

A Report on the Media and the Immigration Debate

DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF NEW MEDIA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ROBERTO SURO

The U.S. media have hindered effective policy making on immigration for decades, and their impact has been increasing in recent years as a result of an ongoing evolution in the media industry. Deeply ingrained practices in American journalism have produced a narrative that conditions the public to associate immigration with illegality, crisis, controversy and government failure. Meanwhile, new voices of advocacy on the media landscape have succeeded in mobilizing segments of the public in opposition to policy initiatives, sometimes by exaggerating the narrative of immigration told by traditional news organizations. The combined effect is to promote stalemate on an issue that is inherently difficult to resolve and that is likely to resurface on the public agenda when a new administration and a new Congress take office in January 2009.

These findings emerge from an examination of how the media have covered immigration going back to 1980 with a special focus on the extended policy debates in 2006 and 2007, which collapsed without producing any significant legislation. Supporters of radically different positions in those debates agree that the current immigration system is broken; one need not favor any particular outcome to conclude that stalemate is a mark of failure in the policy process. Many actors in Washington and beyond played a role in that outcome, and the intent here is not to argue that the media were the decisive players or to rank their influence relative to others. The objective is to understand how the media conditioned public opinion and the policy landscape, and the results show that the media—both traditional journalism and new forms of expression—need to be considered among the factors that contribute to polarization and distrust.

While the immigrant population has grown vastly larger over the years, the terms of the policy debate

over immigration have hardly changed in 30 years. Improving border controls; halting the employment of unauthorized migrants; dealing with temporary workers; determining legalization plans for people in the country illegally; refiguring visa categories for legal immigrants—all these topics have been debated repeatedly since at least 1980, and some have actually been legislated. In the meantime, however, the media have undergone a radical transformation marked by declining audiences for the daily newspapers and broadcast network evening news programs that once dominated the information flow and by rising new forms of news delivery via cable television, talk radio and the Internet.

Immigration is a sufficiently important topic to justify attention on its own, but it also serves as an illuminating case study of how the transformation of the media has made the search for compromise on public policy issues more difficult in Washington. Fragmentation of the industry has generated

enhanced and more complex competition for audience shares. In response, all forms of news media have become more prone to jump on subjects and produce surges of coverage that convey an air of crisis. When the subject is institutional decision making in Washington, such surges can heighten public anxieties and impede the development of consensus on disputed issues by focusing on political process and gamesmanship rather than the substance of the issues.

In the recent immigration debates of 2006 and 2007, the new media landscape also amplified discrete sectors of public opinion to help block legislative action. In the first act of this drama, the Spanish-language media helped mobilize huge crowds to protest legislation passed by the House that would have mandated an unprecedented crackdown on unauthorized migrants including their jailing on felony charges. The protest marches of spring 2006 were one factor that pushed a bipartisan group of senators to present a counterproposal whose passage kept the other legislation from moving forward.

The new media voices played an even more significant role in the second act of the legislative drama. In 2007, conservative voices on cable television news shows, talk radio and the Internet mobilized opposition to provisions of a Senate bill that would have offered legal status, or “amnesty” as it was labeled, to unauthorized migrants. Meanwhile, liberal commentators and bloggers paid relatively little attention to the issue. Conservatives in the media successfully defined the terms of the debate in a way that helped lead to the eventual collapse of efforts to reach a compromise.

Both cases represented a triumph of “no!” These media sectors proved adept at promoting opposi-

tion to specific measures, but they have shown no comparable ability to advance an affirmative agenda. The media have given voice to strongly felt and well-defined views at either end of the policy spectrum. Meanwhile, the broad middle in American public opinion favors a mix of policy options on immigration, but that segment’s views are marked by uncertainty and anxiety about the topic and skepticism about government’s ability to handle it. This reflects the way the immigration narrative has been framed by the media for a generation.

An important but unresolved question is whether these same dynamics apply to other issues that share certain characteristics with immigration. Comprehensive reform of health care and energy policies, like immigration, require the mediation of many competing economic and regional interests while also assuaging strongly felt ideological differences. If the effects of media transformation can be generalized, the recent failures to reach grand bargains on immigration should serve as a cautionary tale.

The conclusions presented here are the author’s alone, but I draw them from the work of several institutions:

- The Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) produced a highly detailed examination of how the media covered immigration in 2007 based on data collected for its News Coverage Index, which is the largest ongoing effort ever to measure and analyze the American news media on a continuing basis. PEJ’s report, “News Coverage of Immigration 2007: A Political Story, Not an Issue, Covered Episodically,” by Banu Akdenizli is based on analysis of 70,737 stories from 48 media outlets in five media sectors.

- At the Brookings Institution, E.J. Dionne Jr. conducted an extensive analysis of public opinion survey data drawn from multiple sources to track the development of attitudes toward immigration and the media's role in shaping them. His report, "Migrating Attitudes, Shifting Opinions: The Role of Public Opinion in the Immigration Debate," examines historical trends in segments of the public based on partisanship, ideology and other characteristics and uses new data to probe deeply into the impact of specific media sectors on public opinion during the most recent debate.
- An analysis of the media's handling of immigration from 1980 to 2007 was conducted at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California under this author's direction. Large bodies of coverage from national and regional newspapers, the Associated Press, the broadcast television networks and National Public Radio were assessed for the volume of coverage, the topics covered and the major attributes of the coverage. In addition, the coverage of several major news stories was examined in greater detail. Coverage of the 2007 immigration debate on five major blogs was also analyzed.

The PEJ and Brookings Institution reports are published in their entirety accompanying the printed version of this report and are available along with other related materials at www.brookings.edu.

Although the media have undergone an accelerating transformation during the period examined here, there is a great deal of continuity in the approach to immigration. Changes in the media landscape have exaggerated some long-standing

tendencies in the coverage and in some cases have taken them to extremes, but the changes have not produced stark turns in new directions. As new "advocacy journalists"—the term CNN's Lou Dobbs uses to describe himself—have come on the scene, they have framed immigration stories in much the same way as traditional news organizations even while departing from long-established journalistic norms.

While individual stories about immigration may have been entirely accurate, the cumulative effect of U.S. media coverage has distorted the underlying realities of immigration while conditioning audiences in ways that make it more difficult to forge policy compromises. Three major tendencies characterize the way immigration has been covered by the U.S. media:

1. The legendary newspaper editor Eugene Roberts of the Philadelphia Inquirer and The New York Times drew a distinction between stories that "break" and those that "ooze." Immigration is a classic example of a news story that oozes. It develops gradually, and its full impact can be measured only over long periods of time. In contrast, coverage of immigration has been episodic, producing spikes of coverage and then periods when attention falls off. The spikes have been driven by dramatic set-piece events such as the Elian Gonzalez saga, congressional debates and protest marches. The surges in coverage have conditioned the public and policymakers to think of immigration as a sudden event, often tinged with the air of crisis. The biggest of all the surges came with the congressional debates of 2006 and 2007.
2. Illegal immigrants have never constituted more than a third of the foreign-born population in

the United States, and that mark has been reached only in recent years. Nonetheless, illegal immigration and government's efforts to control it have dominated the news coverage in all sectors of the media by wide margins for many years. This pattern of coverage would logically cause the public and policymakers to associate the influx of the foreign born with violations of the law, disruption of social norms and government failures.

3. Immigrants, in particular, but also policymakers and advocates, have dominated the journalistic narratives to the exclusion of other critical actors, especially employers and consumers. At the simplest level, this has deprived the coverage of essential context by underemphasizing the role of the U.S. labor market in determining the size and characteristics of immigrant flows and overemphasizing the role of government. When their attitudes toward

immigration turn negative, audiences exposed to this kind of coverage can readily view immigrants as villains and themselves as victims. Distrust of government—a seeming accomplice or an incompetent protector—is a natural byproduct.

When immigration is associated with crime, crisis or controversy, it makes news. Immigrants and political actors are the primary protagonists of these dramas, while the public is a passive bystander. And as the transformation of the media has taken hold, this pattern has been repeated over and over again for many years with increasing intensity. The breathless, on-and-off coverage—more opera than ooze—has mischaracterized a massive demographic event that has developed over decades and mostly through legal channels. And at the same time, it has helped create contours in public opinion that have rendered the enactment of new immigration policies ever more elusive.

THE TRIUMPH OF NO

HOW THE MEDIA INFLUENCE THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE

ROBERTO SURO

On the evening of January 7, 2004, ABC's "World News Tonight With Peter Jennings" opened its broadcast with a report that President Bush had announced a new immigration reform proposal during a White House speech that day. It was a remarkable, even historic speech, and Jennings framed it as such, saying, "We're going to begin tonight with an issue that has invigorated and troubled the United States since the very beginning: Who has the right to be here?" Later, Jennings invoked Thomas Jefferson and other Founding Fathers to emphasize the weightiness of that day's news.

Speaking in the grand formality of the East Room with members of his Cabinet assembled before him, Bush had delivered one of the most expansive and detailed presidential statements on immigration in U.S. history. He spoke compassionately about "the millions of hardworking men and women condemned to fear and insecurity in a massive, undocumented economy." The nation "depends on immigration" to fill its labor force, Bush said, and yet "the system is not working." He offered a set of broad principles and several detailed proposals and asked Congress to start debate on a sweeping reform of the immigration system.

Like most of the other news accounts of the speech, ABC focused on just the most controversial element of the president's plan: his proposal for a temporary worker program. The coverage largely failed to note that Bush had proposed a fundamental redirection of immigration policy to emphasize the needs of the U.S. labor market. And, then, suddenly, the subject of immigration, so historical, so momentous, for one day, was gone.

The big newspapers wrote some reaction stories and then declared the Bush proposals politically

dead. The entire subject virtually disappeared from ABC's premier news broadcast for the rest of the year. From that night, January 7, until the end of 2004, "World News Tonight" never did another story on immigration policy. In fact, immigration was the central focus of only three stories over those 12 months, two about faltering efforts to control the illegal flow along the border with Mexico and the other about illegal migrants drowning in the Caribbean. Otherwise, the topic came up only peripherally in stories about subjects like anti-terrorism policy or a Cabinet nominee with an illegal nanny problem.

ABC's performance exemplifies the way major news organizations have approached immigration for the past 30 years. If immigration is associated with controversy or crisis, it makes headlines. The rest of the time, it gets token attention. And, in this pattern that fluctuates between flashy and meager attention, the reporting has often taken a narrow focus, emphasizing illegal behavior and political conflict. The breathless, on-and-off coverage has mischaracterized a massive demographic event that has developed over decades and mostly through legal channels. This mischaracterization is evident

both in the long narrative arc of news coverage of mounting immigration and recently when Washington tried but failed to come to grips with it.

...the media played a very direct role in heightening the polarization on immigration issues during the most recent round of policy debate.

One element of Bush's January 2004 speech drew near-unanimous agreement from the public and from policymakers in both parties: his conclusion that the immigration system is broken. Under pressure from across the political spectrum, Congress took up the subject of immigration in late 2005, in a debate that lasted some 18 months, through the summer of 2007. Bills passed in both houses, but ultimately no comprehensive legislation was enacted. In the 2008 campaign, both presidential nominees have promised to resume the effort, but the winner in November will have to start from scratch. Despite a great deal of effort, none of the major issues involving immigration is any closer to being resolved than on the day Bush spoke in the East Room in January 2004. If anything, the more the issues have been debated, the more polarized the positions about them have become.

This paper examines the media's role in the evolution of the current stalemate over immigration policy. Many actors in Washington and beyond have contributed to that outcome, and the intent here is not to argue that the media were the decisive player or to rank their influence relative to other players. The objective is to understand how the news media conditioned public opinion and the policy landscape and to assess whether the news coverage of immigration helped or hindered the development of policy. Making that assessment does not require taking a position on what kind of policy would be

desirable. On immigration, as with any number of other major public policy issues, advocates for radically different policies agree that stalemate is itself a sign of failure. Unless the upcoming elections dramatically change the partisan balance in Washington, finding a way to break the stalemate will be the first order of business when work resumes on immigration.

The research presented here shows that the media played a very direct role in heightening the polarization on immigration issues during the most recent round of policy debate. To the extent that successfully adopting new policies of any kind would have required a compromise solution, the media contributed to the failure of the policy process in 2006 and 2007. Some of the most recent developments in the media industry came into play as this congressional debate unfolded, but long-standing trends in American journalism also contributed to the outcome. To capture both factors, this paper examines coverage of the recent debate in considerable detail and also looks back over a quarter-century of journalism about immigration.

The current wave of immigration has developed slowly and steadily since the 1970s, a period in which American journalism has undergone a profound transformation. Sources of information have multiplied. Demand for headline-making dramas and easily defined controversies have increased exponentially. New kinds of media have become articulators and amplifiers of conflicting opinion. The way immigration is covered, however, shows considerable continuity. Even as they produced a journalism of strident advocacy, the relative newcomers of cable television and the blogosphere have shown the same basic tendencies that were evident decades ago in broadcast television and newspapers. The overall effect has been to heighten contradictions in public opinion

rather than to help resolve them. Over the course of many years, traditional journalism presented a distorted portrayal of immigration; when the new forms of media supercharged that portrayal, the search for policy compromises became more difficult.

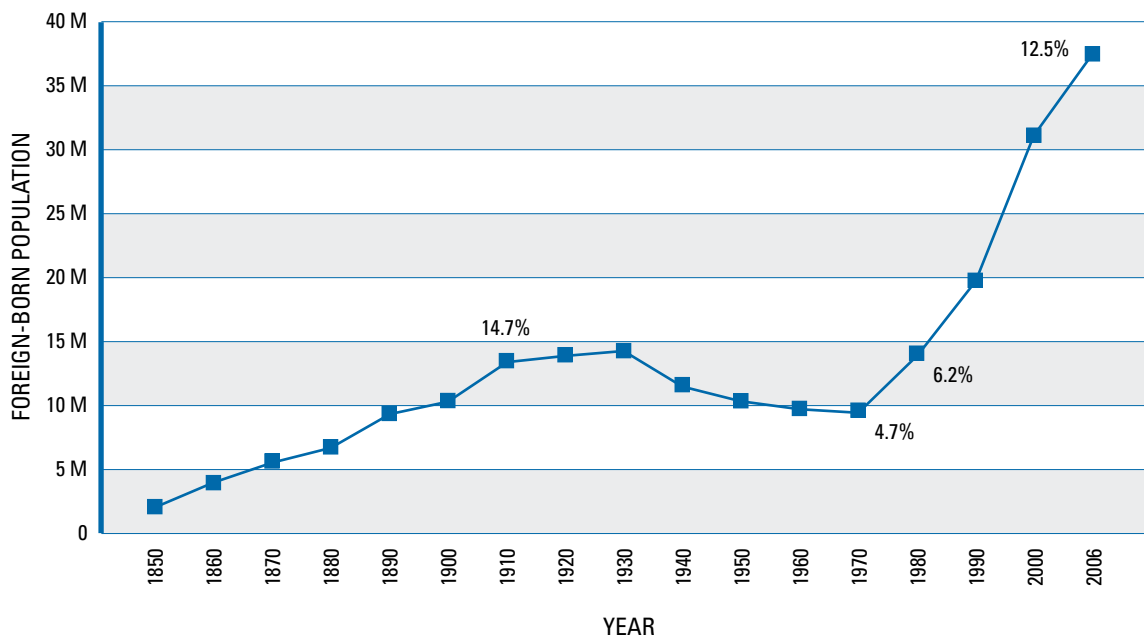
NEW IMMIGRANTS, NEW MEDIA

In the mythology of America, this country has always been a nation of immigrants. But history tells a different story, one of migration that has ebbed and flowed in distinct phases. The iconic era of Ellis Island migration ended in the early 20th century because of the effects of two world wars, the Great Depression and federal policies designed to keep out nationalities judged undesirable. Thus by the 1960s, the Irish and the Italians, the Poles

and the Scandinavians and all the others who had come to America during the great trans-Atlantic wave were dying off, and no great numbers of newcomers had been coming from anywhere else to replace them. The golden door had stood closed for two generations. The U.S. census of 1970 reported a foreign-born population of 9.6 million, the lowest mark of the 20th century. By an even more important measure, the United States was less a nation of immigrants in 1970 than it had been at any time in its history. The share of the foreign born in the total population dipped to 4.7 percent, the lowest point ever recorded.

But at that very moment, new flows of immigrants from Latin America and Asia were developing and gaining momentum. By 1980 the number of

CHART ONE SIZE OF U.S. FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION AND AS A SHARE OF THE TOTAL, 1850–2005



Source: American Community Survey 2006, Census 2000, Gibson, Campbell and Emily Lennon, US Census Bureau, Working Paper No. 29, Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1999.

foreign born had shot to 14 million as a new era of immigration got under way. Then, over the next 25 years, the U.S. experienced the most intense influx of immigrants in its history, bringing the total to nearly 36 million in 2005. As of this writing, estimates put the U.S. foreign-born population at 39 million. That is close to 13 percent of the population, a share approaching the highest levels recorded a century ago. The United States is once again very much a nation of immigrants, and the current influx appears to have gained momentum and staying power. According to Census Bureau projections, migration will add more than a million people a year to the population for many years to come.

The presence of more than 12 million unauthorized migrants is prima facie evidence of policymaking that has been haphazard, episodic and ultimately ineffective.

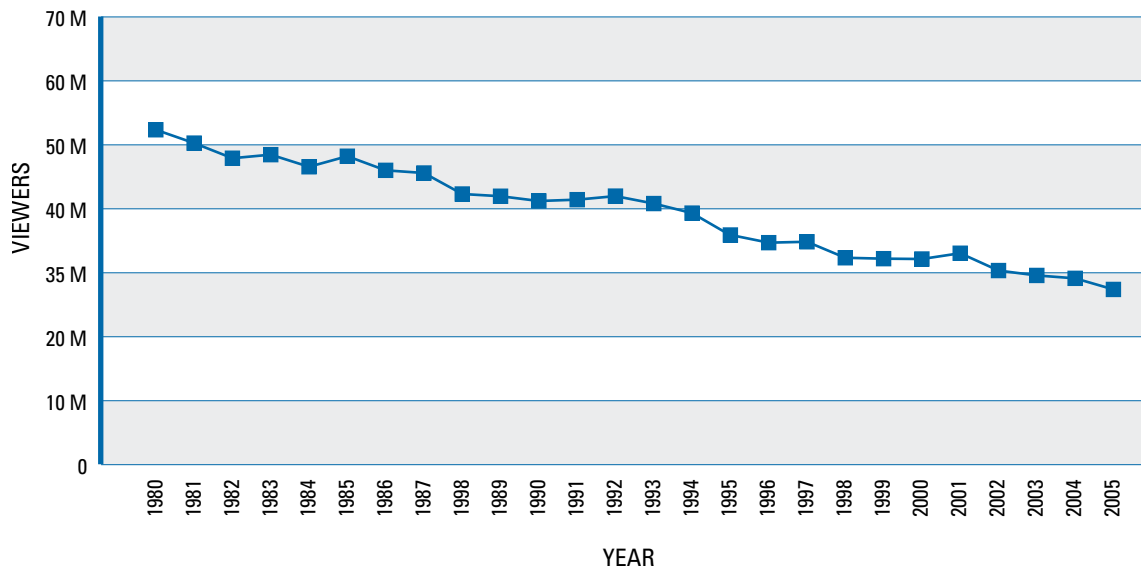
By any standard this has been a massive historical event, one that has been relatively continuous for a quarter-century, wide-reaching, transformative and challenging. As a demographic change, it ranks in magnitude with the black migration out of the South, the birth of the baby boom generation, the white migration to the suburbs and the rise of the Sunbelt. But, unlike internal migration or birthrates, the arrival of people from overseas is explicitly a matter of federal policy. No one is supposed to come into the country without permission, and there is a complex system of visa categories to determine how many people and what types of people are granted permission to visit or reside here. Nonetheless, the current era of migration is not the result of explicit policy decisions.

The idea of quadrupling the foreign-born population was never debated in presidential campaigns or on

Capitol Hill. No one voted for it—not the electorate, not Congress. And, until the past couple of years, the enormous fact of the demographic change under way for a quarter-century had drawn a disproportionately small share of attention from academic researchers, think tank experts and pundits who often inform policy debates. Furthermore, and despite the efforts of a few devotees to promote the “integration agenda,” the questions of what happens to immigrants once they get here—What is their place in American society? Is society responsible for promoting positive outcomes?—remain fairly obscure topics in policy circles. This was not inevitable. During the trans-Atlantic era, there was almost constant debate and policymaking over immigrant flows, their size and their composition, as well as the immigrants’ social status and the extent to which they were integrating into American society.

Explaining the many social, economic and demographic factors both here and abroad that produced the current wave of immigration is beyond the scope of this paper. For our purposes it suffices to note, first, that as a matter of constitutional doctrine since the 1870s immigration is supposed to be regulated by the federal government. And, second, that during the current era of migration the federal government has manifestly failed to carry out that responsibility. The presence of more than 12 million unauthorized migrants is prima facie evidence of policymaking that has been haphazard, episodic and ultimately ineffective. If more evidence is needed, one can search across the entire spectrum of political opinion without finding any major figures who argue that the immigration system as it stands is a success and should be left unchanged. Demands for change come from those who believe the current system is too generous and those who think it’s not generous enough; from those who see immigrants as an economic

CHART TWO EVENING NEWS VIEWERSHIP, ALL NETWORKS, 1980–2005



Source: Nielsen Media Research, used under license to the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Note: Ratings taken for month of November.

boon and those who see them as a burden; from those who worry about too much cultural change and those who extol it. Despite this near-unanimous verdict on the status quo, Washington was unable to enact a new immigration framework in 2006 and 2007; instead, the long, contentious congressional debate ended in deadlock. One need not favor any side of the issue to conclude that inaction constitutes failure.

The current era of migration has coincided with the sweeping transformation of the American news media. The trends are stark and accelerating. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism, the network evening news broadcasts have lost roughly one million viewers a year for the past 25 years, circulation for Sunday newspapers dropped 11.4 percent between 2001 and 2007, and meanwhile 37 percent of Americans now regularly get some

news on the Internet and the audience for cable news prime time talk shows jumped by 7 percent in 2007 alone.¹ This paper explores how the failure of policymaking on immigration is related to the changes in the way Americans get their news. In particular our intent is to understand the news media's role in helping to engender the current policy environment, which is marked by acute polarization and stalemate amid widespread dissatisfaction with the existing system. As abundantly demonstrated in the congressional debates of 2006 and 2007, this environment is very poorly suited to developing policy.

POLITICAL FRAGMENTATION AND GRAND BARGAINS

Throughout the current era, immigration has generated its own peculiar political dynamics. Both major political parties are internally divided.

There is also fragmentation among labor unions, business associations, and even ethnic and civil rights groups. This is not primarily a matter of two sides holding starkly differing views, pro and con, regarding basic principles (although there is some of that). Instead, much of the fractiousness involves advocates with narrow agendas: growers seeking seasonal farmworkers; high-tech firms seeking engineers; libertarians opposed to national identity documents; proponents of rigorous enforcement measures; Asian groups preoccupied with family visas, Latino groups preoccupied with legalization for the undocumented, others preoccupied with refugees and particular nationalities; unions wanting to grow by organizing immigrants and unions wanting to protect their existing members from competition with immigrants. And there are many other sides to the prism.

Immigration is a particularly instructive case study because there has been a round of major policy debates in the middle of each decade since the 1980s, while the basic policy tools have changed very little.

Given this kind of political fragmentation, immigration is quintessentially the kind of issue that requires a nonpartisan, multiplayer compromise to produce successfully new policy in Washington. As such, understanding the media's role in the development of immigration policy—or the failure to develop policy—can have applications to other issues. The transformation of the media is still very much under way, but it is hardly too early to begin asking how it affects the nation's ability to resolve its most intractable problems.

Immigration is a particularly instructive case study because there has been a round of major policy debates in the middle of each decade since the 1980s, while the basic policy tools have changed very little. Border control and worksite enforcement have been constant themes, along with the manipulation of visa categories to control future flows. Legalization programs for the current population of undocumented migrants have also been considered repeatedly, as have temporary worker programs. And, for the most part, the political objective has also remained the same: forge an ad hoc coalition in which participants are all required to sacrifice something to get most of what they want. In each of the three rounds Washington tried to produce a grand bargain.

The first round of policymaking took place in the 1980s, when journalism was still dominated by traditional news organizations. Of the three rounds, that was the only attempt at a grand bargain to achieve substantial success. By the time immigration was debated again, in the mid-1990s, cable television had emerged as a powerful influence on journalism with the creation of the 24-hour news cycle. That attempt met with less success at reaching a compromise. During the most recent round, in 2006 and 2007, the Internet, partisan talk radio and politicized news programming on cable television were major factors. That attempt to forge immigration policy ended, as noted earlier, in stalemate. Over the course of this quarter-century, then, the scale of the policy challenge has grown exponentially, and the scale of actual policymaking has diminished.

This paper examines the media's contribution to that outcome. Our intent is to understand how immigration and immigration policy have been depicted by the American news media from 1980 to 2007 and how that coverage relates to public

opinion and policymaking during most of the current era of immigration. The research involved several forms of content analyses of more than 80,000 news stories or commentaries from print, broadcast and digital media as well as an examination of dozens of public opinion surveys.

