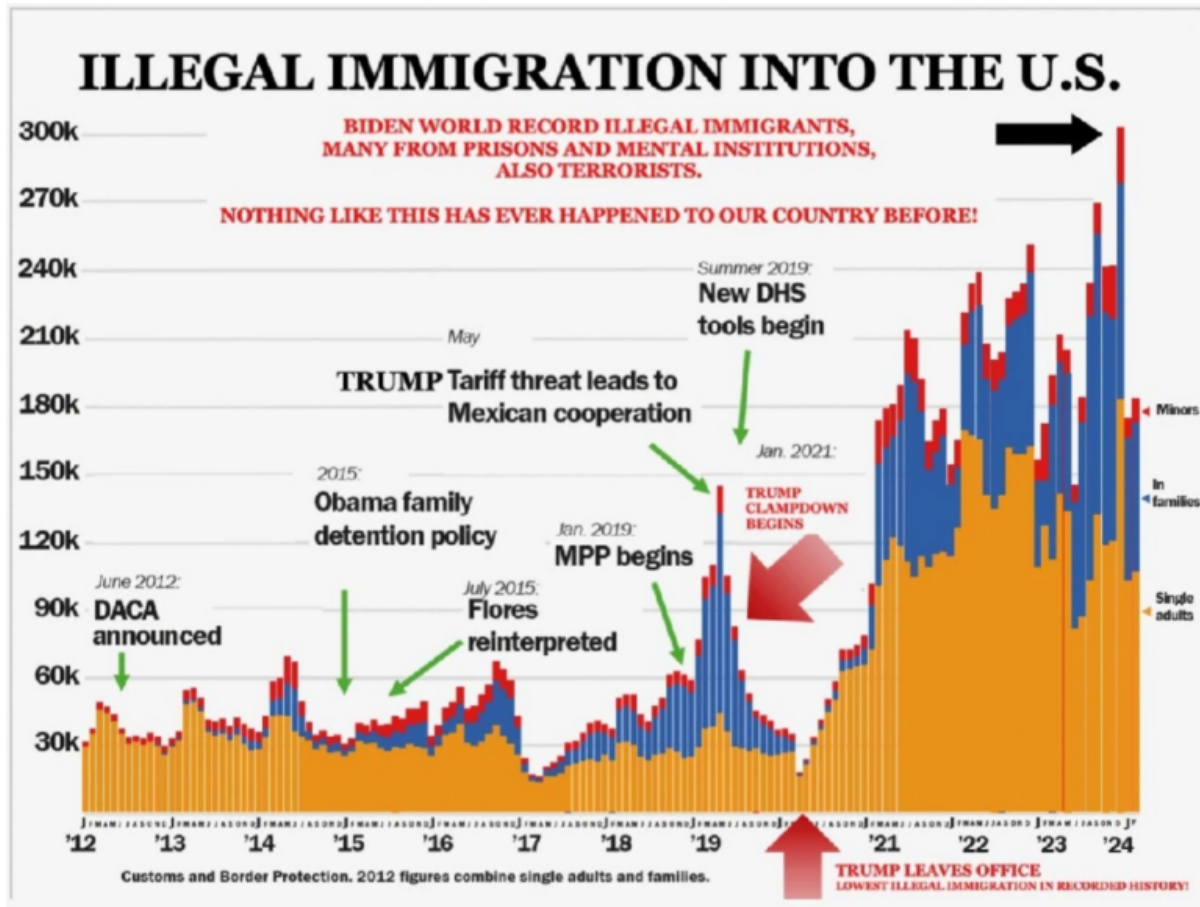
Do not pay for this article, you can not access this article for free via the [Monash library](#).

The article plots we will consider are also included directly below.

Motivation

This lecture we want to look at visual communication and discuss key messages.

Recall this plot from Lecture 1, which has been used by President Trump to show how the number of illegal immigrants over time and with different administrations.



The Washington Post used 12 plots to explore this same issue. Using these plots to provide more context to the rates of illegal immigration.

To understand these plots here is some situational context:

- Immigration was a key issue in the 2024 presidential race.
- Trump lost the 2020 presidential election to Biden in November, 2020.
- Biden took the presidential office in January 2021.

- Biden repealed Policy 42, a policy which turned back unaccompanied minors, but replaced it with a new policy on asylum eligibility.
- Trump won the 2024 presidential election in November, 2024.

Exercise 1

Discuss in your groups, the immigration plot that was used at Trump Republican rally.

(i) Who is the **audience** for this plot?

Solutions

The audience is republican voters who support Trump

(ii) What is the **key** message of this plot?

Solutions

The key message that the plot is conveying is the number of illegal immigrants increased during the Biden administration.

(iii) What are the important secondary messages?

Solutions

There many secondary messages. Some of these include:

- The change in the number of illegal immigrants who are minors, single adults and family groups.
- How different policies have influenced the rate of immigration.

(iv) Are the key messages clear and easy to identify?

Solutions

This plot is cognitively overwhelming. While the key message can be identified, it takes time to read and understand.

The secondary messages are confused.

There is much that could be done to improve the communication of the key messages.

(v) Think about the rhetoric situation - If this plot was shown as evidence at a democratic rally would this communication of the key messages be the received the same?

Solutions

The three aspects of rhetoric situation to be considered are:

- **ethos:** The audience at the rally are Trump supporters, so there is implicit trust and credibility when presented with this visualisation.
- **logos:** The plot provides evidence that illegal immigration has increased under the Biden administrative. In many ways as the plot doesn't adhere to the principles of graphical excellence it is misleading. However, as this is a political rally, the point the visualisation is less about creating something that adheres to the principles of graphical excellence and more about having something to point to.
- **pathos:** The motivation behind the visualisation is to energise the voter base and encourage policy support.

If the audience was democratic supporters the ethos would not be the same democratic voters are unlikely to trust material provided by the Trump team. The audience also would be less accepting of the bad visualisation and so the logos would also change. And as the voter base would be different, the perceived motivation behind the visualisation would be different. This same communication would therefore not be effective at a democratic rally.

Exercise 2

Discuss in your group's the immigration plots shown by the Washington Post.

- i. Who is the **audience** for these plots?

Solutions

The audience is readers of the Washington Post, but not just any readers, likely those interested in politics.

Readers of the Washington Post also include more than just US Citizens.

- ii. What is the **key** message for each of the below plots?

Solutions

The key messages for each of the below plots are clear. Each of these plots tackle only one aspect of immigration.

In the previous plot, there was too much information.

Sometimes, you can not display all the information on one plot and you must choose the

important messages to tell.

- iii. Does voter preference influence how the key messages are communicated and understood for these plots?

Solutions

These plots are much clearer and present a much more balanced picture of the data and the full story behind the complex issue of illegal immigration in the USA.

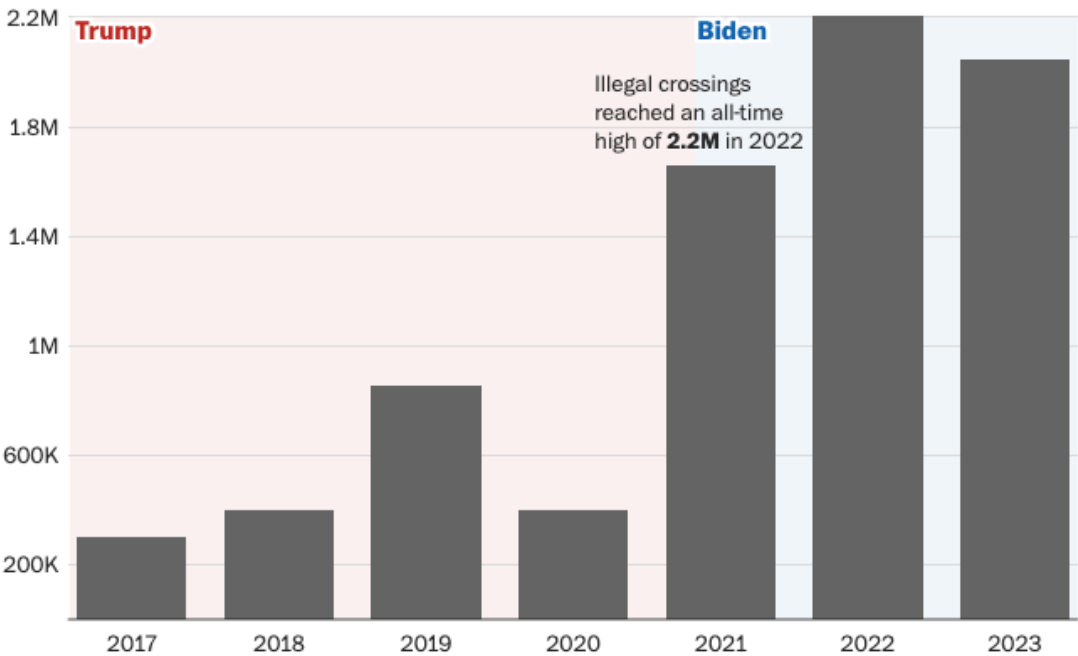
However, it is well understand that news agencies have their own biases. Depending on your voter preference voters perceive different news providers with more or less bias. (This article is a little old but shows the general picture [Business Insider](#)).