IMPEDING COMPROMISE

Our analysis concludes that the dominant approaches toward coverage of immigration have interacted with changes in the structure of the news media in a way that has promoted ineffectual policymaking. Thus, elements of both continuity and transformation need to be taken into account. The dynamics of news coverage described here are the products of epistemological frameworks for defining what constitutes news—frameworks that are deeply ingrained in American journalism. The cumulative effects of coverage by traditional news organizations over many years have conditioned public opinion and the policy environment in a manner that has distorted issues and undermined the possibility of compromise. Changes in the media landscape accentuated these effects in traditional news organizations while also creating additional forms of expression that emphasize an advocacy of protest, an advocacy that has proven more adept at blocking policy initiatives than promoting them. In the most recent immigration debates, specific elements of the media performance facilitated, and even encouraged, polarization and gridlock.

This interaction of persistent intellectual frameworks and revolutionary structural change has produced media coverage that impedes policy making on immigration and is likely to have the same impact on other issues. Although unique in many aspects, immigration shares some important characteristics with other issues, such as income security for the elderly, health care and energy. These are all issues

that develop gradually over long periods of time and that are impelled by many different private actors who are responding to a variety of social and economic factors. And, these are all issues that require difficult compromises to produce new policy.

In the most recent immigration debates, specific elements of the media performance facilitated, and even encouraged, polarization and gridlock.

When the new migrant flows got under way, the media landscape was governed largely by journalistic norms that were developed in the mid-20th century and emphasized impartial reporting, nonpartisan independence and aggressive exercise of the press's watchdog role. The publication of the Pentagon Papers and the uncovering of the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s represented the apogee of this kind of journalism, emerging from a media industry with a healthy economic base. At the time, a handful of major news organizations defined the standards and set the news agenda. The three commercial television networks, major metropolitan newspapers and the national newsmagazine exercised extraordinary reach and influence.

Since then the media landscape has fragmented, and impartial journalism has been relegated to one of several common forms of conveying news. That is the result of continuous and accelerating transformation across many domains since the 1980s, and a detailed accounting of this evolution is not our objective here. In sum, though, technological developments have multiplied the means by which information is received and have created a continuous, highly competitive, 24-hour news

cycle via cable, satellite and the Internet. Policy changes, such as repeal of the fairness doctrine, have opened the public broadcasting airwaves to new, often more partisan, voices. Both new technology (the Internet) and old technology (radio) have enabled participation by audiences that were once passive recipients of information. Social and demographic change, as exemplified by hyper-suburbanization and gentrification, have challenged the high-penetration, mass-market business model for metropolitan news outlets. And, the media have mirrored developments in the political arena as well. Heightened partisanship and the proliferation of less structured, often polarized, interest groups have all made it more difficult for news organizations to present a coherent news agenda that attracts broad consensus as a representation of contemporary realities and policy choices.

... the more attention that is paid to a topic in the media, the more likely the public will regard that topic as important.

To understand how the news media covered the current era of immigration and how that coverage might have influenced public opinion and policy-making, we applied two well-established approaches to media analysis: assessments of agenda setting and framing.

The concept of an agenda-setting function for the news media dates at least as far back as 1922, when Walter Lippmann argued in his seminal *Public Opinion* that by creating mental images of people, places and events that are never experienced directly, journalism shapes the way its audience thinks about public affairs. Since then, extensive empirical work has shown that the prominence

awarded to a topic by the news media has a powerful influence on the importance given to that topic by the public.² Simply put, the more attention that is paid to a topic in the media, the more likely the public will regard that topic as important. This agenda-setting role does not necessarily influence attitudes toward the topic or judgments about proper policies, but it does have an effect on whether people consider the topic worthy of concern and attention. In one of the early formulations of the agenda-setting theory, Bernard Cohen stated, in a 1963 study of the media's impact on foreign policy formation, that the press, "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling them what to think about."³

The framing function takes the media's influence another step. As W. Lance Bennett defines it, "Framing involves choosing a broad organizing theme for selecting, emphasizing, and linking the elements of a story. Frames are thematic categories that integrate and give meaning to the scene, the characters, their actions, and supporting documentation."⁴ The framing function can be exercised within a single story, for example, when candidates' popularity is explained as a function of race or gender rather than by their positions on critical issues. Framing can have a cumulative effect; when stories about gang violence dominate coverage of crime, it gives the impression that gangs are primarily responsible for criminal violence. In addition, as Shanto Iyengar has demonstrated in studies of television news coverage, the media can portray events as singular and disconnected. "Episodic framing," as he put it, prevents audiences from accumulating a sense of context and long-term trends.⁵

This paper first examines news coverage of immigration from 1980 and 2007, to explore the

broad narrative of the immigration story, and then focuses on the most recent round of stalled policymaking in 2006 and 2007 to assess the media's direct impact on the policy process. This is not an effort to hunt out inaccuracies or bias in news coverage. It is not necessary for the news media to lean one way or another on an issue to have an effect on public affairs. Indeed, this study shows that if stalemate is a sign of failure in policymaking, the media can contribute mightily to the problem simply by making it more difficult to resolve the issues in any way. The evidence suggests that the transformation of the media has significantly strengthened this effect.

Even when this era of migration was just getting under way, the traditional news media covered it as a highly dramatic breaking story that would surge onto the agenda and then, just as quickly, recede. Illegal migration served as the issue's dominant frame. In the 1990s, these tendencies were heightened by the onset of the 24-hour news cycle and the suddenly fierce competition between traditional journalism and cable television. As has been noted elsewhere, the new and the old forms of journalism fed off each other. Many news organizations, for example, did not set out to differentiate their products from CNN's as much as they tried to compete directly by replicating what the cable network provided. This interaction became more pronounced as the Internet emerged as a major source of news dissemination, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, the result was even more episodic, crisis-oriented framing of the immigration story.

Certainly, the new media have a powerful influence on traditional news organizations, but influence flowed in the other direction as well. In the congressional debates of 2006 and 2007, new media in the form of partisan pseudo-journalism on cable television, the Internet and talk radio borrowed much of their approach from the way traditional journalism had covered immigration for decades. The agenda-setting mode of episodic, dramatic coverage and the framing concept focused on acts of illegality were merely exaggerated to suit the new media. The subject matter was largely the same even as shrill advocacy dominated the delivery and traditional journalistic norms of verification and fairness were shredded.

The most recent congressional debates did, however, highlight a new development in the media's social role, and the evidence comes from opposite sides of the issue. In 2006, the Spanish-language media found their political voice by stoking participation in the immigrant marches that took place that spring. Radio DJs suddenly found they could get thousands of people into the street and help block restrictionist policy proposals. Then in 2007, talk radio and the Internet were equally successful in rallying pro-restrictionist public opinion to block policy proposals that would have opened the country to more immigrants. In both cases, these media succeeded in exercising a veto over new policies by mobilizing highly vocal minorities. If these occurrences of media activism portend a new model for direct intervention in congressional debates by media commentators and interest groups, then policy making by way of a grand bargain, whether in immigration or any other realm, may be a thing of the past.

ENDNOTES

¹ "The State of the News Media 2008," Project for Excellence in Journalism, Washington, 2008.

² McCombs, Maxwell. "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Press," *The Press*. Ed. Geneva Overholser and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

³ Cohen, Bernard Cecil. *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.

⁴ Bennett, W.Lance. *News: The Politics of Illusion*. New York: Pearson, 2007.

⁵ Iyengar, Shanto. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

THE IMMIGRATION NARRATIVE

ALL ELIAN, ALL THE TIME

The year 2000 will be remembered in the United States in many ways: a disputed presidential election; the waning halcyon days between the Cold War and 9/11; the peak of an economic expansion that pushed unemployment to its lowest point in three decades. And 2000 should also be remembered as a milestone in the history of the American population. That year, more than 1.5 million people born abroad joined the U.S. population, according to the best available estimates. It was the largest single-year influx in the current era of migration and perhaps the largest in American history.¹

Immigration drew a good deal of attention from the news media in 2000, but the saga of a single 9-year-old Cuban boy dominated coverage of the topic. The soap opera of Elian Gonzalez accounted for more than half (55 percent) of all the immigration coverage in *The New York Times* that year and about two-thirds (63 percent) of the immigration stories on the “CBS Evening News” and in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (66 percent).

By virtue of the attention it grabbed and the messages it conveyed, the Elian story is emblematic of the way American journalism has covered immigration across an entire era: The emphasis fell preponderantly on migration outside of authorized channels. Government actors emerged as inept and inconsistent. The most passionate voices in the public arena drew vivid representation. Public policy choices floundered in ambiguity. The overall

impression was one of chaos, controversy and contradictions. And that is the overall impression of migration that the media have delivered to the American public for nearly three decades. That is the perception that has shaped public opinion and policymaking. As we shall see, that perception—that misperception—derives from both the kinds of stories selected for coverage and the volume in which they were produced.

While the media and their audiences focused relentlessly on Elian in 2000, a million and half migrants entered the country largely unheralded and unnoticed.

While the media and their audiences focused relentlessly on Elian in 2000, a million and a half migrants entered the country largely unheralded and unnoticed. Taken altogether their many journeys changed the nation’s demographic destiny, while the Elian saga had no lasting impact.² The stories about Elian were accurate enough individually; that is not the issue here. And it is easy to understand why the saga was so compelling to journalists and audiences alike, loaded as it was with drama, suspense, wacky characters and colorful locales. But while the media and the public obsessed over an irresistible little story, they were missing the much larger, much less dramatic, story that made history and whose consequences are still playing out. Even more is at stake, though. In the larger

story of immigration, the Elian saga was exemplary of neither specific significant events nor public policy issues; it was far more an exception than the rule. And so the extraordinary attention focused on the Elian story created not only a distraction but also a distortion. Consumed by coverage of this uniquely weird little story, audiences could come away with very mistaken impressions about the enormous migration that was reaching a historic peak.

Although there has never been another story quite like Elian's, our analysis of immigration coverage since 1980 shows that it is emblematic of three trends that have characterized the way the media have presented the current wave of immigration to the American public:

- The coverage has been episodic, driven by dramatic and exceptional events even when history was being made by ordinary, day-to-day events. Evidence of this can be seen in the volume of coverage. It spikes for congressional debate or for episodes like the Elian saga or the discovery that a Cabinet nominee employed a nanny who lacked a green card. Then it recedes. As an exercise of the agenda-setting function, the media have conditioned the public and policymakers to think of immigration as a sudden event, often tinged with the air of crisis. In reality, the flow of the foreign born has evolved gradually, even predictably, over time.
- The coverage has focused overwhelmingly on acts of illegality. People entering the country without authorization; government efforts to halt them and debates over what to do about them; acts of criminality by immigrants; corruption and incompetence in government agencies—these have been the topics that have dominated the news of immigration. Much less

attention has been directed to problems with the legal immigration system, like massive backlogs in processing citizenship applications, the pace of assimilation among immigrants or the dependence of some high productivity industries, such as information technology, on immigrant workers. It is not a matter of whether stories cast immigration in a positive or a negative light—many stories about unauthorized migrants were sympathetic—rather it is a preoccupation with immigration as an illegitimate phenomenon that has characterized much of the coverage. As an exercise of the framing function, this pattern of coverage would logically cause the public and policymakers to associate the influx of the foreign born with violations of the law, disruption of social norms and failure by the public sector.

- Immigrants, in particular, but also policymakers and advocates, have dominated the journalistic narratives to the exclusion of other critical actors, especially employers and consumers. At the simplest level, this has deprived the coverage of essential context by underemphasizing the role of the U.S. labor market in determining the size and characteristics of immigrant flows and overemphasizing the role of government. More broadly, the immigrant emerges as the protagonist of the drama, exercising his will over the nation. Meanwhile, the public is rendered as seemingly passive. When their attitudes toward immigration turn negative, audiences exposed to this kind of coverage can readily view immigrants as villains and themselves as victims. Distrust of government, a seeming accomplice or an incompetent protector, is a natural byproduct.

These three tendencies in American journalism's approach to immigration have defined a narrative that has been told and retold for decades. It is a

narrative that emerges out of crisis and confrontation rather than everyday life. It is a narrative haunted by failures to obey and enforce laws. The media have thus conditioned the American public to see immigration through a particular prism. This kind of coverage has not produced drastic turns in attitudes. Instead, it appears to have primed many Americans to associate immigration with controversy and consternation. When Washington policymakers revisit immigration after the 2008 elections, coverage will increase again, and the public is likely to again react warily. It is a response to a story told thousands of times.

OOZING VS. BREAKING NEWS

The individual stories that made up this overarching narrative were not inaccurate, and the events chronicled were not necessarily unimportant. But neither of these conditions is necessary to yield a body of coverage that progressively builds a misrepresentation of a historic development, especially one that unfolds gradually over the course of many years and that is the accumulation of countless small events. Migration, whether it involves African-Americans moving out of the rural South or middle-class whites moving to the suburbs, is just that kind of development, and portraying it accurately requires a particular commitment of attention and resources on the part of journalism. The distinction was expressed by Eugene L. Roberts, a former editor at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The New York Times* to whom the adjective “legendary” is often applied. “Many important stories don’t break,” he once said. “They seep, trickle and ooze. Let’s be sure we are covering the ooze.”³

Immigration oozes, but it has been covered primarily as a breaking story. Thus, the highly eventful breaking news of the Elian saga drew greater coverage in

2000 than the slow, gradual migration of more than 1.5 million people that same year. The broader effect is evident when examining the volume of coverage devoted to immigration over a long period of time. In this case, there are sharp peaks and steep declines because the coverage has been driven by a variety of highly dramatic events rather than the ongoing, epochal story of migration. Some of those events, such as enactment of major changes in immigration policy, have been of lasting importance; others, like flaps over the employment of illegal nannies by Cabinet nominees, have been sensational and short-lived. Even when such breaking stories are entirely newsworthy taken one at a time—which is generally the way they are assessed by editors—they are misleading when taken as a whole.

To measure the pace of coverage, researchers associated with this report examined more than 80,000 news stories produced by print, radio and television news organizations from 1980 to 2007 (See Note on Methodology). Across all news organizations and all platforms, the pattern is the same: from year to year, even month to month, the volume of coverage spikes in response to set-piece events and unexpected incidents, then it recedes. Even as the underlying migration kept mounting and Washington continuously debated policy responses, media interest faded in the absence of dramatic occurrences that met the simplest definition of breaking news. A similar pattern emerges in each of the past three decades: spectacular, atypical events call attention to illegal immigration early in the decade as the U.S. economy falters, and then Washington reacts with a policy debate in mid-decade.

The most recent of these cycles—the period that began with the Elian saga, continued through the September 11, 2001, attacks and their aftermath,

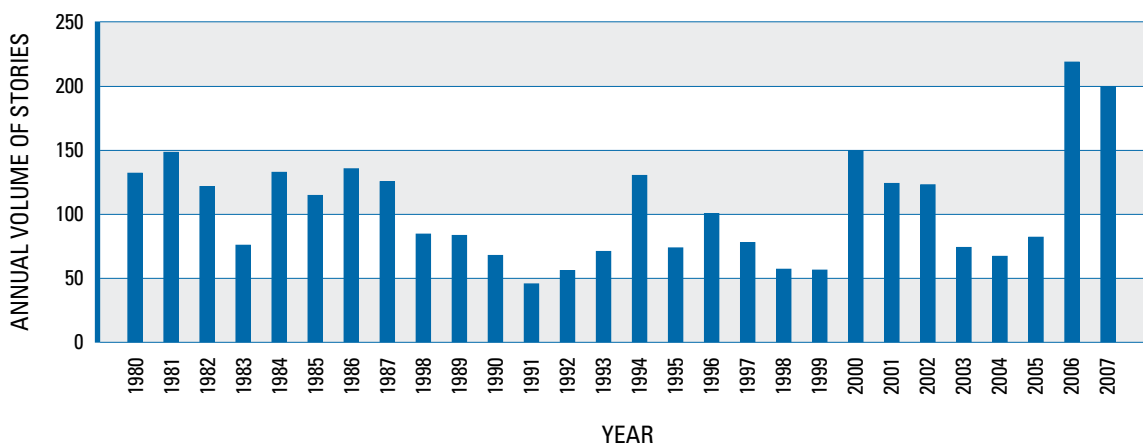
and culminated with the congressional debates of 2006 and 2007—produced the greatest volume of coverage as well as some of the wildest fluctuations in the volume of coverage. Media interest in immigration has grown, but the propensity to treat the topic like a man-bites-dog story has only become more acute. In this regard, the most recent transformations in the media, through the rise of cable television, talk radio and the Internet, have reinforced old journalistic norms by magnifying distortions already evident in the coverage.

To understand how traditional journalistic norms have influenced coverage of immigration, it is useful to start with a publication that acts as self-appointed guardian of those norms and that in fact exercises profound influence over news judgment in the entire profession. Although The New York Times has produced some of the most extensive and consistent coverage, the newspaper’s volume of coverage varies considerably. For purposes of this study, we examined only news stories produced in the paper’s Washington and

national bureaus. We thus excluded metropolitan coverage and stories in opinion and feature sections. Over the course of 28 years, the volume ranged from 43 stories in 1991 to 217 in 2006. While the size of the foreign-born population grew steadily over this entire period, the volume of coverage varied considerably (see Chart Three) from year to year. Another way of illustrating the fluctuation is to calculate the percentage variation each year off that 28-year average of 102 stories a year. In Chart Four, this method again produces a series of peaks and valleys. Examining the pace of coverage across this same period by the Associated Press, a key source of information for many newspapers and radio stations shows a similar pattern (See Chart Five).

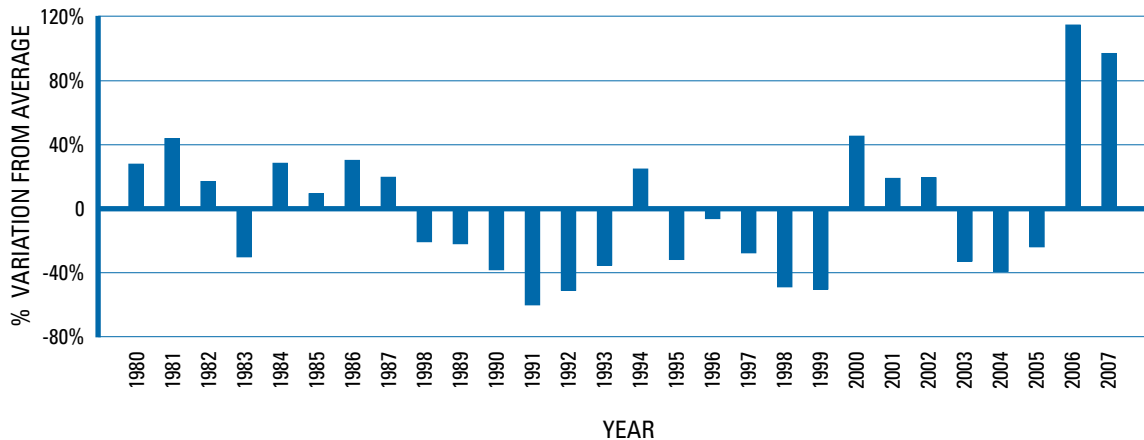
Archival material is less readily available and less complete for many other publications, and so the analysis of immigration coverage by other news organizations focuses on the years after 1990. Again and again a roughly similar pattern emerges from examination of coverage by the “CBS

CHART THREE NEW YORK TIMES COVERAGE OF IMMIGRATION, 1980–2007



Source: USC-Annenberg Content Analysis.

CHART FOUR NEW YORK TIMES COVERAGE OF IMMIGRATION, 1980–2007

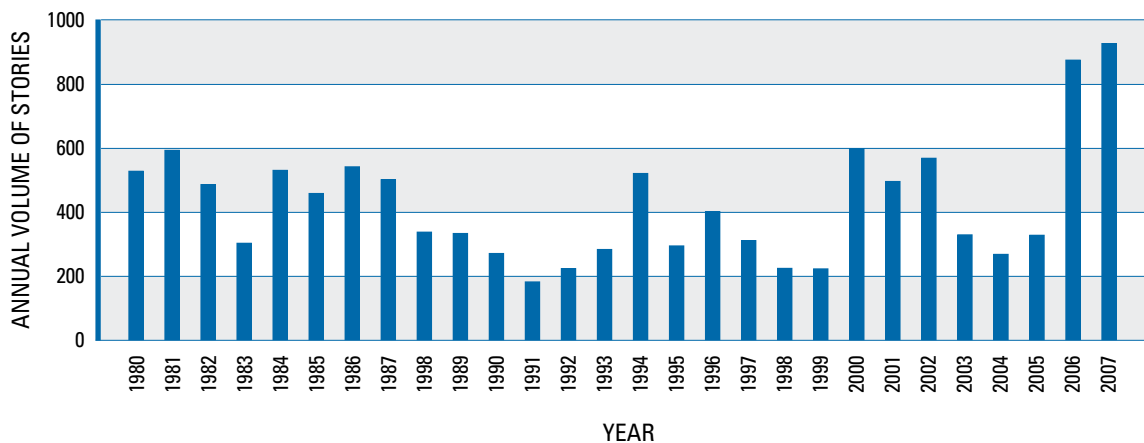


Source: USC-Annenberg Content Analysis.

Evening News” (see Chart Six) NPR’s “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered,” USA Today, four major regional newspapers in different sections of the country (see Chart Seven) and four news agencies servicing major newspaper chains.

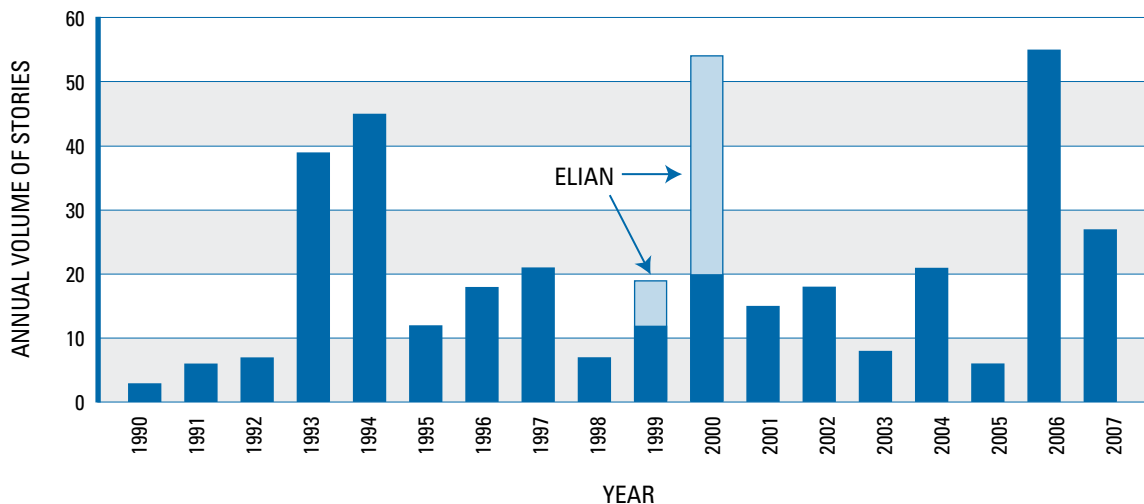
The peaks in coverage are all readily explained by major news events. The chronicle of these events renders a histrionic narrative entirely at odds with the underlying story of steady, uneventful migration. For three decades, there has been far more opera

CHART FIVE ASSOCIATED PRESS COVERAGE OF IMMIGRATION, 1980–2007



Source: USC-Annenberg Content Analysis.

CHART SIX CBS NEWS EVENING COVERAGE OF IMMIGRATION, 1990–2007



Source: USC-Annenberg Content Analysis.

than ooze in the way journalists have covered migration.

The 1980s

Twenty years before the Elian saga, another seaborne migration from Cuba, the Mariel boatlift, dominated the news. Meanwhile, Haitians were illicitly floating to Florida. For the next several years, coverage perked up with periodic riots and disturbances by Cubans and Haitians held in detention centers and with the litigation that sought to get them freed. The chaotic migration in the Caribbean and its lingering consequences set the scene for an important and prolonged round of policymaking.

As the decade began, a congressional commission headed by the Rev. Theodore Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame University, produced recommendations for a policy overhaul, and

Washington turned its attention to the issue soon after the Reagan administration took office in 1981. Repeated congressional debates stoked coverage until enactment of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, also known as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act, a compromise formed of two major elements: on the one hand, it offered amnesty to most unauthorized migrants already in the country; and on the other hand, it sought to cut future flows by imposing, for the first time, sanctions on those who employ illegal workers.

After the enactment of the 1986 bill, media coverage slackened and then dropped off significantly. The real news, however, did not. Implementation of employer sanctions proved problematical, with consequences that still resound today. The newly legalized migrants transformed Latino communities across the country. New, largely unauthorized migrant streams began flowing into the United States

as a result of civil wars in Central America, and within a few years illegal crossings from Mexico began to mount again despite the law's enforcement provisions. Most important, the pace of legal immigration quickened as the U.S. economy accelerated its transformation from a manufacturing base into services and information. But in the absence of big set-piece events, media attention waned.

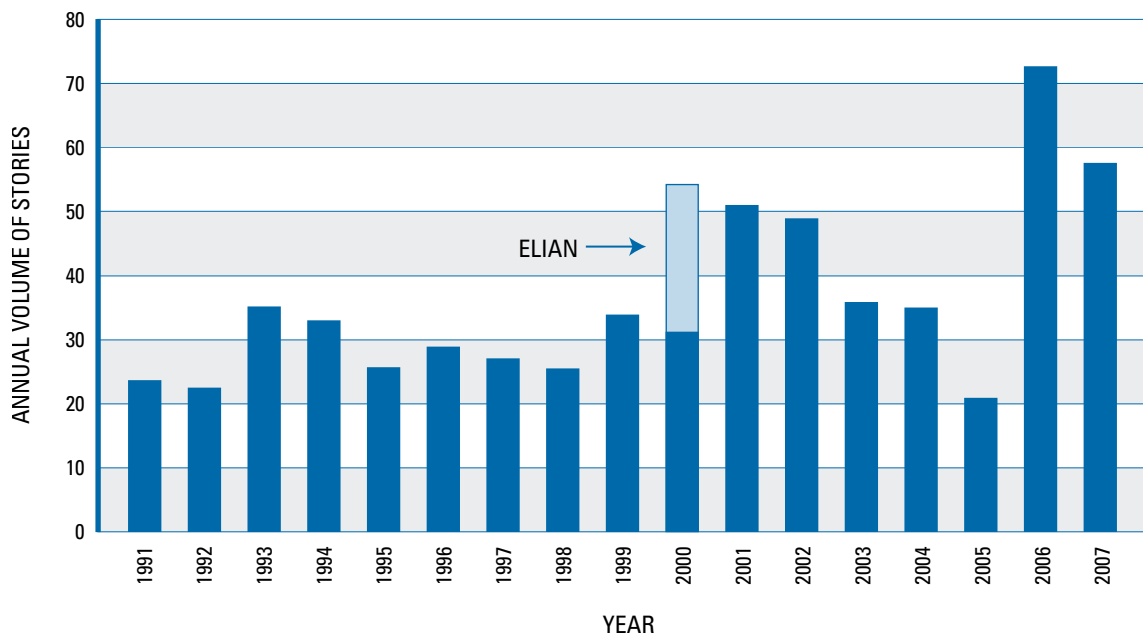
The 1990s

As the decade began, the latest census demonstrated the underlying trends in the foreign-born population, which was up 40 percent to 19.8 million, compared with 14.1 million in 1980. Also in 1990, Washington enacted a law on legal immigration that would

further boost the flow, but the legislation was passed in the midst of a budget crisis and went almost unnoticed.

In the early 1990s, immigration coverage dipped to its low point for the entire quarter-century studied here until a series of unrelated, highly dramatic events in 1993 produced a spike in coverage. President Bill Clinton had hardly taken office before his first two nominees for attorney general were knocked out of contention because they had employed unauthorized migrants as nannies. In February, terrorists who had successfully gamed the immigration system struck the World Trade Center. In June, the Golden Venture, a freighter carrying nearly 300 illegal migrants from China, ran aground off Queens.

CHART SEVEN REGIONAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF IMMIGRATION 1991-2007



Source: USC-Annenberg Content Analysis.

Illegal entries across the border from Mexico and by sea from Haiti and then Cuba drew the media's attention in 1994 as the federal government struggled on multiple fronts to exert control. The two states most affected—California and Florida—mobilized to demand federal recompense for dealing with the unauthorized newcomers, culminating with California voters' passage of the Proposition 187 initiative in November 1994. (The initiative's denial of many taxpayer-funded benefits for illegal immigrants was quickly struck down by federal courts).

Responding to a public aroused by dramatic events and again acting in the wake of a recession, federal lawmakers took up immigration policy in mid-decade once more. In 1996, Congress adopted several immigration-related measures that together formed another bargain: the flow of legal immigrants remained untouched and no efforts were made to improve the enforcement of employer sanctions, in exchange for measures that reduced legal immigrants' access to social benefits and that made it easier to detain and deport foreigners who violated immigration laws.

Once again, media coverage dropped off after the laws were passed, and it remained essentially dormant until the next series of dramas brought immigration back to the front pages. In the meantime, however, the underlying trends were changing. While the media largely ignored immigration in the second half of the decade, the number of newcomers surged, partially as a result of increased illegal flows; meanwhile, the foreign-born population spread rapidly to areas that were benefiting from the boom times but that had no recent experience of immigration, such as the Southeast.

The 2000s

As if on cue, little Elian arrived a month before the end of the millennium and brought immigration roaring back into the news until he finally was returned to Cuba in June 2000. A year later, census results again drew attention to the extraordinary growth of the foreign-born population (up 57 percent to 31.1 million), and serious work was under way on a new immigration deal to legalize the undocumented flow, culminating in a visit to Washington by the Mexican president, Vicente Fox, in early September 2001. But, with Elian gone, immigration coverage slacked off.

Then, on September 11, everything changed with immigration, as it did with much else. In one catastrophic stroke, the nation's immigration controls were shown to be a failure and the foreign born were indelibly linked with mortal threats against every American's well-being. These themes were pounded home in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks as federal authorities conducted a dragnet for young males from Middle Eastern countries, increased the scrutiny of foreign students and moved all aspects of the immigration process, including the granting of citizenship, into the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. There was a burst of coverage that lasted less than 18 months, and then the media lost interest again from 2003 to 2005. When the roller coaster soared once more, the public found Congress locked in yet another policy debate as hundreds of thousands of immigrants marched through the streets of the nation's cities.

The volume of Associated Press coverage of immigration in 1983 was almost a third lower than it had been in each of the prior three years before bouncing back in 1984 and 1985. The number of

editorials and opinion columns on immigration published by The Washington Post in 1993 was almost double what it had been the year before. News coverage by The New York Times in 2000 was almost three times as high as it had been 1999, and the number of immigration stories in 2004 was about half of what it had been in 2002. The combined output on immigration of the Cox, Copley and McClatchy news services in 2006 was nearly 2½ times the amount it had been in 2004. On the “CBS Evening News,” coverage of immigration in 1993 was nearly six times what it was in 1992, nearly three times as much in 2000 as in 1999.

A journalistic narrative that lurches brusquely between spikes in coverage is likely to create a forceful impression. Audiences will quite naturally come to associate the topic with the fast pace and high drama of breaking news. The larger truth of gradual demographic change can easily get lost when this pattern of coverage is repeated year after year, decade after decade. Such misimpressions not only apply to the way immigration and immigrants are perceived, but they also shape the policy environment. Primed by the pace of coverage, the public might logically assume that Washington is dealing with a crisis or a sudden threat when immigration debates make headlines. In fact, policymaking, like the growth of the foreign-born population itself, has developed slowly over the course of several years each time the subject has been addressed.

THE SURGE

The tendency toward hyperbolic coverage of policymaking has become more pronounced as the transformation of the media industry has gathered momentum, and it was most obvious in the most recent round of policymaking. In 1986, for example, when Congress enacted immigration legislation, coverage of the topic in The New York

Times was 20 percent higher than the year before. In 1996, when Congress acted again, there was a 37 percent boost over the preceding year. But then in the most recent round, coverage in 2006 spiked 175 percent over the year before. The same pattern is evident in the coverage by many other news organizations. The combined coverage on National Public Radio’s “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered” programs jumped by 67 percent in 1996 versus the preceding year; in 2006, it more than tripled compared with the previous year. Associated Press coverage was up by 67 percent in 1996 over the year before and by 128 percent in 2006 compared with 2005.

A variety of factors were undoubtedly at play in producing this pattern, but it is so consistent across so many news organizations that it is tempting to look for structural factors. As we shall see in the next chapter, the most recent immigration debate took place in a restructured media environment featuring, as never before, influential participation by cable television, talk radio and bloggers. That structural change appears to have accentuated the traditional journalistic tendency to focus on immigration when it is a subject of breaking news. As the media environment has become more crowded and varied, competition to cover hot topics has increased.

In 2007, the Senate debated immigration over the course of six weeks, from May 17 to June 28. The debate was preceded by nearly six months of negotiations that involved a variety of interest groups and legislators and that were widely known in official Washington. That prelude drew scant attention from the media, and then the coverage skyrocketed when the action moved to the Senate floor. The debate was undoubtedly an important event; the legislation under consideration was massive and consequential as will be discussed in

more detail below. For now our focus is on the media's response as evidence of how much the coverage of immigration has come to be characterized by episodic spikes and how this tendency applies both to traditional news organizations and to the new voices of advocacy on cable television, talk radio and the Internet. However, in the realm of media advocacy, the volume of coverage differed significantly by ideology. Attention surged among conservatives and others who emphasized enforcement over any other policy concerns while there was comparatively little interest among liberal and progressive voices. As we shall see later in this report, that had a clear impact on the outcome of the debate.

The spike in coverage during the six weeks of the Senate debate occurred in all media sectors, making immigration the number one topic in the news for that period.

A detailed examination of media coverage of immigration in 2007, conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) for this report, shows that the volume of coverage across all media was roughly two to three times as high in May and June as it was the rest of the year. (Coverage increased less dramatically again in November when immigration briefly became a point of contention in the Republican presidential nomination fight.) The spike in coverage during the six weeks of the Senate debate occurred in all media sectors, making immigration the number one topic in the news for that period. In newspapers, for example, immigration accounted for 2 to 4 percent of front page stories in the first four months of the year and then jumped to 8 percent during the debate. By July, it was back to 2 percent and then disappeared in August and September. But, the surge was even more dramatic in two other sectors: cable talk and radio talk.

The PEJ analysis of coverage of prime time cable news shows on CNN, MSNBC and Fox News found that immigration filled 18.5 percent of the newshole during the Senate debate while it was in the 4 to 6 percent range for four months before and after. Even CNN's Lou Dobbs, after making immigration a major topic for several years, nearly doubled his pace of coverage. For the year as a whole, Dobbs devoted 22 percent of his airtime to immigration and that share jumped to 43.1 percent during the debate. The spike was sharpest for any media sector in radio talk. Immigration skyrocketed from a negligible presence—zero in some months—to 22 percent during the Senate debate.

Talk radio also starkly illustrated the ideological divide among advocacy journalists, and the divide was not so much in their positions on the issues as it was on their level of interest. The PEJ analysis found that, during the six weeks of debate, conservative radio hosts devoted 31 percent of their newshole to immigration while their liberal counterparts hardly mentioned it, giving immigration just 3.6 percent of their airtime. Over the course of the entire year, immigration received four times as much attention from conservative talk show hosts than from liberals. In fact, liberal hosts gave more attention in 2007 to the Sen. Larry Craig airport men's room imbroglio than to the topic of immigration.

The volume of coverage varied according to ideology on cable television as well during the debate. Fox has achieved ratings dominance with a strong following among Republicans and conservatives. Immigration was a major story on Fox in primetime with Bill O'Reilly giving it 19.4 percent of his show while Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes gave it 16.5 percent. On MSNBC, which has an audience less defined by partisan loyalties than Fox, there was no surge during the debate.

Chris Matthews, for example, gave it only 5.1 percent of his newshole compared to the 48.5 percent he devoted to campaign coverage.

In the worlds of cable and radio talk the surge only happened on the right. The same was true in the blogosphere.

Attention to immigration on five major blogs from across the political spectrum was assessed in a separate analysis conducted for this report at University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication (See Note on Methodology). The five blogs were chosen because they rank among the popular in the sector, are produced by a single author or a small group of authors and have a clear political orientation. Nearly 14,000 posts appearing in the six months from February to June were examined, and for the five blogs the combined share of posts relating to immigration went from an average of 1.5 percent in February, March and April to 6 percent in May and 10 percent in June. Attention then fell back to 3 percent in July. However the average is misleading because of stark difference according to the blogs' political point of view.

On the liberal side of the spectrum, "Talking Points Memo" barely took note of the debate while the "Daily Kos" did increase its coverage but peaked at 9 percent in June. "Instapundit," which is usually identified as libertarian in spirit, spiked coverage but only to six percent. Meanwhile on the right, "Michelle Malkin" showed a jump to 20 percent in May and then 40 percent in June. Similarly, another conservative blog, "Powerline," surged to 13 percent in May and 17 percent in June.

Over the course of the entire year, immigration received four times as much attention from conservative talk show hosts than from liberals.

As will be discussed in more detail below, the advocacy journalists on cable and radio talk and in the blogosphere mirrored what was happening in Washington's more formal political arena. Most liberals and progressives backed the Senate legislation but with a variety of reservations about its major provisions. Meanwhile, most conservatives opposed it adamantly. Weak support met fierce resistance and the bill was defeated.

TABLE ONE | PERCENTAGE OF BLOG POSTS ON IMMIGRATION, FEBRUARY 2007 – JULY 2007

	DAILY KOS (LIBERAL)	TALKING POINTS MEMO (LIBERAL)	INSTAPUNDIT (LIBERTARIAN)	MICHELLE MALKIN (CONSERVATIVE)	POWERLINE (CONSERVATIVE)
February	3%	1%	0%	3%	1%
March	3%	4%	0%	5%	2%
April	2%	1%	1%	4%	1%
May	4%	2%	3%	20%	13%
June	9%	3%	6%	40%	17%
July	4%	1%	1%	23%	2%

Source: USC-Annenberg Content Analysis

The ideological differences in the coverage may also reflect another reality. Operating in a highly competitive atmosphere and still needing to build audiences, the new media of advocacy place a premium on attention-grabbing statements. The very nature of the media—broadcast talk and Internet posts—favor terse and intense expressions. As a result, these media sectors may be better suited for protest than for affirmation particularly when the subject is a complex issue that requires compromise in order to move forward.

In the middle of the 1980s, the 1990s and again in this decade, Washington has turned its attention to the same basic policy issues involving immigration controls and unauthorized migration. Each time, the political maneuvering and the formulation of policy options has developed quite openly for several years with relatively little attention from the media. Then, when votes are going to be cast, the media spotlight has turned to Congress. The evolution of the media, however, has helped produce wilder swings in the volume of coverage. Sudden spikes in coverage of the sort that occurred during the last round of policy debates are likely to alarm audiences rather than to inform them, conditioned as they are to associating surges in volume with short-lived, sensational events and illegality.

THE FEEDBACK LOOP

In 1980, when the number of unauthorized migrants living in the United States was less than a fourth of what it is today, John M. Crewdson of *The New York Times* earned a Pulitzer Prize for stories about abuses suffered by illegal aliens. The abuses came at virtually every level, from smugglers who snuck them into the country, to employers who exploited them, immigration officials who were incompetent and corrupt, and policymakers in Washington who struggled ineffectually to develop policies that

would control the illicit flow. Of the 12 other Pulitzer Prizes in journalism awarded since then for coverage related to U.S. immigration, all but two focused on illegal migrants or malfeasance in the way government dealt with the foreign born. As we shall see, these topics have dominated immigration coverage for nearly three decades, producing an overarching narrative of illicit acts and government's failed efforts to contend with them.

Like the penchant to ride waves of breaking news rather than cover the steady flows of demographic change, age-old predilections drive coverage to crime and malfeasance. Distraction and distortion have accumulated inexorably as these journalistic reflexes are applied to migration coverage decade after decade. As with the spikes in coverage described above, these tendencies in news coverage have become even more pronounced in recent years as the media have undergone a profound structural transformation. Since the rise of the penny press in the mid-19th century, crime has been an essential element of mass-market journalism. Even while taking a less sensational approach than down-market tabloids, the traditional mainstream news organizations that set norms in the 20th century made crime a regular and prominent topic in their news coverage. As new media forms developed, cable television in particular leaned heavily on crime, and in the competition for audience, this in turn influenced mainstream news. The continuous, breathless coverage of the O.J. Simpson saga on cable television in the mid-1990s was in the most egregious traditions of mass-market journalism, for example, and it prompted expansive coverage in newspapers and broadcast television. Thus, the old media and the new media sometimes appear to be operating in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop. Lines of causality are difficult to draw, but the increasingly episodic coverage of immigration as a whole and the emphasis on illegality may be examples of this process at work.

CNN's Lou Dobbs describes himself as an "advocacy journalist" and he makes no bones about disregarding the traditional norms of journalistic neutrality while hosting CNN's evening news broadcast.⁴ Since November 2003 when he launched his "Broken Borders" series, Dobbs has crusaded on the issue of illegal immigration with increasing intensity, reaching a crescendo during the 2006 and 2007 congressional debates with daily coverage. His focus on the illegal aspects of immigration is in keeping with tendencies evident in coverage by traditional news organizations over many years even if his explicitly biased approach to the subject, his lapses in verification and his haranguing style of presentation are obvious departures from the standards of journalism. Nonetheless, his agenda seems to have influenced coverage in traditional news organizations. Dobbs and other advocacy journalists on cable television, talk radio and the Internet have uncritically promoted fringe groups espousing get-tough policies on immigration, most notably the Minuteman Project.

Periodically over the years, going back at least to the early 1990s, irate citizens have protested illegal immigration with watchdog actions along the border with Mexico, sometimes shining car headlights on illicit crossers, or calling in sightings to the Border Patrol or actually trying to detain the migrants in some cases. Most have come and gone, attracting no more than passing notice. The Minuteman Project was one such group with no apparent base of support in any community or track record of political action when they suddenly began to draw national attention. Jerry Seper, a veteran reporter for *The Washington Times* who writes extensively about the restrictionist side of the immigration debate, seems to have given the group its first publicity with a story on January 24, 2005 about plans for a border protest in Arizona in the spring. Dobbs immediately picked up on the Minuteman

Project, giving it favorable, sometimes extensive coverage on twelve broadcasts over the next two months. Rush Limbaugh and others in conservative talk started paying attention as well, and before the Minuteman Project had actually done anything President Bush expressed his worries about "vigilantes" on the border stoking more talk.

When the protest was actually staged on April 1, turnout was below the promoters predictions—scores rather than hundreds turned up according to eyewitness press accounts. Nonetheless, the event generated a bounty of coverage by the traditional media, more than 100 stories in national and regional newspapers, airtime on evening television, the spectacle of satellite trucks lined up to see angry people in combat fatigues waiting, often vainly, for someone to run through the brush from south to north. Absent the attention and controversy generated by Dobbs and other advocacy journalists, it seems unlikely that traditional news organizations would have given so much coverage to a relatively small symbolic protest.

THE NARRATIVE OF ILLEGALITY

Unauthorized migrants accounted for a fifth of the foreign-born population in 1980. By the early 1990s, that share dropped significantly because the 1986 immigration reform law had provided amnesty for some 3 million of them, about 60 percent of the total. Since then, the unauthorized population has grown rapidly but so has the number of legal immigrants. As a result, the unauthorized now account for less than a third of the foreign-born population in the U.S. and that is a peak reached only in recent years.

However, the unauthorized segment of the foreign-born population has drawn an outsized share of the news coverage. Migrants who have

arrived outside of legal channels, whether it is by foot across the Mexican border or by raft across the Straits of Florida, have drawn much more coverage than those who have arrived with passports in hand. As a result, the cumulative portrait drawn by nearly 30 years of American journalism emphasizes illegal or uncontrolled migration rather than the much larger movement of people that has been legal and orderly. This emphasis on illegality applies not only to the means by which people enter the country but also to their activities once here. From prison riots by Marielitos in the early 1980s to murders committed by the Mara Salvatrucha street gangs in this decade, criminality by migrants has been another recurring and pervasive theme. People who break the law inevitably draw more attention from journalists than the multitudes who obey the law, and when those lawbreakers are identifiable as members of a group by virtue of national origin, race or nativity or all three, stereotyping is equally inevitable.

In addition, coverage of the government's role in regard to immigration has been dominated by efforts to devise and implement policies to control unauthorized migration. This coverage has overshadowed important legislation and policy processes in the realm of legal migration that have had much larger and longer-lasting effects on the nation. Like the overall emphasis on illegal migration, this has produced a distraction. Scant coverage of the laws, policies and bureaucracies governing legal migration has meant that the public has been less attuned to government's role in the epochal changes legal immigration has brought to all realms of American society. Instead of focusing on the policies and practices that have had the greatest impact—those regarding legal migration flows—the news media have been preoccupied, in both their breaking news coverage and in their enterprise and investigative reporting,

with efforts to control illegal flows. Thus, an element of distortion has also developed from coverage of government's role.

These conclusions are based on a content analysis that examined coverage by a variety of news organizations across the full time period under discussion here (See Note on Methodology). That coverage is very clearly dominated by various forms of illegality: unauthorized entry to the U.S. and efforts by the government to control it; criminal behavior by immigrants; and malfeasance or incompetence by immigration officials. For example, an analysis of 1,848 Associated Press stories on immigration topics from 1980 to 2007 showed that 79 percent fit into the framework of illegality. Of 2,614 stories on immigration in *The New York Times* over the same period, 86 percent dealt with illegality in various forms, and that included 83% of the coverage in Washington and 88% of the stories from elsewhere in the country. Of 381 stories about immigration on the "CBS Evening News" from 1990 to 2007, 87 percent fit the framework of illegality. And results from other news organizations show the same pattern.

One flaw in this body of coverage stands out: The story of legal immigration has been underplayed relative to the illicit flow. The arrival of tens of millions of foreigners over the past three decades through legal channels—their success and failures, their contributions and costs—has received only a fraction of the coverage accorded to the much smaller number of unauthorized migrants. Government policies and practices regarding legal immigration have also received a scant share of media attention. Even government failures have received less attention when they relate to legal immigration, such as persistent backlogs in processing citizenship and visa applications, than those involving illegal immigration. For example,

in 1990 Congress passed the first major revision of legal immigration statutes in 35 years, substantially increasing migration flow and changing its composition. It is legislation that from the start altered the face of America, and it continues to do so today. The Washington Post covered the debate leading up to enactment with a total of 2,078 words of news copy in four routine Capitol Hill stories; the bill's potential impact was not examined in Washington's newspaper of record until a week after it was passed. In contrast, when Congress produced a law dealing exclusively with illegal immigration in 1986, the Post published ten stories about the deliberations in the month prior to passage and seven follow ups in the immediate aftermath.

Our analysis shows that the framing on illegality in the traditional news media has been highly consistent going back nearly three decades despite substantial fluctuations in volume. In the pages of The New York Times, for example, the share of immigration stories focused on illegality held with a range of 76 to 96 percent for 24 of the 28 years examined, and in those four other years it never fell below 63 percent. The results were similar for the Associated Press, 24 years between 77 and 93 percent of stories related to illegality and four outliers.

A new element was added to the narrative of illegality early in this decade, and Lou Dobbs on CNN was its most notable proponent. Advocates of tougher enforcement measures have long castigated illegal migrants as a drain on public services, as economic opportunists willing to undercut wages, and as eroding the rule of law. Dobbs led the way in characterizing illegal migrants as threats to the health and safety of ordinary Americans, as a category of people who are not merely undesirable but who need to be expelled in order to preserve the nation. Dobbs is by no means an original thinker. He has aped some of

nativism's oldest tropes, but he has done it as the anchor of the flagship broadcast on a network that promotes itself as "the most trusted name in news." He has frequently used the language of conquest, an "army of invaders" to describe the migrants, and has described native-born U.S. citizens as "anchor babies," alleging incorrectly that having a child here will protect an illegal immigrant from deportation. Dobbs has accused unauthorized migrants with infecting the American population with a variety of diseases, including leprosy, and when confronted with factual errors on such accounts, as he was by Lesley Stahl during an interview for "60 Minutes" on CBS, he has been defiant, telling Stahl, "if we reported it, it's a fact." Dobbs, who has generated notable ratings gains for CNN, was subsequently given a slot by CBS doing weekly commentary on "The Early Show."

And, Dobbs has not stood alone. Bill O'Reilly on Fox News has repeatedly recounted crimes committed by illegal migrants as evidence of failed immigration policies, growing melodramatic at times as in an infamous shouting match with his colleague, Geraldo Rivera, in April 2007. "You want open-border anarchy; that's what you want," O'Reilly shouted when Rivera tried to argue that a drunk driver's immigration status was not relevant to his crime. Michelle Malkin, a prominent conservative blogger and Fox commentator, took the same tack in a January 2008 post that was headlined, "Twice-deported illegal alien criminal is Arizona serial rapist suspect: The bloody consequence of open borders, part 9,999,999."

This rhetorical assault on illegal immigration has been directed not only at migrants but also at the government and often in more vociferous terms. For example, in an April 2007 broadcast, O'Reilly framed illegal immigration as a massive betrayal by the public sector: "The founders created

government to provide that protection. But our governments generally have bowed to political correctness and are failing to protect us.” This argument has proved highly successful both in attracting audiences and arousing them in ways that has affected policymaking. Dobbs again offers a way to illustrate the development of this line of advocacy journalism.

As anchor of CNN’s “Moneyline” in the 1980s and 1990s, Dobbs played the sycophantic host to big business executives. When he talked about immigration, which was not very often compared to his more recent obsession, Dobbs often acted as transmitter for the business community’s general view of immigration as a necessary source of new workers. Then after the era of corporate scandals made it hard to treat corporate chieftains like glamorous and admired celebrities, Dobbs reinvented himself as a populist. As anchor of “Lou Dobbs Tonight” since 2003, he has made illegal immigration just one aspect of a broader critique of greedy businesses and failed government. In addition to “Broken Borders,” his running diatribes come with titles like “War on the Middle Class,” “Exporting America” and “The Best Government Money Can Buy.” As with other advocacy journalists, Dobbs uses the pose of a reporter uncovering facts in the public interest as a rhetorical device. His stories on illegal immigration often come with the suggestion that it suits hidden interests with conspiratorial schemes. He has repeatedly argued, for example, that the unauthorized flow is tolerated, even encouraged, because powers in Washington and in the corporate world have plans to surrender American sovereignty in a “North America Union” with Mexico and Canada. The absence of any evidence for this claim has not hindered its frequent repetition.