The Washington Post is viewed as a news source that is more trusted by democratic voters than republican voters. This means institutional trust will be different and the perceived motives behind the visualisation will be considered differently by each of the different voter bases.

Plot 1

This plot shows the number of Illegal crossing at the US-Mexico border (2017 - 2023).

Illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border



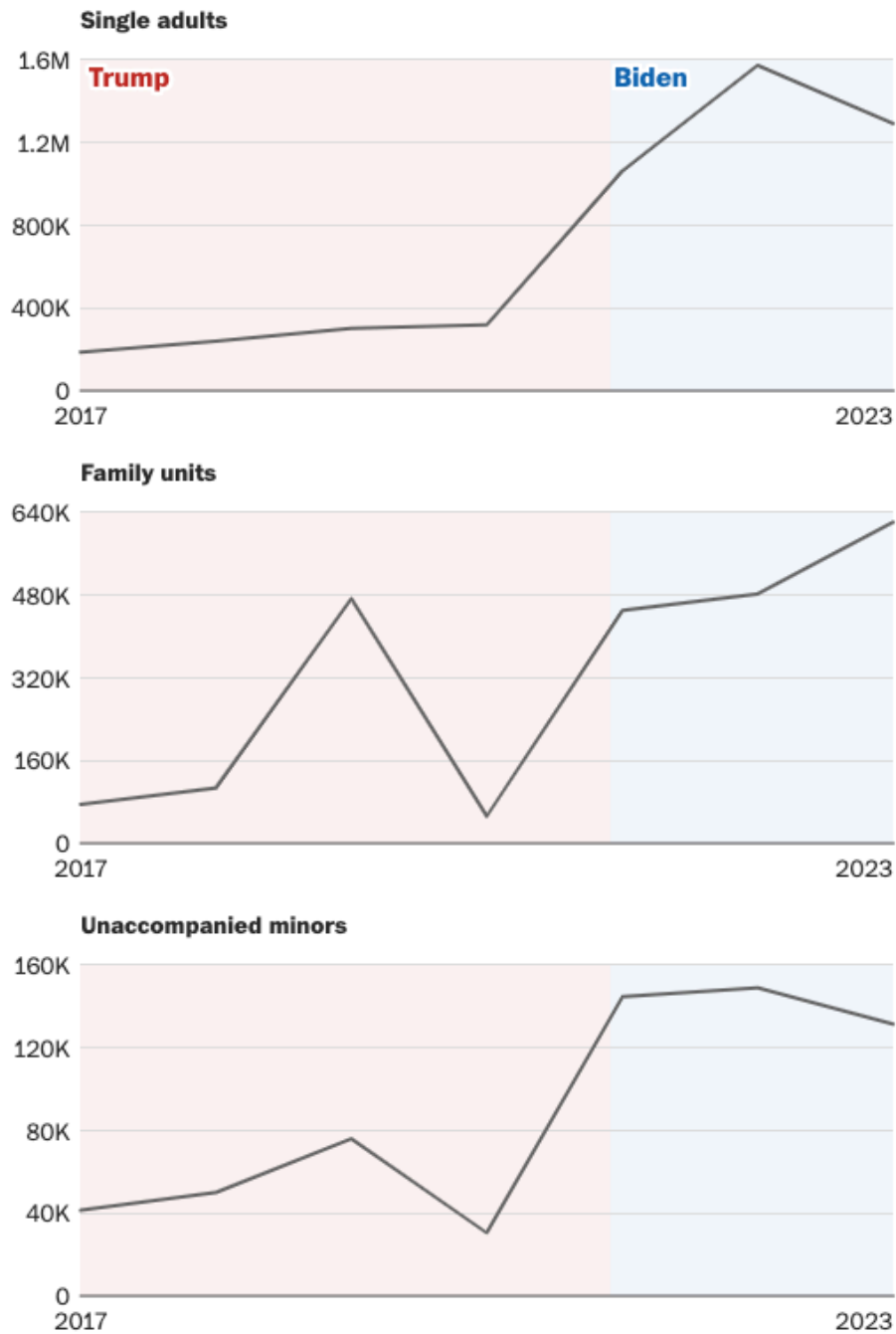
Years shown by fiscal calendar starting on Oct. 1

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics

Plot 2

This plot shows the number of single adults, families and unaccompanied minors.