This kind of framing has a direct bearing on the way policy options are portrayed. When a bipartisan group of senators announced that they would propose a compromise bill on immigration in May 2007, thus opening the most recent round of congressional debate, Dobbs started his broadcast with this bulletin: “The pro-illegal alien and open borders lobby today winning what is an apparent major political victory. A bipartisan group of senators announcing a deal to give as many as 20 million illegal aliens amnesty. There are rising concerns tonight that that amnesty compromise could threaten national sovereignty and security, opening U.S. borders even further with Mexico and Canada.”

Washington has manifestly failed in its stated aims of controlling, let alone ending illegal migration. The size and continued growth of the unauthorized population attest to that. The key question about the framing of immigration coverage is not a matter of accuracy but of attitudes. Specifically one has to ask whether the coverage has heightened skepticism about immigration policy in a way that makes the enactment of new policies more difficult. As we shall see later in this report, there is abundant evidence from the most recent congressional debate that doubts about the government’s ability to control immigration became one of the major arguments against enactment of comprehensive reforms. Sen. John McCain put it simply, explaining why Congress failed to formulate a new policy in 2007: “Many Americans did not believe us when we said we would secure our borders, and so we failed in our efforts.” There is no ready means to measure how much journalism has contributed to this perception through the way it has framed a narrative of illegality. But it certainly has been a factor. So, too, has been another characteristic of the immigration coverage: misplaced protagonism.

MIGRANTS AS PERPETRATORS

A rich body of historical and social science literature has amply demonstrated that large-scale, continuous migrations almost always results from the interaction of many factors. These include individual will and motivations, but the causes of migration go far beyond the individual. At the simplest level, migration is the product of push factors—political, social, economic and environmental factors that cause people to want to leave their communities of origin—and pull factors—those that attract them to a given destination such as local demand for a particular type of labor. When a migration has developed over years, it can also generate its own momentum as migrants seek to reunite with their families and as economic ties develop between sending communities and their diaspora. Suffice to say that beyond oozing, immigration is multidimensional. And American journalism is no better suited to covering stories that are multidimensional than it is to those that develop gradually.

All storytelling, whether factual or fictional, is easiest when narratives can be constructed around the actions of a single person or a group of people. Narratives beg for protagonists, whether they are heroes or villains, victims or perpetrators. This imperative can have particularly perilous consequences when applied to a phenomenon like migration, and yet migration lends itself to simple narratives in which the migrant is the obvious protagonist. After all, moving from one country to another provides a clear plot with a beginning, middle and end. It is the kind of dramatic action that readily drives narratives, especially when it involves physical peril or acts of illegality or both. But, even though the migrants attract the spotlight, an excessive emphasis on them tends to obscure the many social forces that impel their actions. The result can be a deceptive oversimplification.

Taking account of all the factors that produce migration is, of course, beyond the scope of any single news story, but over an extensive body of work, one could hope to see a balance of the individual and societal factors. Instead, the impulse to develop narratives with migrants as the protagonists has proved irresistible for an entire generation of journalists. The story told repeatedly, until it has become a cliché, is of the individual migrating to seek a better life. Whether portrayed sympathetically or not, the migrant is the protagonist who determines the arc of the narrative. The nation or the community at the end of this arc—the destination for the migrant's journey—is a fundamentally passive party. When that narrative is repeated over and over again, an audience in that nation or community will come to see itself as a bystander. When migration is portrayed as the migrant's doing, then all the consequences of migration befall the migrant. And when perceptions turn negative, those consequences are all the migrants' fault and the receiving community will come to see itself as a hapless victim.

THE AGENTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

The predominant role given to immigrants in the journalistic narrative is evident in stories about demographic change, particularly those dealing with change in the racial and ethnic makeup of the U.S. population. Headlines regularly shout that the foreign born and Hispanics are becoming ever bigger shares of the U.S. population and that the nation is undergoing a fundamental shift in composition that could render whites a minority by mid-century. These statements are undeniably true, and they are the result of two distinct but equally important phenomena: the size of the newcomer groups is growing, and the historical populations are not. That is the dual dynamic that

is producing social change; it is important to take a moment with the demographic data to underscore this point. According to the Census Bureau estimates, the American population grew by 20 million between 2000 and 2007 and Hispanics accounted for half the growth.⁵ That is the story that generates coverage. But, there is another important statistic in those estimates that is essential to understanding the story. Non-Hispanic whites, numbering nearly 200 million only contributed 2 million people to the population growth by an excess of births over deaths. In fact, immigration by non-Hispanic whites was almost an equally significant factor, producing growth of 1.4 million people. But, in repeatedly reporting that Hispanics or the foreign born are becoming an ever greater share of the population, journalists have usually declined to mention that the share is increasing both because these populations are growing and because other populations are not. The coverage has focused only on the first factor, depriving this news of an essential element of context.

But, in repeatedly reporting that Hispanics or the foreign born are becoming an ever greater share of the population, journalists have usually declined to mention that the share is increasing both because these populations are growing and because other populations are not.

Increases in the numbers of Hispanics and foreign born have made a lot of news especially since the 2000 census captured a spurt of rapid growth in late 1990s. By contrast, a declining birthrate among whites and African-Americans is an old story, but it is just the kind of phenomenon that

oozes, accumulating impact relentlessly over long periods of time. By emphasizing only one of the two factors, the American media have given the false impression that the newcomers alone are bringing about the demographic change. Americans uncomfortable with this shift will naturally lay blame on those portrayed as the protagonists.

We examined coverage of three census reports that quantified the change in the nation's mix of peoples: the initial data releases from the 2000 census documenting the growth of the Hispanic- and foreign-born populations; a 2003 report showing that the number of Hispanics had outstripped the number of African-Americans to make Latinos the nation's largest minority; and a 2005 report projecting that non-whites would become a majority of the nation's population by 2050. The analysis examined stories produced by The Washington Post, The New York Times, USA Today, a sampling of 23 regional and local newspapers, the Associated Press, National Public Radio and the three broadcast networks. Of a total of 71 stories about the growing shares of newcomers, only 12 mentioned higher birthrates relative to the historical populations and none of them noted this fact any higher than the fourth paragraph. None of those 12 mentioned that birthrates among whites and African-Americans have declined over the period in which the immigrant population has been growing. And, in these number-heavy stories, only two of the 12 cited actual birthrate statistics. Fifteen other stories noted that the newcomers have high birthrates, adding to their population growth, but they made no mention of the lower birthrates among whites and blacks. The remaining 44 stories did not mention births as a factor in any way. The message in this body of coverage is that immigration is changing the face of the nation and that "they" are doing it to us.

LEAVING EMPLOYERS OUT OF THE PICTURE

Changes in the composition of the population relate to the effects of immigration. The same kinds of misimpression have been generated in coverage of the causes of immigration.

The migration narrative produced by American journalism has significantly undervalued the role the United States itself has played in stimulating and shaping the influx. In particular, media coverage has underplayed the importance of the U.S. labor market in determining the size and content of migration flows over many years. The foreign born in general, and especially the young males from Latin America who make up the bulk of the illegal flow, have among the highest labor force participation rates of any group, given that work is often their primary reason for being here.⁶ And, not surprisingly, the actual size of that flow varies from year to year according to demand for these kinds of workers. When employers need more workers during economic expansions, the flow increases; during economic downturns, fewer migrants come.⁷

Washington policymakers of both parties and across several administrations have recognized these realities—at least symbolically—since the onset of the new migration. The need to make the “jobs magnet” less attractive had been a prominent feature of federal debates about the control of illegal immigration since the mid-1970s. In 1986 Congress enacted sanctions against the employers of unauthorized migrants as the centerpiece of an enforcement strategy. Worksite enforcement has remained a central tenant of U.S. immigration policy, even though business lobbyists ensured that the 1986 law was written in a way that makes it impossible to enforce.⁸ In 1990, business associations played a highly influential role in shaping legislation to boost the flow of legal

immigrant workers, and in 1996 they helped defeat efforts to toughen employer sanctions.⁹

During the most recent debate, agricultural interests, the hospitality industry, builders and others worked hard to shape the various proposals considered by Congress. With support from the Bush administration, employers insisted that measures to crack down on the hiring of illegal workers be balanced by a program providing a substantial new flow of immigrant temporary workers. The efforts to strike a grand bargain collapsed in part because of disputes over the rules that would have governed the wages, freedom of movement and ultimate immigration status of these temporary workers. Following the breakdown of the debate, when the Bush administration launched an enforcement campaign to show it was serious about immigration control, the target became the migrants rather than the employers. Dozens of worksite raids have resulted in thousands of deportations, but as of this writing no major prosecutions have been brought against the employers who flaunted the law when they gave the workers a reason to come to the United States and the means to live here.

So employers play two important roles in the migration drama: in their individual, everyday decisions on whom to hire, employers exercise as much control over migration flows as federal immigration authorities—more control, actually, if you consider the illegal flow that circumvents the authorities. And, America’s employers, acting both directly and through lobbyists, have explicitly influenced the development of immigration policies over the past three decades to ensure a supply of foreign workers, including a sizable number outside the legal immigration system. Despite their importance, however, employers have been largely offstage and unseen in the migration drama as it has been portrayed by the U.S. media. Of course,

there have been important exceptions—excellent stories on specific industries, employers and the role of work in attracting immigrants—but our intent here is to understand the broad narrative that emerges from the bulk of the coverage. From that perspective, American journalism at best has not fully informed the public and at worst has misled it.

As with all media, the three broadcast networks ramped up their coverage of immigration in 2006 and 2007 when it became the subject of congressional debate. But even during this spike, employers drew little attention. An analysis of the 201 stories about immigration that were aired on the three broadcast networks' flagship evening news shows in 2006 and 2007 found that employers were quoted in only 12 stories. In contrast, immigrants were interviewed or made statements in 58 stories. On the policy side, only seven stories made mention of employer sanctions, and it was a minor element in most of them. Meanwhile, 29 of the stories on the evening news broadcasts were about the border and the federal government's failed efforts there.

This same distorted narrative, however, is also apparent in coverage that is set in the American communities and focuses on local issues.

Over the past two decades, a burst of extraordinary economic development and population growth in Northern Virginia has coincided with the rise of a new immigrant population, mostly from Central America. Established white, middle-class, suburban populations found themselves contending with rapid population change. In several communities, this produced widespread anxieties and some public displays of animosity toward the newcomers. In response, local governments have attempted to impose their own immigration controls with a variety of measures such as closing down day-labor hiring sites or denying public services to unauthorized

migrants. A similar course of events has played out in many other communities across the country.

An analysis of a sample of 312 articles published by The Washington Post from 2004 to 2007 on immigration controversies in Northern Virginia found that only 14 focused on the employment of immigrants or their economic impact, and only four out of the total that actually quoted individual employers. This omission from the vast majority of the coverage is all the more extraordinary because much of the controversy was about day laborers, and thus the migration issue was framed specifically as a matter of employment. Nonetheless, two lengthy stories charting the demographic and social impact of the new immigration on different communities failed to make any mention of migrants' employment at all. As the home construction industry collapsed, the Post ran a telling piece about how immigrants were leaving the area because their jobs were vanishing. The story quoted four migrants talking about their experiences, but it did not quote a single employer. The Washington Post had never paid much attention to the link between a booming economy and a sudden increase in the immigrant population before it found that economic hard times were causing some of the newcomers to leave. And along the way, attention was never focused on the people who hired the immigrants.

When employers are absent from migration narratives like the Post's coverage of the Northern Virginia controversies, a critical element of context is missing from the story. It is as if the audience was hearing only half of a conversation, or more appropriately, half of a transaction. The missing half is the part that explains the role that the audience, the community itself, has played in bringing about the migration to the extent it has benefited from the immigrants' employment. But

the coverage was focused elsewhere. While only 14 stories focused on employment, 62 focused on the reaction—most of it negative—that the immigrant influx and attendant controversies had provoked among residents, and 54 stories focused on the political impact. The bulk of the coverage—142 stories of the 312 assessed—focused on debates, decisions and actions by public officials. Thus, the policy disputes as they were worked out in governmental settings were the overwhelming focus of the coverage, outstripping employment, the primary cause of the influx, by a factor of 10 to 1.

Whether intended or not, the message of this narrative is that immigrants have provoked a crisis in public policy that is disassociated from any underlying social, demographic or economic

trends. Moreover, it is framed as a crisis that can be resolved by policies aimed primarily, if not exclusively, at the immigrants without addressing the larger dynamics that produced the migration. This kind of framing would be almost inconceivable on other issues. Imagine, for example, coverage of a policy debate over energy that did not prominently feature oil and automobile companies or coverage of a health policy debate that did not delve into the roles of hospitals, doctors and pharmaceutical companies. In the case of immigration, the media's failure to adequately provide context for the policy challenges has produced both lack of understanding and frustration with government's inability to resolve them. As we shall see, this dynamic contributed directly to the failure of the most recent efforts to produce new immigration policies.

ENDNOTES

¹ Passel, Jeffrey S. and Roberto Suro. "Rise, Peak and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992–2004." Pew Hispanic Center, Washington, DC, 2005.

² Elian Gonzalez did help make history tangentially. George W. Bush benefited in the November 2000 election from anger among Cuban-Americans in Florida over the Clinton administration's decision to take the boy away from his Miami relatives so his father could take him back to Cuba.

³ As quoted by Bobbie Bowman in "The 'Ooze News' Behind the News," Poynter Online, Diversity at Work, Poynter Institute, 2008, downloaded at <http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=58&aid=135770>.

⁴ Dobbs stated these views during an interview on "60 Minutes" by CBS News, which was broadcast on May 6, 2007. He used similar language during a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, DC on June 26, 2007.

⁵ Cumulative Estimates of the Components of Population Change by Race and Hispanic Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2007 (NC-EST2007-05). Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Release Date: May 1, 2008.

⁶ See for example the Pew Hispanic Center's series, "Latino Labor Report" for 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2008, available at <http://pewhispanic.org/topics/index.php?TopicID=32>.

⁷ Passel, Jeffrey S. and Roberto Suro. "Rise, Peak and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992–2004." Pew Hispanic Center, Washington, DC, 2005; Kochhar, Rakesh, "Latino Labor Report, 2008: Construction Reverses Job Growth for Latinos," Pew Hispanic Center, Washington, DC, 2008.

⁸ Cooper, Betsy and Kevin O'Neil. "Lessons from the Immigration and Control Act of 1986." Policy Brief, Migration Policy Institute, Washington, DC, 2005.

⁹ Suro, Roberto. *Strangers Among Us: Latino Lives in a Changing America*. Vintage: New York: 1999.

THE ROAD TO STALEMATE

GRAND BARGAINS AND A WEAKENED WASHINGTON

Using an extraordinary forum often associated with foreign crises, President Bush addressed the nation from the Oval Office on the evening of May 15, 2006, to press his case for immigration reform. Sitting behind the great Resolute desk hewn from the timbers of a British navy ship, he announced the deployment of 6,000 National Guard troops to help patrol the border with Mexico. Although it was a rare use of an Oval Office address on a matter of domestic policy, and the first ever on immigration, an air of crisis prevailed nonetheless. Despite progress, he said, “we do not yet have full control of the border.” But the emergency Bush faced that night was not along the Rio Grande or in the deserts of the Southwest, but on Capitol Hill.

“Tonight,” the president said, “I want to speak directly to members of the House and Senate.” Nearly two-and-a-half years had passed since Bush had unveiled his proposals in the East Room speech of January 2004. In the meantime, conservatives in his own party had gone into open revolt against his plan, with the House Republican leadership ramming through a tough enforcement-only bill in December 2005. That prompted hundreds of thousands of demonstrators to march through dozens of U.S. cities in the spring of 2006 in protest. And then, as Bush spoke, the Senate was considering a broader set of measures that included a version of the temporary worker program he had originally proposed. The legislative calendar required the Senate to act within a few weeks for there to be any

chance of reconciling the House and Senate bills and getting final passage before that Congress ended its term following the November elections.

Like many in Washington before him, Bush was trying to strike a grand bargain on immigration. In addition to sending troops to the border, he proposed several other enforcement measures aimed at mollifying conservatives—more high-tech sensors and Border Patrol agents to catch illegal crossers and more facilities for detention and deportations to send them home. To keep those on the other side of the debate onboard, he endorsed plans to offer a path to citizenship to unauthorized migrants of long residence in the country if they had jobs and clear criminal records and if they paid fines as penance for their wrongdoing. Border enforcement had gotten token attention in his initial proposals, and in 2004 he had not offered a legalization plan that clearly led to citizenship. In trying to forge a compromise, the president and his allies had to satisfy the vociferous factions on each side of the debate. Indeed, the political strategy behind comprehensive immigration reform was to create a big legislative package that included measures that separately would satisfy opposing factions with strongly held views rather than building a centrist proposal that would win majority support for all its elements. Each side had to get enough of what it wanted to let the opposition get what it wanted. But that has been the nature of U.S. immigration politics for a long time.

In its broad outlines, what Bush proposed was not unlike the bargain struck in 1986 or even the

deal-making behind the legislation passed in 1996. It was basically the old “close the back door, open the front door” strategy proposed by the Hesburgh Commission in 1980 when the new era of immigration was still young. But by 2006, much had changed. The migration had grown large, and over the years the illegal flow that had gained great momentum despite repeated proclamations from Washington that it would be brought under control. Moreover, the American public had been primed by events—from Elian to the post-9/11 roundups—and by media coverage to associate immigration with chaos and controversy. Finally, the media themselves had changed in ways that make it more difficult for Washington to resolve a public policy issue that requires a grand bargain. When views harden among opposing factions, striking such a deal can become impossible even if a majority wants to take action of some kind. That night in May 2006, Bush was trying to soften the hard edges.

... during the immigration debates of 2006 and 2007, key forms of alternative media—talk radio, ethnic media, partisan television and the blogosphere—played an outsized role.

As is customary, the White House scheduled an event the day after the president’s speech to try to build some political momentum. In this case, however, there was no town hall meeting in the heartland, no Rose Garden photo op with congressional allies. Instead, Vice President Dick Cheney made an appearance on “The Rush Limbaugh Show” to promote the immigration plan. The White House was aiming at the heart of the opposition within its own ranks and was using the forum most likely to communicate with credibility. Limbaugh was hardly a new phenomenon; he had

been a powerful influence within the Republican Party for more than a decade. But during the immigration debates of 2006 and 2007, key forms of alternative media—talk radio, ethnic media, partisan television and the blogosphere—played an outsized role. During those crucial days in May 2006 when Congress was debating the nation’s demographic destiny, President Bush used the most bully of all pulpits to make his case—an Oval Office address in prime time—knowing that the verdict would be rendered on AM radios in the middle of the day, through high-decibel punditry on dinner hour television and in late-night computer postings. And, it would all happen again, following the same script, almost exactly a year later during the 2007 debate.

The immigration debates of 2006 and 2007 starkly illuminate the rising influence of new media in federal policy deliberations, and the lessons learned are potentially applicable to other areas of policy as well. Talk radio, partisan cable TV and Internet punditry undoubtedly played a far greater role in this round of policymaking than in any previous immigration debate, and so this episode serves as valuable case study. It is historically convenient because the points of contrast are 10 and 20 years in the past, across technological horizons. And, while the media had changed, the public policy issues had not. The dilemmas facing policymakers were roughly the same as they had been in 1986 and 1996, albeit on a much larger scale. In 1986, for example, with newspapers and the broadcast networks as unchallenged sources of news, Washington wrestled with the terms of a legalization program for a population of about 5 million unauthorized migrants. Twenty years later, with the new forms of media exercising new kinds of influence, Washington debated another legalization program, this time with a target population of 12 million.

The recent immigration debates are also a ripe specimen because the political context accentuated the power of noninstitutional political players. Like so much else in Washington, immigration policy has been subject to aggressive intervention by a variety of interest groups with divergent aims. But on immigration, and much else, competing interests traditionally were mediated by institutional players in the executive and legislative branches and very often these competitions were resolved behind closed doors. During the immigration debates of 2006 and 2007, the institutional players were in a weakened condition, thus creating greater opportunities for some of the new players emerging on the media landscape.

The political figure most obviously in a diminished state was President Bush himself. Between the time of his East Room speech on immigration in January 2004 and the Oval Office address in May 2006, Bush's job approval ratings had dropped from 58 percent to 33 percent in Pew Research Center polls. There were many reasons for this decline. But even when he was a popular president, Bush had never been in a strong political position on immigration. Many Democrats and immigrants rights advocates attacked his 2004 proposal because it lacked a path to citizenship for unauthorized migrants. Moderate Republicans were largely indifferent to it, and conservatives decried it: The cover of the *National Review* rendered a simple judgment: "Amnesty, Again." In the midst of a re-election campaign, Bush could not risk alienating his base. The administration never proposed any specific legislation, never mounted a lobbying effort behind the plan. By spring, the temporary worker proposal was a dead letter.

When the second term began in 2005, Bush made an overhaul of Social Security his top domestic priority and utterly failed. The White

House then took aim at immigration in the summer of 2005, developing a proposal for a comprehensive bill and extensively briefing major players on its provisions. The goal was to launch a bipartisan legislative initiative shortly after Labor Day so a bill could be enacted before the end of the year. Events intervened, however. At the end of August, Hurricane Katrina produced a spectacle of death and destruction on the Gulf Coast and, with them, a lasting impression of government ineptitude. A few days later, William H. Rehnquist, chief justice of the United States, died at his home, setting off a nomination scramble over two slots because Justice Sandra Day O'Connor had earlier announced her retirement. Bush eventually nominated Harriet Miers, his personal lawyer and the White House counsel, to O'Connor's seat, but the nomination was rejected by the conservative wing of his own party. Meanwhile, the investigation over who leaked the identity of a covert CIA operative was reaching into the White House.

Congress, too, had a diminished capacity to control the policy debate on immigration. Republicans were riven by ideological infighting with the White House and a perceived political need to separate from a weakened lame-duck president as the off-year election approached. Moreover, a leadership transition was under way after the indictment in September 2005 of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay on campaign finance charges; "The Hammer" had been the party's disciplinarian in the chamber. Among congressional Democrats, meanwhile, caution was the watchword. The Democrats still ached over their party's narrow loss in the 2004 presidential election and looked forward to the 2006 vote as a chance for vindication. After they took control of both houses in that election, Democratic leaders had another worry: House freshmen from swing districts had to be protected from unpredictable controversies like immigration.

NEW MEDIA VOICES AND THE FIRST STALEMATE

Weakness in Washington opened a space for other political actors to define policy choices, and potent voices in the media began driving the immigration agenda among conservatives. As Bush began his second term, Rush Limbaugh, the self-appointed guardian of the conservative movement and host of the most popular show on talk radio, warned that immigration had the potential to split fatally the Republican Party. Like many other commentators on the right, Limbaugh did not attack Bush directly, even as the president tried to revive his temporary worker plan; instead, Limbaugh emphasized the need to secure the borders. A week after the inauguration, for example, Bill O'Reilly, the Fox News commentator, decried the "border chaos," threats to national sovereignty and identity posed by Mexican immigration, and the dangers of terrorist infiltration from the south. All were familiar themes to his viewers, but he essentially excused Bush for not taking action. "Well, you know, it's so politically charged that the Bush administration certainly is not going to do it, even though they've been re-elected," he said, "because ... the future of the Republican Party, according to their strategists, lies with Hispanic-Americans, and what they're doing."

As 2005 passed, stances toughened. In April, Limbaugh repeatedly praised a demonstration by the Minuteman Project and by August he was warning congressional Republicans that they would suffer politically if they did not take action on immigration enforcement. By October, Dobbs was criticizing Bush for, "21 months of silence on the issue of immigration reform," and chastising the Republican-led Congress for not taking up the issue. It was, he said, "a do-nothing Congress on the issues that really matter most to middle-class Americans." At the end of November, Bush took a

two-day trip to Arizona and Texas in which he promised more border enforcement, but O'Reilly painted the visit as a political effort to shore up his standing with conservatives and questioned his commitment to get tough. "The president has been intimidated by the far left," he said. And casting a wider net, O'Reilly declared, "You're going to have to take very drastic action against poor, pitiful people to stop this [illegal immigration]. And no politician in the country at this point is willing to do so."

House Republicans heard the message coming from conservative media and rushed through an immigration bill composed exclusively of enforcement measures just before they adjourned in the final days of 2005. The bill called for building 698 miles of additional border fencing at a cost of \$3.2 million a mile. It also would have broadly authorized local law enforcement officers to enforce immigration laws and get federal pay for doing it. Employers would be required to verify the immigration status of all workers, but bowing to pressure from business lobbies the bill did not require full enforcement of this provision for six years. The most controversial aspect of the legislation would have made it a felony to be in the country illegally and would have criminalized giving any assistance to an unauthorized migrant—even a meal from a soup kitchen. The author of the bill, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Jim Sensenbrenner, a Republican of Wisconsin, belatedly realized the enormous costs to the criminal justice system of providing jury trials for illegal migrants who are easily deported under existing law. He tried to remove the criminalization provision with a floor amendment but was blocked by Democrats who saw this outlandish feature as a poison pill that might eventually kill the bill.¹ What the Democrats had no way of foreseeing was just how provocative criminalization would be for the nation's immigrants and their allies.

On March 10, 2006, a crowd estimated variously between 100,000 and 300,000 people marched through the streets of downtown Chicago to protest the House immigration bill. Latino immigrants, their U.S.-born children, labor unions, church groups and immigrants' rights advocates massed together and demanded that the legislation be defeated. "We are not criminals!" marchers incensed by the bill's criminalization provision chanted repeatedly. And their accompanying threat—"Today we march, tomorrow we vote"—was aimed not only at Republicans but also at any Democrats who might want to avoid tackling the immigration issue. By May 1, similar scenes had been repeated in more than 120 U.S. cities with protests that involved more than 3.5 million people, according to estimates by the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.²

The marches represented not only one of the largest civic mobilizations in American history but also one of the least structured and most spontaneous, having been coordinated only loosely on a national level and having involved a variety of ad hoc coalitions in individual cities. The most powerful evidence for the spontaneity and lack of structure is that after the spring of 2006, several efforts to organize other marches failed to produce substantial crowds. No clearly identifiable leaders, organizations or political agendas emerged from all that activity. However, one enduring and growing institution played a central role in the immigrant marches: the Spanish-language media. The national television networks Univision and Telemundo, as well as dozens of local affiliates and hundreds of radio stations, promoted the marches and even offered explicit instructions to participants on how to behave. White T-shirts were the dress of choice, and U.S. flags were far preferable to those of the home country. In Los Angeles, for example, three

hugely popular radio hosts, Eddie "El Piolin" (Tweety Bird) Sotelo, Ricardo "El Mandril" (The Baboon) Sanchez, and Renan "El Cucuy" (The Boogeyman) Almendarez Coello, set aside rivalries and their penchant for raucous, often off-color humor to join forces behind the protests. They appeared together on the steps of City Hall to announce the date of the march, conducted repeated on-air interviews with organizers and then marched at the head of a crowd that stretched for 20 blocks.

... one enduring and growing institution played a central role in the immigrant marches: the Spanish-language media.

Just as conservative media powers outside of traditional journalism helped propel restrictionist legislation, the equally untraditional ethnic media helped block it.

Several major immigration bills had been introduced in the Senate in 2005, but serious maneuvering did not get under way until just after the immigrant marches began. As Washington was immersed in weeks of negotiations and debate, the protests gathered momentum around the country. Though many political factors were at play, the marches kept attention focused on the issue and kept up the pressure on Democrats to block the Sensenbrenner bill. In the midst of the debate, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the Massachusetts Democrat who was co-author of one of the major bills with Sen. John McCain, the Arizona Republican, addressed marchers who had filled the National Mall to assure them he would not back down. Weeks later, on May 25, 2006, a bipartisan coalition of 23 Republicans, 38 Democrats and one independent passed a comprehensive immigration bill through

the Senate. It included a legalization program that would cover most undocumented migrants, a temporary worker program and a series of enforcement measures. The ultimate fate of these provisions was uncertain because Republicans, who then controlled both houses of Congress, would dominate the conference committee where differences between the Senate and the House bills were to be reconciled.

... anxiety over illegal immigration increased during the Bush presidency much more among conservatives than among liberals or moderates.

The Latino radio hosts had countered the conservative talkers. The Senate had countered the House. In both realms, however, there was more rhetoric than reality. The day after the Senate passed its bill, Sensenbrenner rejected its key provisions. “The president is not where the American people are at,” he said at a news conference. Echoing the conservative media, he said the Senate’s legalization plan amounted to “amnesty,” and he predicted—correctly, as it turned out—that the House would never consider it. No conference committee ever attempted to work out the difference between the Senate and the House bills, and both eventually died. The House had said “no” to Bush, and then the Senate said “no” to the House. The result was a stalemate until the November 2006 elections produced a new Congress with fragile Democratic majorities in both houses. That set the stage for the next round of the debate.

STOKING ANXIETY AND DEFINING THE DEBATE

As discussed in E.J. Dionne’s accompanying essay on public attitudes toward immigration (See “Migrating Attitudes, Shifting Opinions: The Role of Public

Opinion in the Immigration Debate”) anxiety over illegal immigration increased during the Bush presidency much more among conservatives than among liberals or moderates. A March 2001, Gallup Poll found that 31 percent of conservatives said they worried a great deal about illegal immigration; by March 2005, it was up to 41 percent. This anxiety among conservatives continued to mount steadily, rising to 51 percent in 2006 and 54 percent in 2007, as Washington focused intensely on the subject. Anxieties among moderates increased as well, though less dramatically, from 27 percent who said illegal immigration caused them a great deal of worry in 2001 to 45 percent in 2007. Opinion among liberals changed less over the same period, with the share expressing a great deal of worry increasing from 23 percent in 2001 to 31 percent in 2007.

The nature of that anxiety, however, is fairly well focused. For most Americans, any problems with immigration lie with the policy, not the phenomenon. Their unhappiness is directed more toward government than toward immigrants. Consider that in a CBS–New York Times survey taken in May 2007, 49 percent of respondents said the immigration system needed to be completely rebuilt and 41 percent said it needed fundamental change³—that’s 90 percent favoring significant change. But in the same survey, most respondents held positive views of immigrants: 57 percent agreed that “most recent immigrants contribute to this country,” compared with 28 percent who said they “cause problems.”

When it comes to the options for changing the immigration system, public opinion surveys consistently show support for a combination of policies, in effect, a grand bargain. The May 2007 CBS–New York Times survey found that 62 percent of Americans favored a legalization program that would allow illegal immigrants living in the country

for two years to keep their jobs and apply for legal status, while 33 percent said such people should be deported. Opinion split by a similar measure in favor of a temporary worker program. At the same time, three-quarters (75 percent) of the respondents favored increasing enforcement on employers and raising fines against those who hire unauthorized migrants. Given a choice, two-thirds (68 percent) said that increasing the Border Patrol would be the most effective means to control illegal crossings, while 15 percent favored more fences instead. (The only immigration control legislation actually enacted during the debates of 2006 and 2007 called for building more fences and little else.)

Dionne's analysis shows that talk radio may have been a potent influence in strengthening resistance to legalization measures among conservative Republicans. This apparent influence from the new media landscape extended beyond simply underscoring the importance of immigration controls; it also encompassed the framing of the issue and the terms with which it was discussed. Moreover, the radio and cable TV hosts and the bloggers on the right helped boost organizations that promoted an agenda of more enforcement and less immigration by giving frequent favorable exposure to the leaders of such groups as Numbers USA, the Minuteman Project, the Federation for American Immigration Reform and the Center for Immigration Studies. These organizations, particularly Numbers USA, then mobilized their members to bombard Congress with faxes, e-mails and letters. Thus the conservative commentators and the pro-restriction groups created a highly effective echo chamber that reverberated on Capitol Hill.

The use of the term "amnesty" to describe a proposal that would grant any kind of legal status under any conditions to any individual who had entered the country illegally is perhaps the single most obvious

and successful tactic of pro-restriction advocates and their allies in the media in defining the terms of the debate. As noted above, the term was invoked as soon as Bush proposed his temporary worker program in 2004, even though the plan would have allowed only a limited number of unauthorized migrants to remain for a limited period of years and only so long as they were employed in jobs left unfilled by native workers. "Amnesty" was also wielded to brand the far different proposal in the final Senate debate of 2007 that would have provided a path to citizenship for unauthorized migrants of long tenure in the United States who met a number of conditions including payment of a fine for having violated the law on entering the country. For example, during the months of May and June 2007, at the height of the Senate debate on immigration, "Lou Dobbs Tonight" on CNN featured 42 lengthy stories on immigration, hammering the subject every day the show was broadcast. The term "amnesty" was used in every story. Over at "The O'Reilly Factor" on the Fox News Network, "amnesty" was applied to the Senate legislation on 18 of 34 stories about immigration broadcast during those critical months.

... radio and cable TV hosts and the bloggers on the right helped boost organizations that promoted an agenda of more enforcement and less immigration.

Bush and other proponents of a comprehensive bill were left to plead that their proposals did not amount to amnesty. In his Oval Office address to the nation, Bush said, "Some in this country argue that the solution is to deport every illegal immigrant, and that any proposal short of this amounts to amnesty. I disagree." He tried to convince the public that the Senate bill had struck "a rational

middle ground” between mass deportation and blanket amnesty. But for those Americans, primarily conservatives, whose opinions had been formed by the pro-restriction voices of the new media, Bush was posing a false distinction. It was also a losing proposition.

A UPI-Zogby Poll taken during the 2007 Senate debate found that 65 percent of respondents agreed that the legislation under discussion—a version of Bush’s middle ground—“represents amnesty for illegal immigrants.”⁴ Mississippi Republican Sen. Trent Lott said of the 2007 bill as it was headed for defeat: “Talk radio defined it without us explaining that there were reasons for it, and the good things that were in it.” Another Republican who supported the 2007 legislation, Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina was even more pointed in describing how harsh voices in the media and elsewhere set the terms for the policy discussion, “there’s racism in this debate,” he said. “Nobody likes to talk about it, but a very small percentage of people involved in this debate really have racial and bigoted remarks. The tone that we create around these debates, whether it be rhetoric in a union hall or rhetoric on talk radio, it can take people who are on the fence and push them over emotionally.”

The power of defining the legislation in these terms was evident in a Pew Research Center survey taken about the same time.⁵ Among Republicans, a solid majority of 62 percent said they would favor dealing with illegal immigrants already in the country by “providing a way to gain legal citizenship” if they met certain conditions such as passing a background check, paying a fine and having a job—essentially what the Senate legislation proposed. When the policy was described under the same conditions but using the term “amnesty,” only 47 percent of Republicans

said they favored it. Nonetheless, it is important to underscore that even with the amnesty language, Republicans were split evenly with 48 percent saying they opposed the idea. Moreover, among the public as a whole, clear majorities favored legalization regardless of how it was described, with 63 percent supporting a path to citizenship and 54 percent supporting the amnesty formulation. Allowing conservative commentators to define the issue was a significant tactical setback for proponents of comprehensive immigration reform, though the reasons for their ultimate failure were more complex.

STALEMATE, ACT II

After the Democratic victories in the November 2006 elections, quiet work got under way in Washington to revive comprehensive immigration reform by forging yet another grand bargain. By early spring 2007, intensive talks were taking place on detailed provisions. Kennedy and Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) led a bipartisan group of legislators who often met on a daily basis with Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. The political strategy, conceived largely by Kennedy, was to negotiate behind closed doors, free from the influence of the media. Then, once a deal had been reached by senators representing a broad spectrum of opinion, the bill would be taken directly to the Senate floor without hearings or a campaign of public persuasion. Kennedy hoped to minimize debate and amendments so as to produce a quick vote for enactment before outside forces could interfere.

On May 17, a Thursday, Kennedy, Kyl and their allies unveiled what would have been the most massive reform of immigration policy in more than two decades. It not only addressed all the pending

issues involved with unauthorized migration—guest workers, legalization and increased enforcement—but also proposed a profound change in the legal immigration system, introducing a “merit-based” system that would weigh potential residents according to their economic utility. The plan was to begin debate the following Monday and have a vote on passage before the Memorial Day recess at the end of the week.

The bill’s authors confessed its limitations as they presented it at a news conference. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the California Democrat, pleaded with her colleagues, “Please, please, please don’t let ... the perfect be the enemy of the good.” And, Kennedy, still confident that he could harness the Senate to compromise as in years past, said, “politics is the art of the possible and the agreement we just reached is the best possible chance we will have in years to secure our borders [and] bring millions of people out of the shadows and into the sunshine of America.” But, Kennedy also knew that the politics of immigration as they had evolved in a new media environment required him to move quickly.

Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), an opponent of the legislation, said Kennedy and his allies wanted to get the legislation passed, “before Rush Limbaugh could tell the American people what was in it.” As noted above, Limbaugh and others in the conservative talk media launched an unprecedented campaign to tell their audiences what they thought was in the bill and to rally opposition to it. Some of the figures from the Project for Excellence in Journalism report bear repeating: while the Senate debate was under way, Dobbs devoted 43.1 percent of his broadcasts to immigration, O’Reilly gave the topic 19.4 percent, and for conservative talk radio hosts it was 31 percent of their airtime in a relentlessly negative portrayal of the bill as a

reward to lawbreakers, and the corporate interests that thrive on cheap imported labor and elites bent on changing the nation’s identity.

Just ten days into the debate, Bush tried to respond to the media voices that had once been among his most loyal supporters. “If you want to scare the American people, what you say is the bill’s an amnesty bill,” he said May 29 during a speech in Glynco, GA. “That’s empty political rhetoric trying to frighten our citizens.” But it was already too late.

The quick-vote strategy fell apart almost immediately as it became apparent that the doubters in the Senate were as numerous as the bill’s provisions. The major attacks came from pro-labor Democrats who opposed the temporary worker program and from pro-restriction Republicans who immediately raised the specter of “amnesty.” Amendments proliferated, and advocates from every sector entered the fray. Restaurant owners, agricultural producers, high-tech businesses, unions, churches and ethnic advocates all pounded the Senate with pleas for their particular interests. Comprehensive reform failed on one vote June 7, and then staggered back to life a week later. In between, some provisions were altered in an effort to make the package palatable to conservatives, but the changes failed in that regard and caused further unease among some Democrats and immigrant rights advocates. On June 28 a motion to end debate was 14 votes short of the 60 necessary to move toward final passage, and the bill was dead. In the end, 15 Democrats joined 37 Republicans and one independent in killing it.

The grand bargain of 2007—so carefully crafted in private—died a death of a thousand cuts when it was debated in public. In trying to address virtually all aspects of immigration policy, it

became not a single defining compromise but a stack of compromises that had too many cross-cutting dynamics. Individual legislators and advocates found themselves trying to fix one or two provisions even as they tried to defend one or two others from alteration. Preventing the debate from devolving into running skirmishes over details would have required strong leadership in Washington. But Kennedy failed to hold key unions, especially the AFL-CIO, which opposed the temporary worker provisions, and Bush failed to hold key Republican moderates.

While the conservative talkers and bloggers roared, liberal commentators showed little appetite for the subject.

The battle for public opinion, however, was entirely one-sided. While the conservative talkers and bloggers roared, liberal commentators showed little appetite for the subject. Moreover, powerful interest groups that supported comprehensive reform, such as the major business associations and the Catholic bishops, largely confined themselves to Washington lobbying rather than aggressively promoting their own messages to counter Limbaugh, Dobbs and the others. The media blitz by the anti-amnesty, pro-restriction voices did not succeed in persuading a majority of Americans to embrace their views. As Dionne's analysis demonstrates, most Americans have consistently favored both tougher enforcement and some kind of legalization program for unauthorized migrants already in the country. In addition, most Americans express generally favorable views toward immigrants and reject the xenophobia that sometimes surfaced among opponents of comprehensive reform. But in 2007, the strident voices of opposition were not trying

to enact legislation; they were trying to block it, and in that they succeeded.

With the passage of the House bill in December 2005, the forces of restriction took the initiative and then they were stopped in the spring of 2006. A year later, proponents of generous immigration policies took the initiative, and then they were stymied. Both cases represented a triumph of "no" that resulted in stalemate. Although the circumstances differed significantly, common themes could be traced back to the way the media have covered immigration. One of those themes was articulated, albeit somewhat histrionically, by Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.), a diehard opponent of comprehensive reform, in the closing hours of the 2007 debate: "This immigration bill has become a war between the American people and their government. The issue now transcends anything related to immigration. It's a crisis of confidence."

Over the course of three decades, successive administrations and successive Congresses have failed to deliver on promises to control the border and to maintain a fair and orderly immigration system. So a certain lack of confidence on the part of the American people is justified. But getting past that skepticism to enact new policies that can remedy the situation has been made more difficult by a media narrative that episodically creates a sense of crisis that emphasizes illegality as the dominant characteristic of the migration story and that casts the public as hapless victims of immigrant newcomers, policy-makers and advocates. Add to that narrative the new forms of media that have the capacity to mobilize niche audiences in opposition to policy proposals that are characterized in the direct terms. Stalemate would seem to be the inevitable outcome unless political leaders are first able to

regain credibility on immigration and to restore, or at least to begin to restore, that lost confidence. This is the dilemma that will confront the new

administration and the new Congress when they tackle immigration. They should not expect any help from the media in any of its forms.

ENDNOTES

¹ See interview with Rep. Tom Tancredo, "The Charlie Rose Show," May 8, 2006.

² *Invisible No More: Mexican Migrant Civic Participation in the United States*, Bada, Xochitl, et al, editors, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC, 2006.

³ CBS–New York Times Poll, May 25, 2007, findings accessed from CBSNews.Com, "CBSPoll: Most Support Immigration Reform."

⁴ UPI–Zogby Poll, June 25, 2007, findings accessed from UPI, "Analysis: Poll data back talk-radio claim." United Press International, Washington, DC.

⁵ The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Democratic Leaders Face Growing Disapproval, Criticism on Iraq, Mixed Views on Immigration." Washington, DC, June 7, 2007.

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

USC-ANNENBERG CONTENT ANALYSIS— TRADITIONAL NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

This study employed content analysis to identify how immigration and immigration policy were framed in the U.S. news media between 1980 and 2007, and if the framing of these subjects changed over time. News media considered in the analysis included newspapers, news agencies, National Public Radio and the three national broadcast networks. A full listing of the news organizations and the periods for which they were studied is below.

The LexisNexis Academic Universe database served as the source for all of the analyses. The full body of coverage by individual news organizations over specific periods was searched using different combinations of search terms to generate the fullest possible sample of stories that primarily dealt with the subject of immigration. For example, the sample of coverage by The New York Times was selected based on a search specifying that the term “immigration” appeared at least five times in a search of the headline, the text of the article and the indexing of the subject matter by LexisNexis. Further filters were applied to limit the kind of publication. For example, coverage by the Associated Press was limited to stories published in the AM cycle only.

Stories from all news organizations were examined in the analysis of the volume of immigration coverage. All stories from The New York Times, the Associated Press, USA Today, the CBS Evening News and the three television broadcast networks’ evening news shows in 2006 and 2007 were further analyzed in

detail to determine whether illegality was the frame of the story. Each story was filtered to determine whether the dateline was from the U.S. and if not whether it related directly to immigration to the U.S. Stories were individually examined and coded to determine whether the primary focus fell into the category of illegality according to the following criteria: The major topic of the story related to unauthorized entry into the United States by persons from abroad, government efforts to control unauthorized entries, crimes alleged to have been committed by foreign-born persons or by immigration officials, or the activities of illegal migrants in the United States. In the case of large samples drawn from regional newspapers and news services automated searches utilizing keywords and NexisLexis indexing terms were used to determine whether stories were coded as having a framework of illegality.

Subsamples drawn over limited time periods were further coded to determine whether a specific subject was involved such as the Elián González saga during 1999 and 2000. Articles published by a selection of news organizations in 2006 and 2007 with an illegality frame were further coded for the use of one of the following illegality “sub-frames”: policy development by the executive branch, Congress, or the courts; federal policy implementation; state and local policy development and implementation; pro-, anti-, or mixed public opinion; electoral politics; and migrant experiences. Additional analysis was conducted on coverage by the broadcast networks to categorize the persons quoted.

TABLE ONE IMMIGRATION COVERAGE BY TRADITIONAL NEWS ORGANIZATIONS EXAMINED IN THE USC-ANNENBERG CONTENT ANALYSIS

NEWS ORGANIZATION	PERIOD EXAMINED	ELIGIBLE SAMPLE SIZE	FILTERS
The New York Times	1980-2007	2,859	National Desk
Associated Press	1980-2007	1,939*	AM Cycle
Regional Papers:	1991-2007	6,370	Atlanta Journal Constitution, Boston Globe, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, San Francisco Chronicle
News Services:	1997-2007	3,760	Copley, Cox, McClatchy
USA Today	1992-2007	715	
CBS News	1990-2007	381	CBS Evening News
National Broadcast Networks: CBS, NBC, ABC	2006-2007	201	Evening news broadcasts
National Public Radio:	1992-2007	1,288	Morning Edition and All Things Considered

* Because of the large volume of content drawn from the Associated Press, a sample was constructed by randomly selecting 25% of the articles, or 1,939, from the total population of 7,757.

In addition, the coverage of several specific episodes such as the Minuteman Project protests in Arizona in 2005 and policy-making on immigration by local governments in Northern Virginia from 2004 to 2007 were examined by drawing samples from selected news organizations and by searching with terms related to the specific stories in question.

USC-ANNENBERG CONTENT ANALYSIS—POLITICAL BLOGS

The data for this analysis came from all blog posts made in the six month period between February 1, 2007 to July 31, 2007 on five, well-known political blogs: Daily Kos, Instapundit, Michelle Malkin, Powerline, and Talking Points Memo. The blogs were selected according to three criteria: They are among the most popular political blogs. The primary posts are generated by a single author or a specific group of authors. Together the five represent the spectrum of public opinion. A total of 13,769 posts were

examined and of these 545 were identified as discussing issues relating to immigration.

First, a word search was conducted for each post to determine whether the words “immigration” or “immigrant” appeared in the post. If the words did appear, the number of times they occurred in the post was recorded. Post length (number or words), time, author, and title were also recorded. Once a post had been identified as containing the words “immigration” and/or “immigrant”, it was more closely examined to see whether immigration was a central topic of the post of just a passing reference. If one of the terms appeared in the title or first paragraph of the post it was automatically coded as an “immigration post”. If the terms did not appear in the title or first paragraph, the post was more closely examined to determine whether or not immigration was a key theme. Examples of posts that were not coded as pertaining to immigration are posts where the term immigration

was used as a descriptor with no further elaboration of the term (i.e. John Smith, an immigration lawyer....) or references to immigration policy in countries other than the United States. However, the majority of posts containing the words

“immigration” or “immigrant” were coded as “immigration posts.” A total of 571 posts contained the terms “immigration” or “immigrant” and of these 545 were coded as “immigration posts.”

TABLE TWO USC-ANNENBERG CONTENT ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL BLOGS

	DAILY KOS (LIBERAL)	TALKING POINTS MEMO (LIBERAL)	INSTAPUNDIT (LIBERTARIAN)	MICHELLE MALKIN (CONSERVATIVE)	POWERLINE (CONSERVATIVE)
Total Sample	2594	2799	5547	1132	1697
Immigration Posts	109	55	101	176	104

NEWS COVERAGE OF IMMIGRATION 2007

A POLITICAL STORY, NOT AN ISSUE, COVERED EPISODICALLY

BANU AKDENIZLI

In a year dominated by the war in Iraq and the 2008 presidential campaign coverage, how much media attention did immigration receive? Which aspects of the immigration issue did the media most tune into? What was not covered? And who provided the most coverage?

As comprehensive news coverage of 2007 from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) shows, the war and the presidential election consumed nearly a third of the overall newshole.¹ And the debate over U.S. immigration policy was able to secure itself a position within the top 10 stories of the year. It was the fourth biggest story overall for 2007.

However, a closer look into the data shows that immigration coverage for the year 2007 was not consistent, but episodic. Analysis of a year in the news of immigration comes from PEJ's in-depth analysis of news coverage of 70,737 stories for the entire year of 48 media outlets across 5 media sectors. Below are some of the key findings specific to immigration:

- American media did not cover immigration as a topic continuously. "Media's tendency to flood the zone with instant coverage and then quickly drop the subject," as stated in PEJ's State of the News Media 2008 report, was also seen in immigration coverage. An overall look into all media sectors shows that immigration as a topic² in the first four months of the year was below 2%. A sudden surge came in May and June in which the numbers for immigration jumped to 6.1% and 7.6% respectively. And then for the rest of the year it went back to the 2–3% range. The surge in immigration coverage coincided with the May 17 announcement of the compromise bill among the Senate and the White House and its defeat on June 28.
- Talk hosts both in cable and radio sectors played a major role in the media's coverage of the immigration bill. For the period of May 17 – June 28, immigration policy coverage was highest among conservative radio talk hosts and cable TV talk hosts, with 31% and 18.5% respectively. Some argue that the nation's talk hosts had an important role in the demise of the immigration bill. As stated in our earlier weekly index reports "it's impossible to document how many votes they changed or how many calls and emails they inspired, but derailing the bill certainly was a major priority of such conservative hosts as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Michael Savage." This also showed how immigration as a subject became more political in nature.
- A look into the breakdown of immigration stories in 2007 reiterates the political character of coverage. Fully 54.2% of the newshole of all immigration stories considered in this study were on legislation discussion. The second largest category (27% of the news space studied)

was a miscellany of events: such as Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on illegal immigrants, and a variety of human interest stories, including one about Elvira Arellano, who took refuge in a church in Chicago.

- With the growing Latino population in the U.S., some forecast that immigration will become a larger part of presidential campaign debates. But in 2007, during which most of the presidential election coverage was dominated by horserace politics, immigration received only minimal coverage within the campaign. Out of 5,657 presidential campaign stories, only 75 of them related to immigration.
- As stated in PEJ’s State of the News Media 2008 report, overall, newspapers and network television—when compared to the more opinionated platforms of talk radio and cable television news—have a broader and more diverse news agenda. This was evident in the case of immigration coverage as well. While immigration policy coverage skyrocketed in May and June for talk radio and cable, immigration as a topic was consistently present within newspapers signaling an effort to track immigration as a subject that ebbed and flowed throughout the year.

Throughout 2007, the news agenda was dominated by a few major general topic areas. As stated in the State of the News Media 2008 report by PEJ, “coverage of U.S. foreign policy and U.S. politics and elections accounted for almost one-third of the overall newshole for the year.” Immigration as a topic came in after business coverage at 2.8% of the overall newshole.