Who is crossing the U.S.-Mexico border



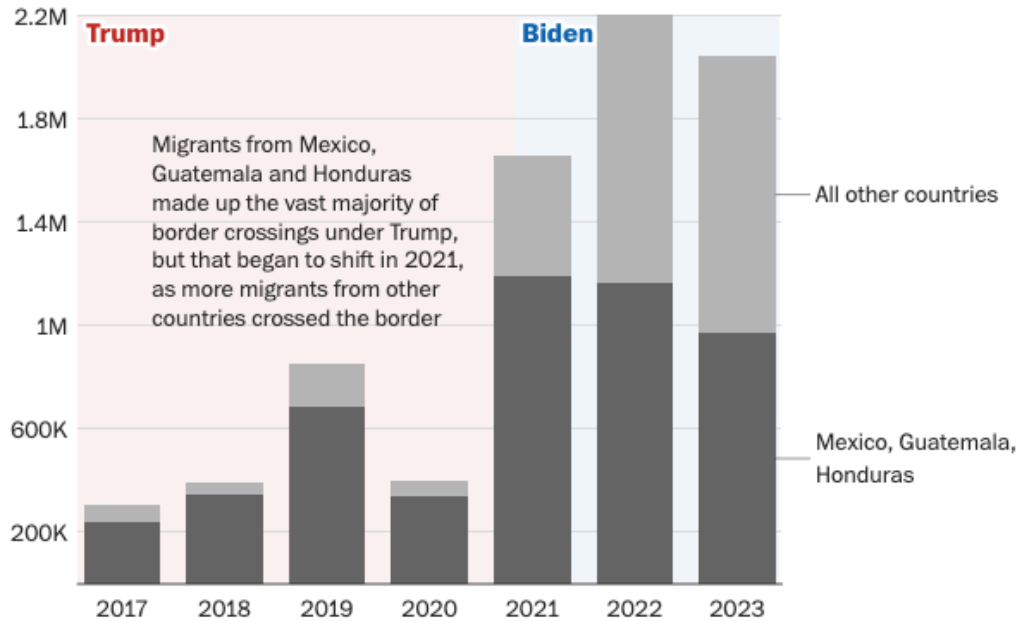
Years shown by fiscal calendar starting on Oct. 1

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics

Plot 3

This plot shows the main countries of origin for illegal immigrants.

Where people crossing the U.S-Mexico border are coming from



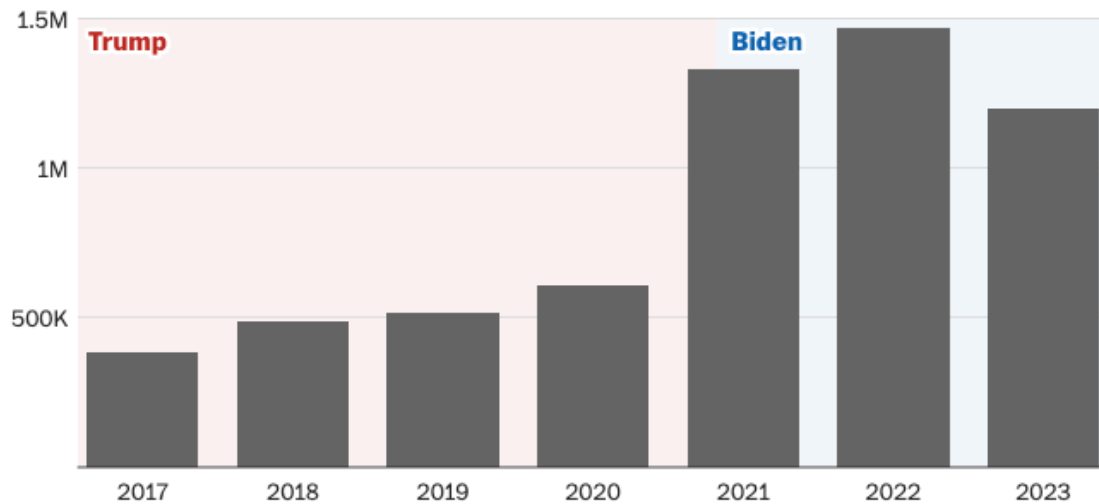
Years shown by fiscal calendar starting on Oct. 1

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics

Plot 4

This plot shows the number of people deported, returned or expelled each year.

Number of people illegally entering the United States who are deported, returned or expelled by year



Years shown by fiscal calendar starting on Oct. 1

Source: Office of Homeland Security Statistics

Lesson Summary

The drivers and reasons behind immigration in the US are complex. The Washington Post created a total of 12 plots in their article to help understand the causes in changes in immigration.

This example shows that sometimes your data will be too complex for one plot! To understand what is happening in the data, we will often need to use multiple plots, each with their own clear message. Combining a series of plots together with simpler clearer messages better creates the full picture of what is happening in the data.

This example also shows if you obscure or ignore important variables that are important for understanding patterns in the data, that this is another way to create misleading visualisations.

Note

In Assignment 2, you will combine your own set of plots to tell a data story and share key messages.