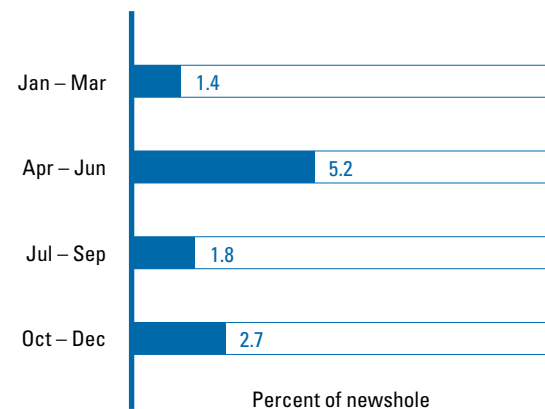
A closer look into the immigration coverage timeline across the year and media reveals how, as

a topic, it was not only covered episodically but also in political terms. While coverage was pretty much low but steady throughout the year, the spike to 5.2% for the second quarter of 2007 shows how immigration as a topic received more coverage when it was political.

As illustrated in Chart Two, the year in the news was dominated by two continuing story lines, the presidential election and the Iraq war, they dominated nearly a third of the overall newshole in PEJ’s analysis of news media. Immigration as a top story was at number four with 2.9 %. Yet this number is a bit misleading.

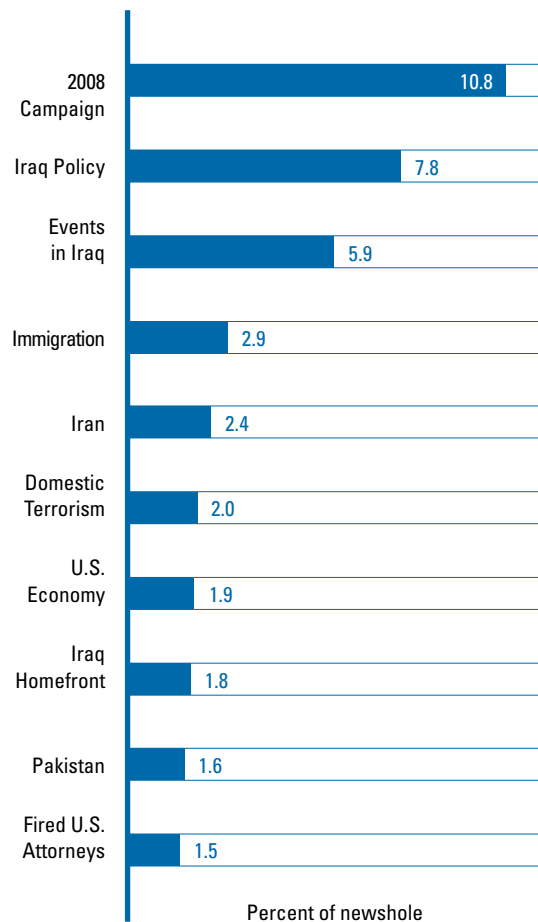
A month by month look into the trajectory of immigration as a big story revealed that coverage was marked by episodic spikes, rather than being continuous. A jump in May to 5.3% and in June to 8.4% of the overall newshole for all media demonstrated once again that immigration was not covered as a topic but primarily a politicized subject. The breakdown of the immigration big story also illustrates how coverage mostly centered around the discussion of legislation.

CHART ONE IMMIGRATION TOPIC TIMELINE OVERALL MEDIA 2007



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

CHART TWO TOP 10 STORIES FOR ALL MEDIA, 2007



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

While immigration received modest media attention in the first three months of 2007, it emerged in the second quarter of the year to become the biggest domestic policy issue. The debate over U.S. immigration policy, which included an unsuccessful effort to pass a major immigration reform bill in the Senate, was the fourth biggest story overall in the quarter, filling 5.7% of the total newshole.

Coverage of immigration during that time increased

dramatically in every sector. More specifically, coverage increased sharply between May 17 and June 28 coinciding with the time frame of the birth and death of the immigration bill. Coverage of immigration across all media was the number one topic in the news. With 9.2% of the news space studied for that particular time period, immigration was able to secure first place ahead of the presidential campaign coverage at 8.9%. Let us consider this specific time period in more detail.

IMMIGRATION BILL COVERAGE

On June 24, the Associated Press ran an article titled “Talk Shows’ Sway on Immigration Rises,” arguing how national talk show hosts have spent months denouncing the bill as providing amnesty for illegal immigrants. The New York Times and The Washington Post ran similar articles highlighting how talk radio personalities “put the issue on the front burner.”

One of our Talk Index reports spotlighting immigration summarizes the timeline of the immigration bill in the following way:

On May 17, the Senate and the White House announced a compromise agreement on a wide-ranging bill attempting to deal with the nation’s troubled immigration system. The measure was backed by the President and some senators, mostly Democrats, but generated opposition from both the right and the left. Forty-two days later, on June 28, the legislation died in the Senate despite an energetic White House effort to save it.

As mentioned previously, during this time immigration was the top story followed closely by the presidential campaign coverage across all media. This was also the case in individual sectors. Coverage of immigration increased dramatically, finishing as the top story in newspapers (8%); at

fourth place online (4.2%); the third biggest network story (6.1%); the second biggest cable story (11.9%); and the biggest radio story (17.4%) between May 17 and June 28.

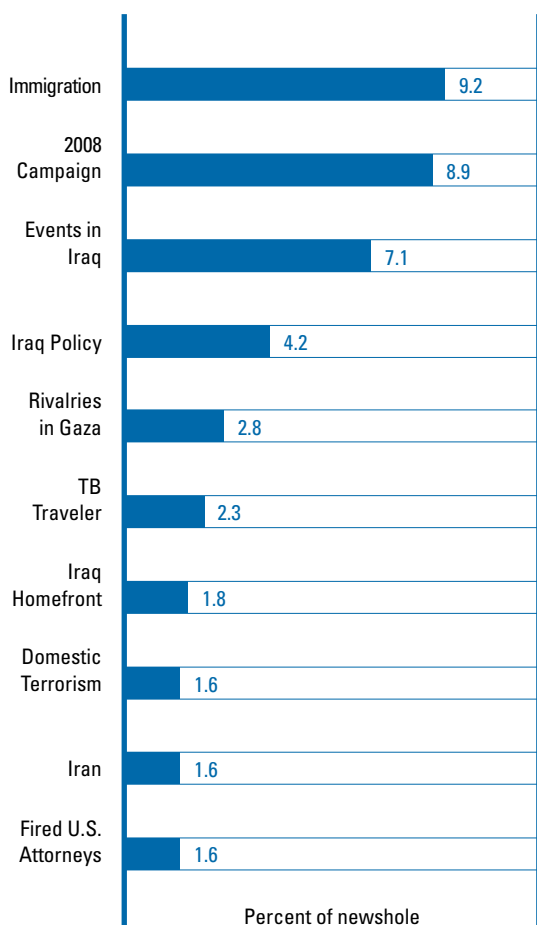
The higher numbers in cable and radio could be attributed to the talk hosts in both sectors. Within our studies at PEJ, we try to capture the media universe of talk and opinion with our Talk Index which includes seven prime time cable shows and

five radio talk hosts. Here we will treat them separately. First the cable talkers.

Cable TV Talk

Our universe of cable talkers include the following: Lou Dobbs from CNN; Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity & Alan Colmes from Fox; Tucker Carlson, Keith Olbermann, Chris Matthews, Joe Scarborough for the first half of 2007 and Dan Abrams for the second half of 2007 from MSNBC.

CHART THREE TOP 10 STORIES FOR ALL MEDIA MAY 17 – JUNE 27, 2007



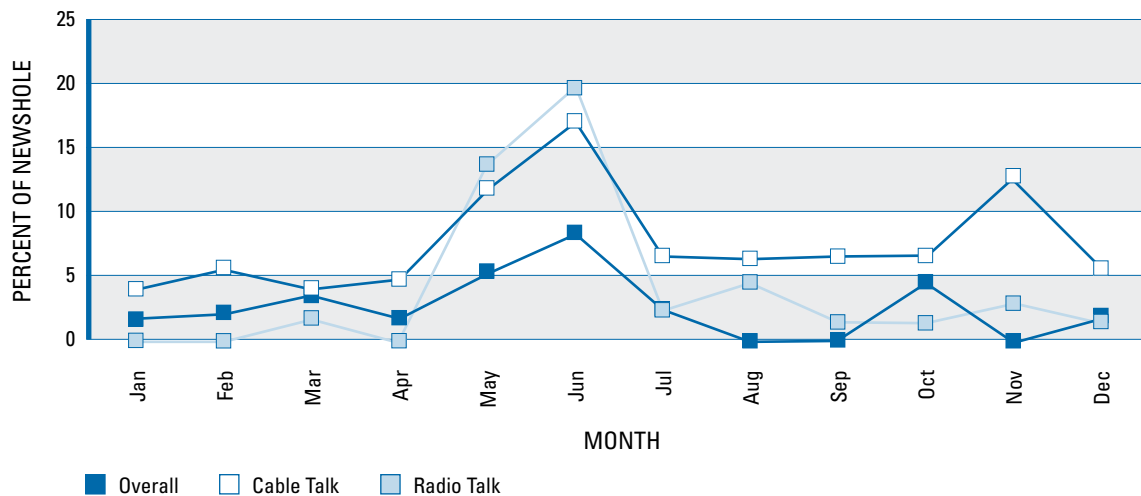
Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

Overall the cable news agenda is measurably different than other media. As stated in PEJ's State of the News Media 2008 report, "the focus on prime time is talk, and tends toward the political and the controversial. More than any other medium we have studied, the definition of news differs depending on the outlet."

For 2007 in cable TV talk, immigration was the third biggest story for the year at 7.4% of the newshole, following presidential campaign coverage at 21.1% and Iraq policy debate at 13.6%. For the period between May 17 and June 28, we see immigration at 18.5% of the newshole at second place right after presidential campaign coverage at 21.1%. Also during this period, 20% of the time immigration was the lead story of the program. Immigration coverage spiked in May and June in comparison to the rest of the year.

The news agenda on cable to some extent depends not only on the channel but also on the host of the program. Among all the cable talkers, the one who was most clearly devoted to the cause of immigration was CNN's Lou Dobbs. While throughout the whole year immigration was the number one story at 22%, during this specific time it skyrocketed to 43.1% of the time studied on Dobbs. Besides offering a timeline of the immigration bill

CHART FOUR IMMIGRATION BIG STORY TIMELINE 2007, OVERALL VS. CABLE TALK VS. RADIO TALK



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

debates within the Senate, Dobbs openly criticized the bill as an amnesty bill for illegal aliens in the country, pointed out how the bill would cost taxpayers a lot of money, and emphasized the need for better border security, which according to him was not a part of the proposed bill. He also was critical of George Bush, Ted Kennedy, Michael Chertoff, Lindsay Graham, Trent Lott and their stance on immigration. The night the immigration bill failed, Dobbs began his program with these words: “Tonight the crushing defeat for President Bush and the Senate’s Democratic leadership on amnesty, a glorious victory for the American people.”

Immigration in 2007 was a bigger story for Bill O’Reilly on Fox than it was for Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes. While for the year it was the top story at 11.4% of the newshole for O’Reilly, immigration ranked sixth at 2.5% for Hannity & Colmes overall. During May 17 – June 28 immigration continued to be the top story for O’Reilly at 19.4%.

For Hannity & Colmes, however, the increase was more significant. Immigration became the second biggest story during that time, occupying 16.5% of the newshole. During this time, O’Reilly offered his opposition to the bill, but in comparison to the rest of the year did not go beyond his usual fare of immigration coverage, which mostly seems to focus on illegal immigration, immigrant crime, raids and rallies. Hannity & Colmes’ coverage on immigration during this time seemed to center more on outlines of the bill and interviews with experts and pundits on the provisions in the immigration bill.

Among cable channels, MSNBC is the one trying to position itself as the “place for politics.” This is to some degree evident in its programming. While Tucker Carlson and Chris Matthews devoted 43.8% and 40.9% of their newshole respectively to campaign coverage, Keith Olbermann was more concerned with Iraq war policy (23.8 % of the newshole) for 2007. This did not change for the

period from May 17 – June 28; these same topics continued to dominate their agenda. Campaign coverage for Chris Matthews was at 48.5% (immigration was at fourth place with 5.1%). For Olbermann, immigration as an issue was not even in the top 10; he continued to devote his time to Iraq policy and campaign coverage. Tucker was the only MSNBC host studied that showed some interest in the bill. Immigration coverage was at number two at 18.8% after campaign coverage (39.9%).

Radio Talk

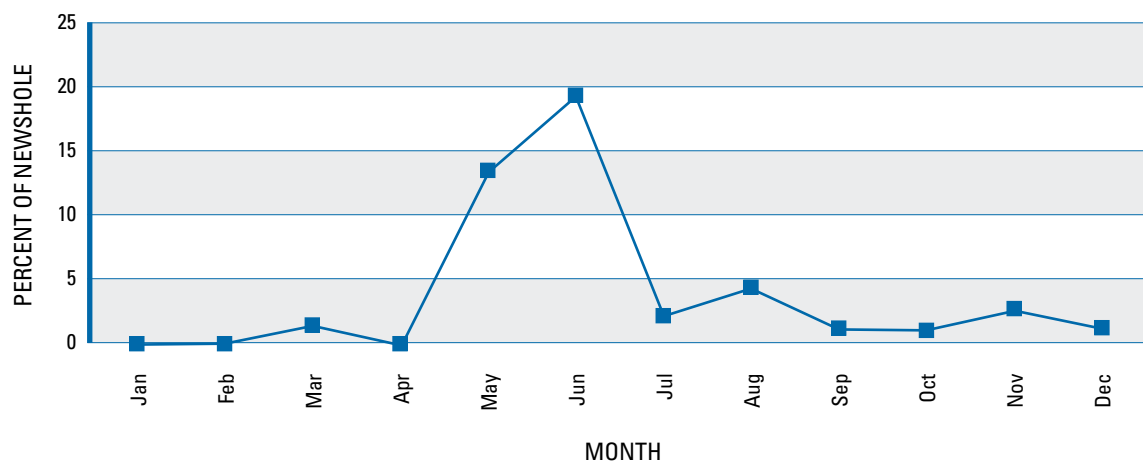
As we state in our State of the News Media 2008 report, “one of the most striking characteristics of talk radio is its tendency for hosts to seize on the news and amplify those events.” Immigration policy coverage accounted for 22 % of the newshole for talk radio during May 17 – June 28. Analysis of this time period underlined the ideological differences between the conservative and liberal talk radio hosts. Conservative radio hosts devoted

31% of their newshole to the coverage of immigration, while their liberal counterparts paid little attention. Immigration ranked at sixth place with only 3.6% of the newshole for this period among liberals.

Conservative talkers Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Michael Savage were highly critical in their coverage of the immigration bill. Rush Limbaugh on May 18 accused democrats of trying to destroy America. He also was highly critical of Trent Lott for supporting the immigration bill and his attack on talk radio saying, “Talk Radio is running America, we have to deal with that problem.” The “drive-by” media, as Limbaugh likes to reference (i.e. the liberal media), also was on the receiving end of criticism for their coverage of the immigration bill. Limbaugh more than once criticized The New York Times for push polling on the issue.

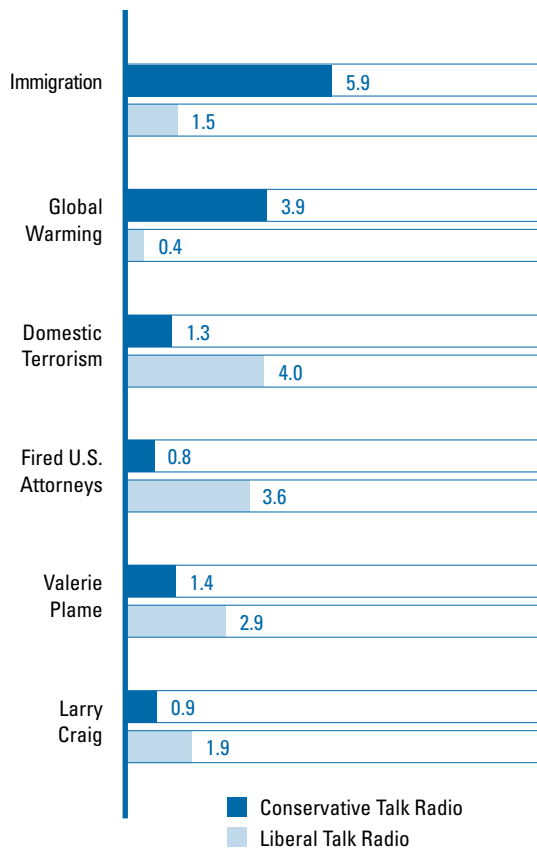
In his coverage of the immigration bill, Sean Hannity—like Limbaugh—labeled the bill as an amnesty bill, and throughout the period continued his attack calling the bill “a disaster on many

CHART FIVE RADIO TALK BIG STORY TIMELINE 2007



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

CHART SIX STORY SELECTION 2007, CONSERVATIVE VS. LIBERAL



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

levels.” On June 7, he said the amnesty bill was not dead yet but was on its way, a victory for conservatism.

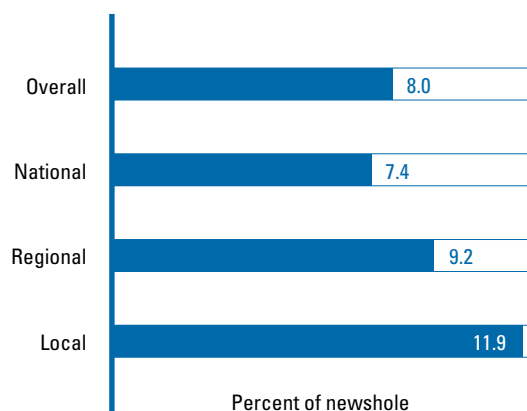
Michael Savage, the wildcard among conservative talkers, was more explosive in his coverage of the immigration bill. On May 17, he called Bush a traitor and a sellout for his stance on immigration and he likened the wave of immigration to the Alamo, proclaiming, “We are not giving away the sovereignty of America.” On June 28, he opened his program with bells tolling for the death of the immigration bill.

Immigration coverage was not on the agenda of liberal talkers Ed Schultz and Randi Rhodes. In fact, for the whole year, Randi Rhodes did not devote any time to the topic of immigration in the hours studied. When Ed Schultz commented on the demise of the immigration bill, it was to say that the bill should have included checks and balances, and to declare his support for the guest worker program. The ideological division between the conservative and the liberal talk radio hosts was clear on this issue.

Newspapers

The immigration debate was the biggest story for newspapers in May 17 – June 28, filling 8% of the front page newshole studied, closely followed by campaign coverage at 7.5% and events in Iraq at 7.1%. The emphasis in print is greater than it first seems, considering our analysis includes only the front page articles of national, regional and local papers.³ What was most striking about newspapers’ coverage during this specific period was that, besides offering the timeline for the immigration bill within the Senate, they also highlighted some aspects that other forms of media seemed to overlook. For example, The New York Times on May 20 offered the immigrants’ point of view on the bill in an article entitled “Illegal Migrants Dissect Details Of Senate Deal.” On June 25, The Washington Post spotlighted how individual states were cracking down on illegal immigration as a response to the stalled immigration bill with an article entitled “Illegal Immigrants Targeted By States; Impasse on Hill Spurs New Laws.” The Los Angeles Times on May 27 actually provided details of the proposed immigration legislation and explained how the bill was pulling the GOP in two directions in “Immigration Debate Puts Up a Wall in the GOP; Pursue Latino Voters or Please the Party’s Base? The Senate Overhaul Bill Reveals a Split on What Political Road is Best for Republicans.”

CHART SEVEN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE MAY 17 – JUNE 28, 2007



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

At the regional and local level there was evidence to suggest there was more coverage in high profile immigration states such as Texas and California. Immigration was the top story for local papers during May 17 – June 28 at 11.9% of the newshole; for regional papers it was the third biggest story at 9.2% (for national papers immigration was the second biggest story at 7.4% of the newshole).

The Boston Globe article dated June 5 drew attention to the fact that if the bill passed, newly legalized immigrants would be contributing \$26 billion to the U.S. economy over a decade. The Albuquerque Journal spotlighted the labor shortage in New Mexico and immigration law limitations with “Finding a Way to Solve State’s Shortage of Workers” on June 10. On June 29 after the bill failed, the Bakersfield Californian ran an article on local reaction to the Senate’s rejection of immigration reform. The Chattanooga Times Free Press had an array of articles on: the lack of local support for the bill on May 29 with “Immigration Bill Draws Opposition from Area Lawmakers” and then on June 26 with “Immigration Bill Lacks Area Support in Senate;” local employers’ cautious

approval of the guest worker program in the immigration deal on May 25; and on June 24 localizing the context of the bill with “Bush’s Immigration Zeal Has Texas Roots.”

IMMIGRATION BILL COVERAGE: SPANISH VS. ENGLISH LANGUAGE MEDIA, A BRIEF COMPARISON

There is evidence, too, that the English-language media differ significantly in coverage of immigration from Spanish-language media. This year at PEJ, as part of the larger ethnic media analysis within our State of the News Media 2008 report, we conducted a snapshot study of the coverage in the leading Spanish-language television networks and three major papers and compared that with similar English-language press from one key period in 2007, June 25-29, the week the immigration bill died in the U.S. Senate. This to some degree allowed us to see how Spanish vs. English-language mainstream media covered the immigration bill.

PEJ examined Spanish-language network national evening news on the two major stations, Telemundo and Univision, and compared it to evening network news on the major networks, ABC, CBS and NBC. For print, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post were compared to three Spanish language newspapers, El Diario-La Prensa, La Opinión and El Nuevo Herald.

The study found that ABC, NBC and CBS covered the issue substantially less. In total there were eight stories during this period. What they did produce was given high prominence with most—six out of the eight—among the first three stories aired. By comparison, Telemundo and Univision aired a total of 18 stories focusing on the immigration bill during the same period. Of these stories, 14 aired as one of the first three segments.

In print, there was more continuity between the English-language and Spanish-language press. As stated in our study, “overall, the English-language papers had more stories but gave them less prominence than the Spanish-language papers. The three English-language papers ran a total of 37 stories during the five days (pretty evenly distributed among the three) while the Spanish papers ran 22. The majority of the English-language stories fell in the inside pages—23 out of 37. Just 14 made page 1. The Spanish-language papers, on the other hand, ran 15 of the 22 on page 1.”

By and large, as our analysis suggested, “during the week the immigration bill died in the Senate, consumers turning to Spanish-language media for their news probably came away with a different perception of the meaning and impact of the defeat. They learned about angles not focused on in much of the English-language media, heard from different people and, especially in broadcast, often heard what the reporters themselves felt about the situation.” The English-language media tended to focus on the politics of the bill, the winners and the losers in the Senate. The Spanish-language press focused much more on immigrants themselves and the possible ramifications of the bill within the ethnic community.

Now that we have considered the specific case of the immigration bill coverage, let us look into how much coverage immigration received across media sectors in general.

IMMIGRATION COVERAGE ON CABLE TV

An analysis of 17 cable shows, 885 hours of cable news, with a total of 22,823 stories for the year 2007 revealed that immigration filled 4.8% of the overall newshole, third after presidential campaign (15.2%) and Iraq policy (10.2%) coverage.

Time of day is an important element to consider in cable TV news agenda. During the night, cable’s talk hosts fill prime time with stories they choose to amplify. During the day, the audience is more likely to see stories on crime, accident, disaster and breaking news events. This was the case in immigration stories, too. While most of the immigration stories on nighttime cable centered around policy and legislation discussion, during the day the audience was more likely to see immigrant crime, rally and protest stories. Live May Day rallies from Chicago and Los Angeles on CNN Live; ICE raids and illegal border crossing stories on MSNBC Live and Fox Live were some of the typical examples of the day fare.

The English-language media tended to focus on the politics of the bill, the winners and the losers in the Senate. The Spanish-language press focused much more on immigrants themselves and the possible ramifications of the bill within the ethnic community.

In the year 2007, immigration policy discussion did not make the top 10 stories list for CNN Live. By contrast for CNN evening, it was the biggest third story of the year at 8.5%, in part due to Lou Dobbs’ efforts. For MSNBC, the case was different. Immigration was not in the top 10 stories for evening programs, but was present in daytime at 3.5% of the newshole as the fourth biggest story overall, right behind the death of Anna Nicole Smith. Immigration was present both on daytime and evening for Fox but in different doses. During daytime it was the overall ninth biggest story of the year with 1.7%; and for the evening it was the third biggest story at 5.0%, due in part this time to O’Reilly’s coverage of the issue.

Overall, as also stated in the State of the News Media 2008 report, “MSNBC focused itself around Washington, the campaign, and political scandal, often with an eye sharply critical of the Bush administration. Fox was more oriented to crime, celebrity and the media than its rivals. And CNN tended by degrees to devote somewhat more time across a range of topics.”

The somewhat similar evening newscasts of Fox—Special Report with Brit Hume and Fox Report with Shepard Smith—differ in their rundown of the day’s news. While Smith’s is somewhat more oriented toward a mix of crime, disaster, accidents, with a marked dose of celebrity and entertainment, Hume’s program is focused on politics and government. This was reflected in their coverage of immigration as well. While for Smith, immigration was not a part of the top 10 stories of the year, for Hume it was at number five, filling 4.2% of the newshole studied overall. Besides the failed immigration bill coverage, stories on Hume’s nightly

news were mostly on state-level immigration legislation news and immigrant crime.

It is also important to note that presidential campaign stories on the topic of immigration primarily received coverage within cable. The GOP debate in which Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani clashed; then-NY Governor Eliot Spitzer’s attempt to provide driving licenses to illegal immigrants and the subsequent stance or lack of stance by Hillary Clinton on that issue; and John McCain’s “flip flopping stance” in regards to immigration were some of the topics.

RADIO

The role of talk radio in immigration policy discussion was largely covered in our section devoted to the immigration bill. Here we will briefly consider what radio news headlines had to offer on immigration in 2007. Almost all stations offered some summary of the news. For this we analyzed ABC

TABLE ONE TOP STORIES 2007: NEWS RADIO HEADLINES VS. TALK RADIO VS. MEDIA OVERALL

RANK	NEWS RADIO HEADLINES ONLY		ALL TALK		MEDIA OVERALL	
	Topic	Percentage	Topic	Percentage	Topic	Percentage
1	Iraq Policy Debate	7%	2008 Campaign	17%	2008 Campaign	11%
2	Events in Iraq	5%	Iraq Policy Debate	12%	Iraq Policy Debate	8%
3	U.S. Economy	3%	Immigration	4%	Events in Iraq	6%
4	2008 Campaign	2%	Global Warming	3%	Immigration	3%
5	U.S. Domestic Terrorism	2%	Iran	3%	Iran	2%
6	Iran	2%	Domestic Terrorism	2%	U.S. Domestic Terrorism	2%
7	Fired U.S. Attorneys	2%	New Democratic Congress	2%	U.S. Economy	2%
8	Iraq Homefront	1%	Valerie Plame Investigation	2%	Iraq Homefront	2%
9	VA Tech Shooting	1%	Fired U.S. Attorneys	2%	Pakistan	2%
10	Gas/Oil Prices	1%	Events in Iraq	1%	Fired U.S. Attorneys	1%

Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

and CBS headline news every day of the week at 9 AM and 5 PM: four headline segments each day which roughly made 20 minutes of radio headline news.

In general for 2007, radio news headlines from CBS and ABC were in many ways solid supplements to the narrow and selective talk news agenda. In general, they offer an impressively broad if quick look at the day's events. What is absent is depth, any kind of nuanced analysis or comparison of multiple angles on any given issue.

When it came to immigration in 2007, immigration coverage was confined mostly to May and June, which coincided with the immigration legislation discussion in the Senate. And even then, immigration was only able to secure 0.5% of the newshole of radio headlines.

NEWSPAPERS

What was unique about newspapers' coverage of immigration policy was that—much like cable—it devoted somewhat continuous coverage throughout the whole year. Immigration coverage was present, albeit in various degrees, throughout 2007.

National newspapers such as The New York Times, Los Angeles Times and The Washington Post stood out most in their coverage of immigration. Not only did these newspapers offer detailed coverage of the failed immigration bill, but also offered stories on immigrant life and immigration legislation and discussion in general. All immigration stories in national papers were covered by internal staff.

An important sign of the local nature of immigration was that smaller newspapers devoted their own staff to covering this issue. As we noted in our yearly report, “for major national news stories, local and metropolitan papers tend to rely on the wires,

especially the front pages.” But this was not the case in the coverage of immigration in 2007. At the mid-level, 82.3% of coverage on immigration was from staff reporters versus about 51.7% of Iraq stories and 78.9% U.S. economy stories. At the most local level, 65.3% were written by internal staff compared to 47.6% of presidential campaign, 29.3% Iraq, and 53.5 % of U.S. economy (see Chart Eight).

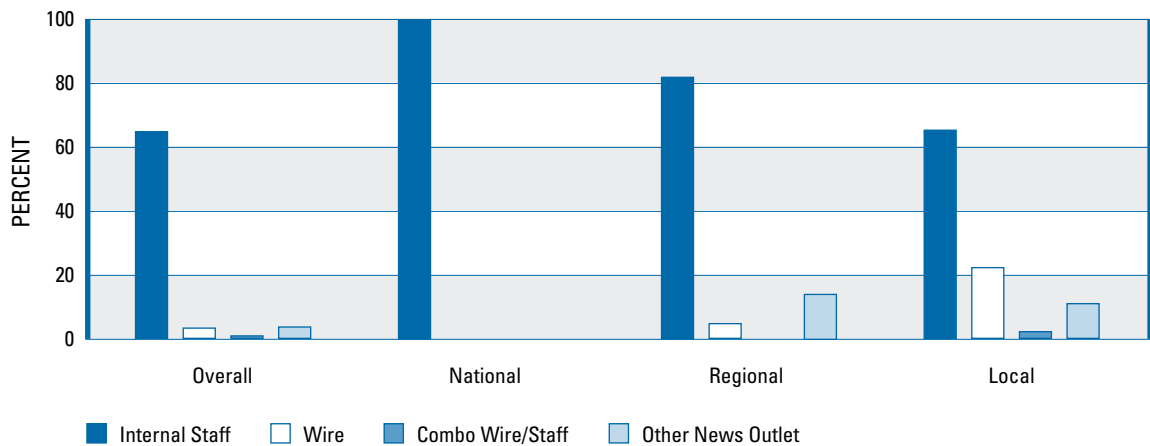
NETWORK TV

For this section, three network's weekday nightly newscasts, and the first 30 minutes for the weekday morning shows were considered. This represents about 27,600 minutes of news in 2007.

The most striking finding is that, overall in 2007, immigration was not among the top 10 stories for any of the networks except during May and June, which coincides with the immigration legislation discussion in the Senate. In May, it was the fourth biggest story (with 4.4% of the newshole), and in June it was the third biggest story (with 5.5%). Both network morning and evening news were more concerned with the coverage of the presidential campaign, the war in Iraq and the U.S. economy.

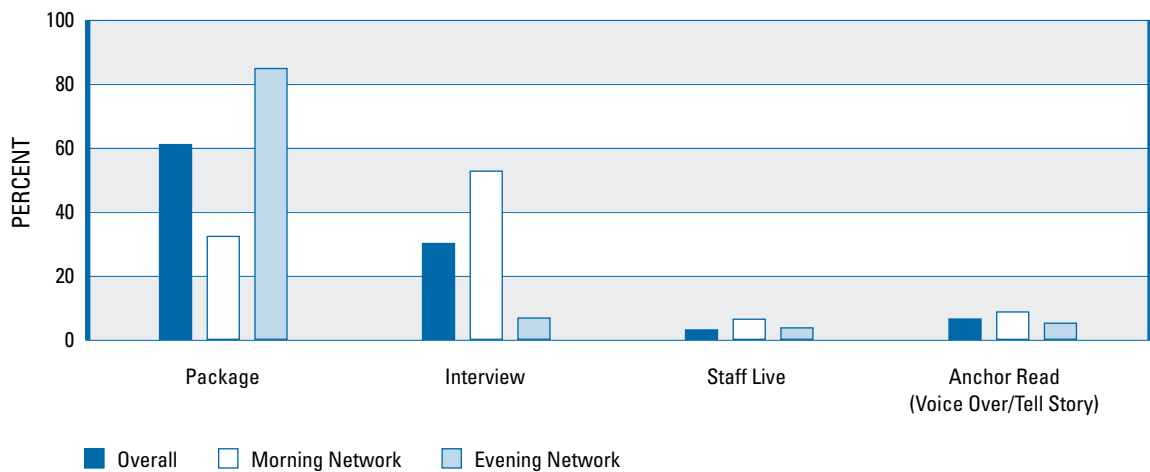
Network nightly news compared to cable and network morning is, “where viewers can see stories that have been checked and edited, where the words from the correspondents have been carefully written rather than spoken from quick notes, where producers and correspondents have discussed the content of the stories, and the pictures and the words have been carefully matched in an editing room.” Our yearly content analysis of news showed that for 2007, correspondent packages made up 82% of the time on the nightly newscasts. This was the case for immigration stories as well: 85.2% of the time immigration stories

CHART EIGHT HOW NEWSPAPERS COVERED IMMIGRATION 2007



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

CHART NINE HOW NETWORK TV COVERED IMMIGRATION 2007



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

on nightly news were correspondent packages, and 6.5% of the time they were interviews. Immigration stories on the morning network news were interviews more than half of the time (52.9%) as opposed to packages (32.5%).

ONLINE

For this section we considered the lead news coverage every weekday on five of the most popular news sites on the Internet: AOL News, CNN.com, Google News, MSNBC.com and Yahoo.com.

As we also stated in our State of the News Media 2008 report:

Overall, the lead news agenda online was the most international of any media we studied. At least in their top five stories, which is roughly analogous to the number of stories found on a front page of a newspaper and generally describes the number of stories featured at the top of the Web page, the leading Web sites studied put a premium on international news that far outweighed any other medium. Fully 25% of the top coverage dealt with non-U.S. international stories. This was nearly six times that of cable (4%), three times that of commercial network evening news and the network morning news (8%), nearly twice that of newspapers (13%), and about 60% more than radio news programming (15%).

Therefore, it was no surprise to see that some domestic topic areas and specific news got less prominence online. A monthly look at online coverage for immigration found that, it was part of the top 10 list only in May and June, and was absent for the rest

of the year. In May, it was the sixth biggest story with 2.6% of the newshole, and in June it was fifth biggest story with 4.7%. Overall, immigration was the 12th story of the year at 1% of the online newshole.

Overall among the websites, immigration made it into the yearly top 10 story list only on CNN.com. It was the seventh biggest story for the year at 1.8%. This can be in part attributed to the fact that the CNN.com homepage mirrors to a certain degree the news tendencies of its cable counterpart. Lou Dobbs' commentary pieces on immigration appeared on CNN.com at least five times during the period from March to November.

As we mentioned in our State of the News Media 2008 report, "both AOL and Yahoo use wire services for more than 90% of their lead news coverage on their sites, most of it coming from the Associated Press. Google News, on the other hand—a site that produces no original content—had 17% of wire stories and 82% of the coverage was original reporting by the cited news organization." For CNN.com,

TABLE TWO TOP STORIES FOR ONLINE SITES 2007

1	Events in Iraq	11%
2	2008 Campaign	7%
3	Iraq Policy Debate	6%
4	Iran	3%
5	Pakistan	3%
6	U.S. Economy	2%
7	Afghanistan	2%
8	Domestic Terrorism	2%
9	Fired U.S. Attorneys	2%
10	Israeli/Palestinian Conflict	2%

Source: PEJ, A Year in the News 2007.

most of the stories were by internal staff reporting (61%) and wire reports (32%). For MSNBC.com, 54% of the lead stories came from the wires. Overall the same pattern was evident for immigration stories across these news websites. Most of immigration stories online were wire stories (44.3%) while 27.4% of the lead stories on immigration were internal staff reporting and original reporting by the cited news organization (also at 27.4% of the online newshole).

CONCLUSION

The story of immigration in the news in 2007 was mostly a political one. The immigration agenda in the news was narrow. More than half of the stories of the news space studied pertained to legislation, most of it a particular bill in the Senate. The fuller picture of immigration issues with all its complexity tended to be covered in print more than in other media. In 2008, this trend toward political controversy might continue. We might well expect immigration to be more prominent in presidential campaigns. In 2007, during which most of the presidential election coverage was dominated by horserace politics, immigration received minimal coverage within the campaign. Out of 5,657 presidential campaign stories, only 75 of them related to immigration. But with the growing Latino population, it would be of interest to see if immigration as an issue will become a bigger part of the campaign rhetoric in 2008.

One important trend many scholars draw attention to is the relation between economic uncertainty and attitudes toward immigration as an issue. Usually, the intensity of feelings toward immigrants and immigration is closely related to economic conditions. As we noted in our annual report, in January 2008, economic concerns rose significantly to rival the war in Iraq as the top problem facing the country. At the same time, it also began driving the presidential primary debates and became a top issue influencing the primary vote. Studies show opposition towards immigration usually rises in periods of recession. It would be of interest to see if this will be reflected in the news media coverage of immigration, especially now that it appears U.S. economy perils/ worries coverage is growing within the English-language media.

In the more qualitative assessment of the news on immigration, a trend of national security concerns influencing the attitude toward immigration seemed to stand out. The portrayal of the immigrant was more likely to be that of an outsider. Further content analysis on frame and tone could provide detail on how news media in the U.S. give meaning to immigration as an issue. Here we provided you with how much attention immigration received across five media sectors in the U.S., which aspects of immigration received more reporting, and by whom most of the coverage was provided.

ENDNOTES

¹ Newshole is defined as the time or space available in an outlet for news content.

² For an explanation of the distinction of immigration as a topic and immigration as a big story please refer to the methodology section of this report, which can be found at <http://www.brookings.edu>.

³ In our sample the national papers are The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, USA Today and Los Angeles Times; the regional papers are the Boston Globe, Star Tribune, Austin Statesman and the Albuquerque Journal; the local papers are the Star Beacon, Bakersfield Californian, Sun Chronicle and the Chattanooga Times Free Press.

MIGRATING ATTITUDES, SHIFTING OPINIONS

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC OPINION IN THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE

E.J. DIONNE, JR.

Americans regularly change their minds about immigration. While certain political and demographic subgroups are fairly constant in their opinions, overall attitudes can shift sharply in response to changes in the economy, fears of terrorism, organized media campaigns, the way the issue is framed and the centrality of the issue to debates in Congress.

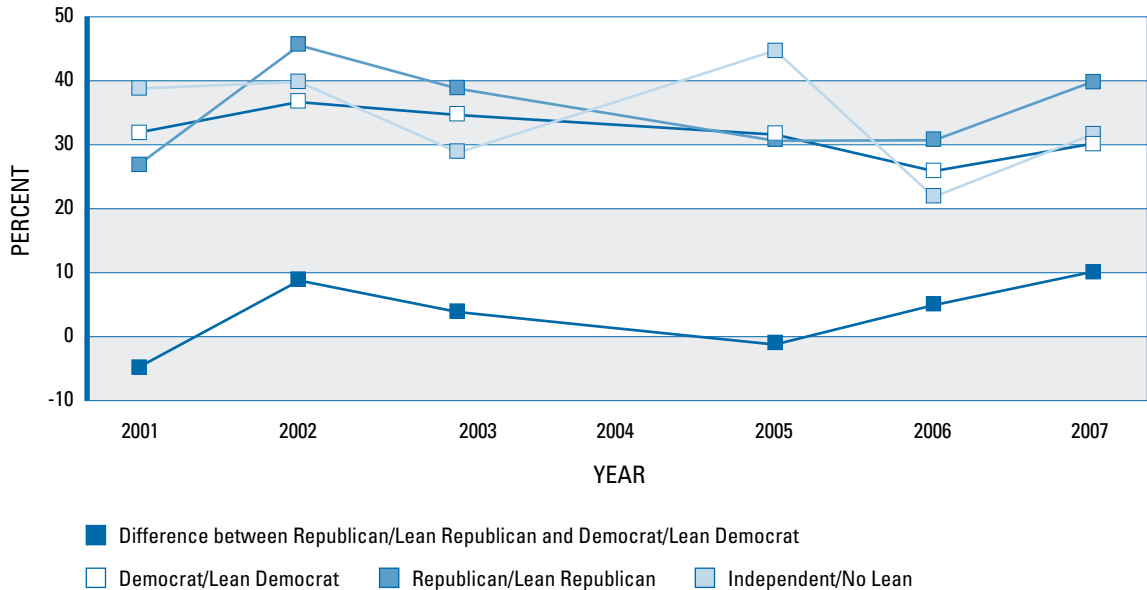
On the whole, immigration is not at the top of the list of concerns for the vast majority of Americans. It occasionally breaks through as an important issue, but that almost always happens in response to outside stimuli. And on the rare occasions when worries about immigration have reached double digits, it was still less important to voters than problems related to war and peace and economic well-being. Precisely because immigration tends to be a major issue for only a modest minority of voters, relatively small groups can disproportionately influence the debate. So can media figures who choose to make immigration one of their central causes.

One of the most important changes in public opinion over the past decade is the rise of immigration as a specific concern for conservatives and Republicans. While conservatives and Republicans have, over time, been somewhat more sympathetic to restrictions on immigration than liberals and Democrats, this issue has not until now been defined by the usual divides of ideology and partisanship. Indeed, conservatives have been split on immigration. Free market, libertarian and business-oriented conservatives gravitated toward a more open or permissive view, and cultural conservatives toward a more restrictionist view. Liberals with strong ties to organized labor have sometimes favored more

restrictive policies (with an eye toward pushing up wage rates by increasing the competition for labor) while other liberals (Latinos notably, but also cultural liberals, civil libertarians and, more recently, leaders in the service-oriented parts of the labor movement) have sympathized with more open policies. If the two dominant ideological groups split within themselves, so, too, have Republicans and Democrats. At times of economic stress, opposition to immigration has increased among liberals and Democrats, again reflecting their concerns over job opportunities and wages.

But there is evidence that the link between restrictionist views on immigration and Republican political identification has strengthened during the Bush years, despite President Bush's advocacy of immigration reform. For many years, Gallup has asked its respondents: "On the whole, do you think immigration is a good thing or a bad thing for this country today?" In the first year of the Bush presidency, as Chart One shows, Democrats were slightly more likely than Republicans to see immigration as "a bad thing." Then came two noticeable spikes in Republican opposition to immigration. In June 2002, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the proportion of Republicans with a negative view of immigration soared. The post-9/11 reaction

CHART ONE AMERICANS ON IMMIGRATION (PERCENT BY POLITICAL PARTY WHO SAY IMMIGRATION IS BAD FOR THE COUNTRY)



Source: The Gallup Organization, Inc. The surveys were conducted in June 4–24, 2007; June 8–25, 2006; June 12–18, 2003; June 3–9, 2002; and June 11–17, 2001.

against immigration was much stronger among Republicans than among Democrats or independents.

For much of the rest of the Bush presidency, negative views of immigration among Republicans declined. Then came the second sharp rise in June 2007, just as the debate over the immigration reform bill was raging in Congress. As we'll see in a moment, there is evidence that the shift among Republicans was related to the energetic advocacy of a restrictionist position on conservative talk radio. The general, if irregular, trend toward greater hostility to immigration was captured in other surveys as well. For example, the Pew Research Center found that the proportion of Americans who view immigrants as a burden to the country has grown. In 2000, 38 percent agreed that "immigrants today are a burden on our country because they take our jobs, housing and health care." This sentiment rose to 52 percent in 2006.

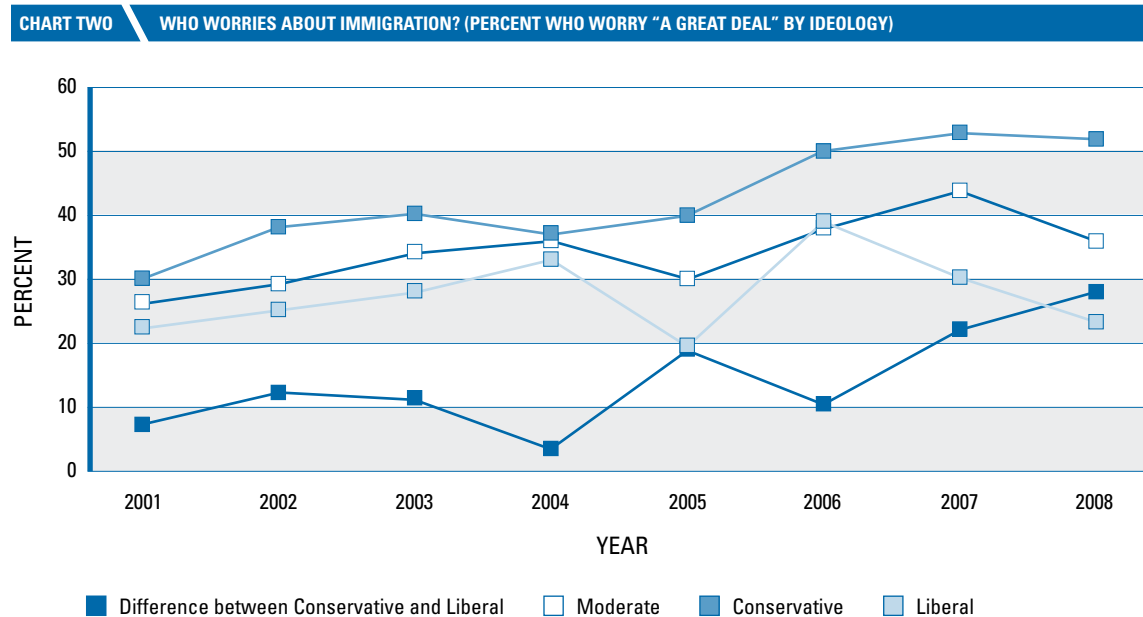
Chart Two suggests a steady increase in concern over immigration on the part of conservatives through the years of the Bush presidency. In Bush's first year in office, there were only modest differences among liberals, moderates and conservatives on a Gallup question asking respondents whether they personally worried about immigration "a great deal, a fair amount, only a little or not at all." In March 2001, only 31 percent of self-described conservatives said they worried a great deal about immigration, compared with 27 percent of moderates and 23 percent of liberals.

The proportion of conservatives worrying a great deal about immigration reached 53 percent by March 2008 (comparable to a peak of 54 percent in 2007). By contrast, the proportion of liberals who worried a great deal about immigration in 2008 stood almost exactly where it stood in 2001. (The peak for liberal concern, at 40 percent, came in

March 2006, when pro-immigration groups, particularly Latinos, organized rallies in support of immigrants.) Moderates worried more about immigration over time than liberals, but still far less so than conservatives. Again, it is significant that the greatest polarization between liberals and conservatives on this measure—reflected by the line at the bottom on Chart Two—came in and after 2007, the year of the immigration reform debate in Congress.

The most recent data suggest that immigration continues to be of far more concern to conservatives than liberals but that it is not a partisan issue. Tables One and Two report the findings of a survey conducted by The Washington Post and ABC News in July 2008. The survey gave respondents a long list of issues and asked them to rank each issue's importance. Not surprisingly, the economy ranked as the most important, followed by gasoline prices, the war in Iraq, education and health care.

Immigration ranked relatively low on the scale, just below relations with other countries and just above appointments to the Supreme Court. But there were striking demographic and ideological differences among respondents' judgments of the importance of the immigration issue, as Table Two makes clear. As we'll see in more detail later, lower income respondents and those with less formal education were more likely to see immigration as an important issue—and especially more likely to rank it as an “extremely” important issue. Voters who felt financially insecure were also more likely to rank immigration as more important. The ideological differences were even more stark: While 39 percent of conservatives rated immigration as “extremely” important, only 18 percent of liberals and 21 percent of moderates did so. At the other end of the scale, liberals and college graduates were the only two groups to reach double digits in giving an extremely low ranking of the immigration issue. Interestingly,



Source: The Gallup Organization, Inc. The surveys were conducted in March 6–9, 2008; March 11–14, 2007; March 13–16, 2006; March 7–10, 2005; March 8–11, 2004; March 24–25, 2003; March 4–7, 2002; March 5–7, 2001.

TABLE ONE AMERICANS' RANKING OF MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN 2008 ELECTION (JULY 2008)

WORDING OF QUESTION: "For each item I name, please tell me how important it will be in your vote for president this year. Will it be an extremely important issue, very important, somewhat important or less important than that?"

	IMPORTANT			NOT AS IMPORTANT			NO OP.
	NET	EXTREMELY	VERY	NET	SOMEWHAT	LESS	
The economy	92	50	41	8	7	1	0
Gasoline prices and energy policy	85	48	37	15	11	4	*
The war in Iraq	83	42	41	17	14	3	*
Education	81	37	44	19	15	4	0
Health care	78	39	39	22	15	7	*
The US campaign against terrorism	74	37	36	26	21	5	*
Social Security	73	38	35	27	23	3	0
Ethics in government	72	37	34	26	20	6	2
The federal budget deficit	72	34	38	27	21	5	1
Taxes	70	30	40	30	23	6	1
Relations with other countries	69	28	41	30	24	6	1
Immigration Issues	63	27	36	37	29	7	1
Appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court	60	26	35	36	25	11	3
Global warming and other environmental issues	58	27	31	42	26	16	*
Gun control	50	23	27	49	29	20	*
The candidates' choice for vice presidential running mates	48	15	33	49	35	14	3
Social issues such as abortion and gay civil unions	39	19	20	61	30	31	1

Source: Washington Post/ABC News Poll conducted July 10–13, 2008, among a random national sample of 1,119 adults, including additional interviews with randomly selected African Americans, for a total of 209 black respondents.

Note: Net values may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

TABLE TWO HOW IMMIGRATION AFFECTS AMERICANS' 2008 PRESIDENTIAL VOTE (% BY SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC AND POLITICAL GROUPS JULY 2008)

WORDING OF QUESTION: "For each item I name, please tell me how important it will be in your vote for president this year. Will it be an extremely important issue, very important, somewhat important or less important than that?" Analyzed below are those saying immigration issues.

	IMPORTANT			NOT AS IMPORTANT			NO OP.
	NET	EXTREMELY	VERY	NET	SOMEWHAT	LESS	
All	63	27	36	37	29	7	1
18–64	61	26	35	39	31	8	*
65+	71	31	40	27	21	6	2
Non-college	69	31	38	30	25	5	1
College grad	47	17	31	53	39	13	0
Among whites:							
Non-college	67	30	38	32	27	5	1
College grad	47	16	31	53	40	13	0
Household income:							
Less than \$50,000	70	32	39	28	23	5	1
\$50,000 or more	56	21	35	44	34	9	0
HH income among whites:							
Less than \$50,000	69	32	37	29	23	6	2
\$50,000 or more	56	21	36	44	35	9	0
Feelings of financial security:							
Very/Somewhat secure	60	23	37	40	32	7	*
Very/Somewhat insecure	67	33	34	32	24	8	1
Liberal	54	18	36	45	33	13	1
Moderate	58	21	36	42	35	7	0
Conservative	73	39	34	27	21	6	0
Democrat	61	26	35	38	29	9	1
Republican	65	24	41	35	29	6	0
Independent	61	24	37	39	31	8	0
2008 vote preference:							
McCain	69	26	43	31	25	6	0
Obama	58	26	32	41	33	3	1

Source: Washington Post/ABC News Poll conducted July 10–13, 2008, among a random national sample of 1,119 adults, including additional interviews with randomly selected African Americans, for a total of 209 black respondents.

Note: Net values may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

differences between Republicans and Democrats in rating the importance of immigration were minimal, though supporters of John McCain assigned the issue greater importance than did supporters of Barack Obama—in part because of McCain’s relative strength among conservatives and Obama’s relative strength among the college educated.

Conservative talk radio has played an important role in the rise of immigration as an ideological issue on the right. At the least, it reinforced the restrictionist views that many conservative Republicans already held. But it may also have moved a significant share of conservative Republicans toward more restrictionist views generally and a more forceful position against illegal immigration in particular.

Conservative talk radio has played an important role in the rise of immigration as an ideological issue on the right. At the least, it reinforced the restrictionist views that many conservative Republicans already held. But it may also have moved a significant share of conservative Republicans toward more restrictionist views generally and a more forceful position against illegal immigration in particular. At the request of this project, the Pew Research Center included questions on its December 2007 survey that probed respondents’ attitudes toward immigration and their media consumption habits. Because the survey was largely about the presidential campaign, the media questions specifically asked respondents about the sources of their election information.

To test the impact of different ways of framing the immigration question, Pew split its sample and

asked two forms of the same question. Half of the sample was asked: “Thinking about immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally. ... Do you favor or oppose providing amnesty to illegal immigrants currently in the country if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs?” The other half was asked: “Thinking about immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally. ... Do you favor or oppose providing a way for illegal immigrants currently in the country to gain legal citizenship if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs?” Note that the second version of the question dropped the word “amnesty,” an important buzzword for those favoring more stringent immigration restrictions.

Strikingly, both versions of the question drew a positive response. When asked about a solution that included “amnesty,” 50 percent said they were in favor and 42 percent were opposed. When asked about a path to citizenship without reference to “amnesty,” 58 percent were in favor and 35 percent were opposed. The eight-point swing is testimony to the power of the word “amnesty” in pushing respondents away from support for a comprehensive solution. At the same time, a plurality was still willing to back a path to legalization even when the word “amnesty” was used.

But the most striking findings came when these data were analyzed to take into account whether respondents relied on talk radio as a primary source of political information. Table Three summarizes attitudes toward a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants broken down by talk radio listenership, party and ideology. (Because of splits in the sample, talk radio listeners were asked only the form of the question that did not use the word “amnesty.”) For the public at large, views on the immigration question among listeners to talk radio were not much different from those of non-listeners. But

TABLE THREE **IMPACT OF TALK RADIO ON AMERICANS' ATTITUDE TOWARD IMMIGRATION**

WORDING OF QUESTIONS: “Now I’d like to ask you about some specific ways in which you might be getting news about the presidential campaign. For each item that I read, please tell me how often, if ever, you learn something about the presidential campaign or the candidates from this source. How often, if ever, do you learn something about the presidential campaign or the candidates from ... talk radio shows—regularly, sometimes, hardly ever, or never?”

“Thinking about immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally. ... Do you favor or oppose providing a way for illegal immigrants currently in the country to gain legal citizenship if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs?”

	GET INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FROM TALK RADIO REGULARLY/SOMETIMES			GET INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FROM TALK RADIO HARDLY EVER/NEVER		
	PATH TO CITIZENSHIP OR AMNESTY					
	FAVOR	OPPOSE		FAVOR	OPPOSE	
Total	57	36	(284)	59	35	(419)
Republicans	49	48	(82)	61	35	(109)
Democrats	60	32	(80)	63	32	(141)
Independents	64	29	(104)	54	37	(135)
Rep/Rep Lean	54	43	(129)	59	37	(146)
Dem/Dem Lean	64	29	(124)	62	31	(223)
Conservatives	47	47	(141)	52	39	(150)
Moderates	56	37	(88)	60	36	(165)
Liberals	90	10	(46)	73	21	(82)
Conserv Reps	41	54	(66)	62	34	(70)
Mod/Lib Reps	69	31	(16)	61	38	(39)
Cons/Mod Dems	51	45	(52)	55	39	(88)
Liberal Dems	89	11	(24)	79	18	(50)

Source: Pew Research Center, December 2007.

Notes: The only statistically significant differences within groups across talk radio habits are among liberals (significant difference on favor) and among conservative Republicans (significant difference on oppose). The non-listening group also includes the categories “Don’t Listen” and “Don’t Know.”

conservative Republicans who listened to talk radio were distinctive in their views. Among the 24 groups examined, conservative Republicans who listened to talk radio constituted the single group firmly opposed to a path to citizenship (by 54 to 41 percent). By contrast, conservative Republicans who rarely or never listened to talk radio favored a path to citizenship by a ratio of nearly 2-to-1, a slightly larger proportion than in the country as a whole. Despite the relatively small number of respondents in these subgroups, the differences between the two groups of conservative Republicans were statistically significant.

But it is quite clear that the talk radio hosts mobilized a significant minority constituency against immigration reform.

Interestingly, the only other statistically significant finding related to liberals who listened to talk radio is that they were far more favorable to a path to citizenship than the rest of the sample. Not surprisingly, the survey found that conservatives made up nearly half of the talk radio audience, liberals less than a fifth. Overall, 40 percent of those surveyed said they regularly or sometimes learned something about the campaign from talk radio; for conservatives, the share was 48 percent.

These findings suggest that talk radio listeners may now be a distinctive constituency within the Republican and conservative coalitions. Whether the attitudes of this constituency were shaped by the talk radio hosts or whether the hosts were reflecting widespread sentiment among their listeners is a question deserving of further study. But it is quite clear that the talk radio hosts mobilized a significant minority constituency against immigration reform. It's also clear that

conservative worries about immigration have grown over time. The combination proved lethal to immigration reform efforts in 2007.

As the accompanying study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism shows, conservative talk radio gave far more attention to the congressional immigration reform debate than did any other medium. The study found that conservative radio hosts devoted 31 percent of their airtime to coverage of immigration from May 17 to June 28, 2007, compared with just 3.6 percent on liberal radio shows. In the same period, newspapers devoted just 8 percent of their front-page coverage to the immigration debate. On cable television, the study found that conservative hosts on Fox and CNN's Lou Dobbs, television's leading opponent of illegal immigration, gave far more coverage to the issue than did other hosts and anchors. On the right, there is a clear push-pull effect between the advocacy of talk show hosts and the views of their wing of the conservative Republican coalition. The immigration issue energized a significant part of the right while calling forth little militancy or concern on the left.

But conservative talk radio was not alone in fighting for a restrictionist position on immigration. Another critical important media player was Dobbs, whose evening broadcast on CNN became television's headquarters for the battle against illegal immigration. Dobbs was unabashed in running story after story about the problems created by "illegal aliens," including an ongoing series on the nation's "broken borders." Dobbs cast himself as a populist avatar for a struggling middle class in speaking out against illegal immigration, the costs of free trade and pressures on the middle class. His opposition to illegal immigration was linked to a message on trade and stagnating wages that was congenial to the labor movement, which built Dobbs a significant following among Democrats.¹

Not surprisingly, the Pew survey found that Dobbs' audience was smaller than the combined audience for talk radio shows. Overall, 22 percent of respondents said they "learn[ed] something about the presidential campaign or the candidates" from the Dobbs show either "regularly" or "sometimes," about half the rate who said the same of talk radio. More importantly, the Dobbs audience was significantly less Republican than the talk radio audience. While 41 percent of Republicans said talk radio was a significant source of political news, only 15 percent said the same of Lou Dobbs. Looked at another way, Democrats formed a much larger share of the Dobbs audience than of the talk radio audience.

And as Table Four shows, Dobbs' impact on the immigration attitudes of respondents was much larger on Democrats than Republicans, and it was especially pronounced on moderate-to-conservative Democrats. (Note that Dobbs viewers were asked both forms of the immigration question. Their responses have been combined to create a large enough sample for analysis.) For the sample as a whole, there was little difference between Dobbs viewers and non-viewers: 55 percent of non-viewers favored a comprehensive solution that included a path to citizenship or amnesty, as did 53 percent of Dobbs viewers. But Democrats who said they regularly went to Dobbs' program for political information were significantly less likely to favor a path to citizenship than other Democrats. And Dobbs' impact was especially powerful on moderate and conservative Democrats. Of all the groups studied, Dobbs viewers in this group were the most firmly opposed to a comprehensive solution (43 percent favor, 52 percent against). At the same time, moderate and conservative Democrats who did not watch Dobbs regularly strongly favored a comprehensive solution (59 percent in favor, 34 percent opposed).

These findings, taken together with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's analysis of the media, point to how the media's impact on the congressional debate fell decisively on the restrictionist side and almost certainly played a major role in dooming immigration reform in 2007. Conservative talk radio and Lou Dobbs paid far more attention to the immigration debate than did other media sources, and they pushed hard for defeat of the bill. By contrast, neutral and liberal media gave the debate limited coverage. Moreover, an implicit (and almost certainly unconscious) division of labor developed between talk radio and the Dobbs program. Each had its greatest influence on critical swing groups in Congress. Talk radio moved (and also firmed up) conservative opposition to comprehensive immigration reform, providing a strong counterweight to President Bush's support for a broad measure. Dobbs' greatest impact was on moderate-to-conservative Democrats—and in Congress, moderate-to-conservative Democrats (or Democrats who represented moderate and conservative swing constituencies) were those most likely to join the ranks of the opponents of comprehensive reform.² It's possible, of course, to exaggerate the power of the restrictionist media in the immigration debate. But it would be a larger mistake to ignore or discount the media's role in making what was already a difficult situation impossible for advocates of comprehensive reform.

This report will explore a variety of factors shaping views on immigration. It will underscore the extent to which concern about immigration is sporadic and suggest that the public's view of the issue is replete with ambiguity and paradox. Americans are philosophically pro-immigration but operationally in favor of a variety of restrictions, particularly when it comes to the receipt of taxpayer benefits. In principle, a majority favors a solution to the problem that includes a path to citizenship,

TABLE FOUR **IMPACT OF LOU DOBBS ON AMERICANS' ATTITUDE TOWARD IMMIGRATION**

WORDING OF QUESTIONS: “Now I’d like to ask you about some specific ways in which you might be getting news about the presidential campaign. For each item that I read, please tell me how often, if ever, you learn something about the presidential campaign or the candidates from this source. How often, if ever, do you learn something about the presidential campaign or the candidates from ... “Lou Dobbs Tonight” on CNN—regularly, sometimes, hardly ever or never?”

“Thinking about immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally. ... Do you favor or oppose providing a way for illegal immigrants currently in the country to gain legal citizenship if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs?” OR “Thinking about immigrants who are currently living in the U.S. illegally ... Do you favor or oppose providing amnesty to illegal immigrants currently in the country if they pass background checks, pay fines and have jobs?”

	GET INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FROM LOU DOBBS REGULARLY/SOMETIMES			GET INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FROM LOU DOBBS HARDLY EVER/NEVER		
	PATH TO CITIZENSHIP OR AMNESTY					
	FAVOR	OPPOSE		FAVOR	OPPOSE	
Total	53	42	(303)	55	38	(944)
Republicans	51	46	(60)	47	47	(319)
Democrats	50	43	(119)	65	28	(329)
Independents	56	39	(106)	53	39	(388)
Rep/Rep Lean	55	43	(99)	48	48	(461)
Dem/Dem Lean	56	36	(171)	63	30	(523)
Conservatives	48	47	(96)	45	48	(440)
Moderates	53	44	(125)	57	36	(418)
Liberals	66	26	(68)	75	20	(219)
Conserv Reps	48	47	(37)	44	50	(216)
Mod/Lib Reps	54	47	(22)	56	40	(98)
Cons/Mod Dems	43	52	(68)	59	34	(202)
Liberal Dems	65	28	(46)	78	19	(119)

Source: Pew Research Center, December 2007.

Notes: The differences between Dobbs-viewing and non-Dobbs-viewing Democrats and moderate/conservative Democrats are significant. The non-watching group also includes the categories “Don’t Listen” and “Don’t Know.” Source: Pew Research Center, December 2007.

but many within that majority are also inclined to deal harshly with immigrants who are in the country illegally. The most important finding is the energy created on the restrictionist side by the interaction between core supporters of the conservative Republican coalition and their radio hosts.

SPLIT-LEVEL POLITICS: CONGRESS, THE PRESIDENCY AND IMMIGRATION

This paper deals with national findings and national trends, although it incorporates some of the conclusions of the valuable 2006 study of selected regions and cities by the Pew Research Center and the Pew Hispanic Center. But the national perspective is less important in the congressional battle over immigration, which is fought district-by-district in the House and state-by-state in the Senate. It's therefore worth pausing to note that while Latinos played an important part in pushing for immigration reform, their impact on the debate may be limited by their relative absence in swing congressional districts. While the spread of Latinos across the country will enhance their voice in the long run, they are likely to have a limited impact in the short run in pushing marginal members of Congress in their direction. The national-district split also helps explain why the immigration issue could play very different roles in the presidential election and in congressional contests, and why restrictionist media could have a much larger role in the congressional debate than on a president's views. A Latino backlash against Republicans could hurt their nominee for president. John McCain's past efforts on immigration reform could offset this effect, though a Pew Hispanic Center survey released in mid-July 2008 suggested that McCain, despite his history, was having difficulty blunting the Latino reaction against his party. A backlash against illegal immigration could

conceivably help at least some Republicans running for Congress, though the issue has had only a limited effect in recent congressional contests as the GOP's candidates battled a broad anti-Republican tide.

In the presidential election, Latino votes could well tip Western states that voted for President Bush in 2004 to the Democrats, who enjoyed a Latino surge in 2006. A study released in December 2007 by the Pew Hispanic Center found that 57 percent of registered voters who are Hispanic identified themselves as Democrats, compared with 23 percent who identified as Republicans—a 34-point advantage. In July 2006, the Democratic Latino advantage was just 21 points. Immigration has a lot to do with the widening of this gap. That same Pew study found that Hispanics gave Democrats a 41 percent to 14 percent edge on dealing with illegal immigration.

While Latinos played an important part in pushing for immigration reform, their impact on the debate may be limited by their relative absence in swing congressional districts.

This shift will matter in several swing states, notably in New Mexico, where people of Hispanic origin account for 42.6 percent of the state's population; Arizona (25.3 percent Hispanic); Nevada (19.7 percent Hispanic); and Colorado (17.1 percent Hispanic). It should be noted that Arizona, because it is McCain's home state, is less likely to be a swing state in this election.

Yet the Hispanic population is quite small in the limited number of highly competitive districts that will determine control of the House. Based on the results of the 2006 election, some 34 Democratic

districts are potentially vulnerable to Republican challenge (even if the actual number, given strong Democratic trends, may prove to be significantly smaller).³ In only four of those districts is the Hispanic population more than 18 percent. In 19 of them, it is under 3 percent. These are the races in which Republicans may be tempted to use the issue of illegal immigration. In the 15 districts where the Democratic incumbent received 51 percent or less in 2006, 11 have Hispanic populations below 10 percent. (All Hispanic population figures are from the just-published Almanac of American Politics 2008.)

Typical of Democrats trying to hold on to seats won in 2006 is Representative Heath Shuler, who defeated GOP incumbent Charles Taylor in a western North Carolina district where Hispanics account for just 2.6 percent of the population. It is no accident that Shuler has featured his sponsorship of the Secure America through Verification and Enforcement Act on his congressional website. The proposal, Shuler says, would “drastically reduce illegal immigration” through “a strict emphasis on border security, employer verification, and interior enforcement.”⁴ No one will accuse Shuler of being “soft” on immigration. And his stance has made Shuler a regular on Dobbs’ program.

The evidence from both the 2008 Republican primaries and public opinion polls points to a decline in the saliency of the immigration issue and a slight decline of restrictionist sentiment. Nonetheless, the figures on swing districts in the House suggest the limits of extrapolating national trends to the behavior of individual members of Congress. To offer a more modest version of Tip O’Neill’s famous axiom: Politics, including immigration politics, is often local. And because most representatives of swing districts cannot count on a large Latino vote, they are more likely to be influenced by voters who are themselves

influenced by restrictionist media—particularly, in the case of Democrats, by Lou Dobbs. As a practical matter, this also suggests the limits of a strategy for immigration reform that counts on a large Latino electoral mobilization. While such a mobilization is desirable in and of itself as a democratizing step and could have an important effect on the presidential election, it would likely have a limited impact on congressional outcomes and congressional votes.

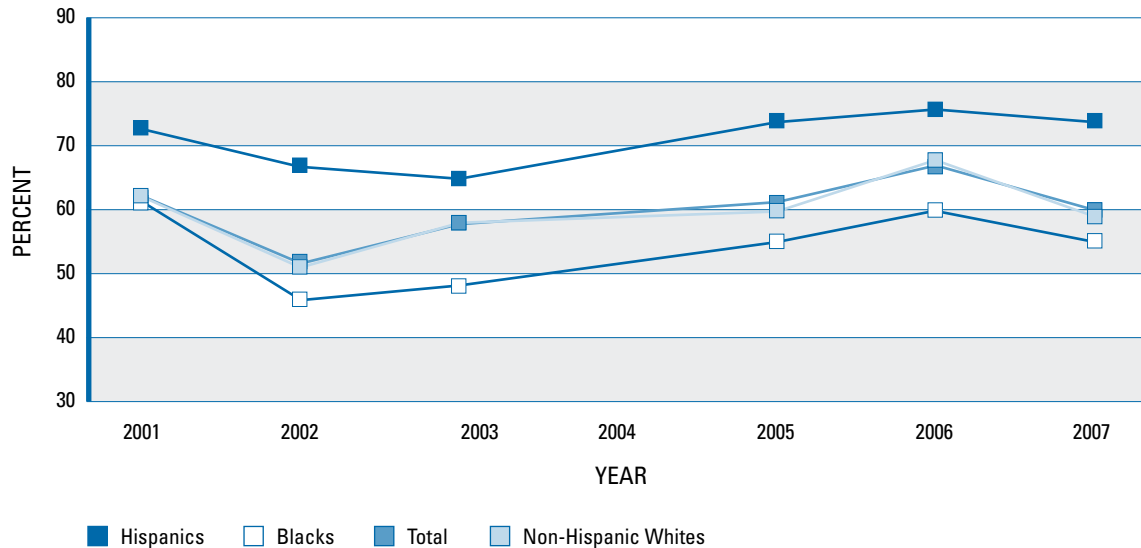
IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES: AN OVERVIEW

President Bush has declared that the United States is a “nation that values immigration.”⁵ Indeed, immigration is embedded in our country’s history. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the vast majority of the public has a positive view of immigration’s historical role. For example, a 2002 Gallup poll found that 75 percent of Americans said that immigration has been “a good thing” for the country in the past.

Americans also view immigration as “a good thing” for the country today. From 2001 to 2007, a majority of the public has shared this viewpoint. But there was a modest decline between 2006 to 2007, reflecting the broader trends mentioned earlier. In 2007, the year of the immigration debate in Congress, 60 percent reported immigration is “a good thing,” including 59 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 55 percent of blacks, and 74 percent of Hispanics. Immigration opponents clearly had an impact on public opinion in the critical year.

As Gallup noted, while most Americans tend to assess the concept of immigration positively, the majority of the public does not want to increase immigration.⁶ A June 2007 Gallup poll found that 45 percent of the public favors decreasing

CHART THREE AMERICANS WHO SAY IMMIGRATION HAS BEEN GOOD FOR THE COUNTRY (PERCENT BY RACE AND ETHNICITY)



Source: The Gallup Organization, Inc. The surveys were conducted in June 4–24, 2007; June 8–25, 2006; June 12–18, 2003; June 3–9, 2002; and June 11–17, 2001.

immigration⁶ levels, while 35 percent said it should remain at its current level. Only 16 percent wanted immigration levels increased. The percentage of Americans supporting a decrease in immigration varied sharply by subgroup. While close to half (48 percent) of non-Hispanic whites and 46 percent of blacks said that immigration levels should be decreased, only 30 percent of Hispanics shared that view. It is striking that over the last several years and across many measures, African-Americans and non-Hispanic whites have held similar views on immigration. African-Americans are often regarded as natural allies of liberal causes, but there was considerable opposition on black talk radio to a path to citizenship. African-American commentators pointed to high rates of black unemployment in expressing distress and anger over the phrase, commonly used by immigration reformers, that immigrants took jobs that “Americans won’t do.”⁷

The share of Americans favoring a decrease in the immigration level is currently lower than it was in the mid-1990s when 65 percent favored decreasing immigration levels. Economic distress in the early 1990s certainly played a role in the shift toward a restrictionist view.

When asked in a 2007 Gallup poll if immigrants make the “economy in general” worse, close to half of Americans (46 percent) said they did. A slight majority of blacks (52 percent) and close to half of whites (49 percent) saw immigrants as making the economy “worse.” For Hispanics, the figure was 25 percent.

Indeed, there was a striking correlation between the monthly seasonally adjusted unemployment rate—as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from the Current Population Survey—and attitudes toward immigration, as reported on Chart Five.

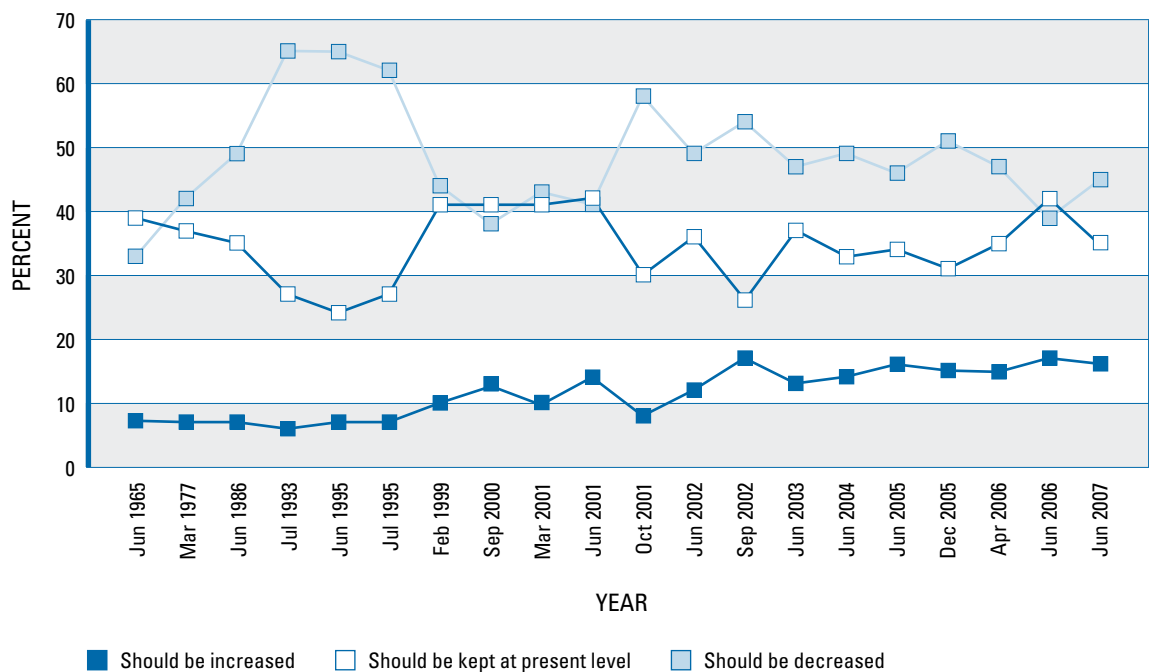
As the unemployment rate rises, so does support for decreasing immigration. A June 2007 Gallup poll reported that about one-third of Americans (34 percent) said immigrants to the U.S. were making job opportunities “worse” for the respondent’s family. On the other hand a 2006 Gallup poll found that nearly three-quarters of Americans said illegal immigrants took low-paying jobs that Americans did not want. Only 17 percent of Americans said illegal immigrants took jobs that Americans wanted, though that figure was 24 percent among African-Americans.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, clearly had a separate impact⁸. According to a Gallup poll, 41 percent of Americans preferred a decrease in immigration in June 2001. That figure jumped to 58 percent in October 2001 following the attacks.

Although views on immigration today remain rather negative, as 45 percent of Americans want to decrease immigration levels, Americans appear to have a more positive attitude toward immigration now than they did in the mid-1990s and in the period immediately after 9/11.

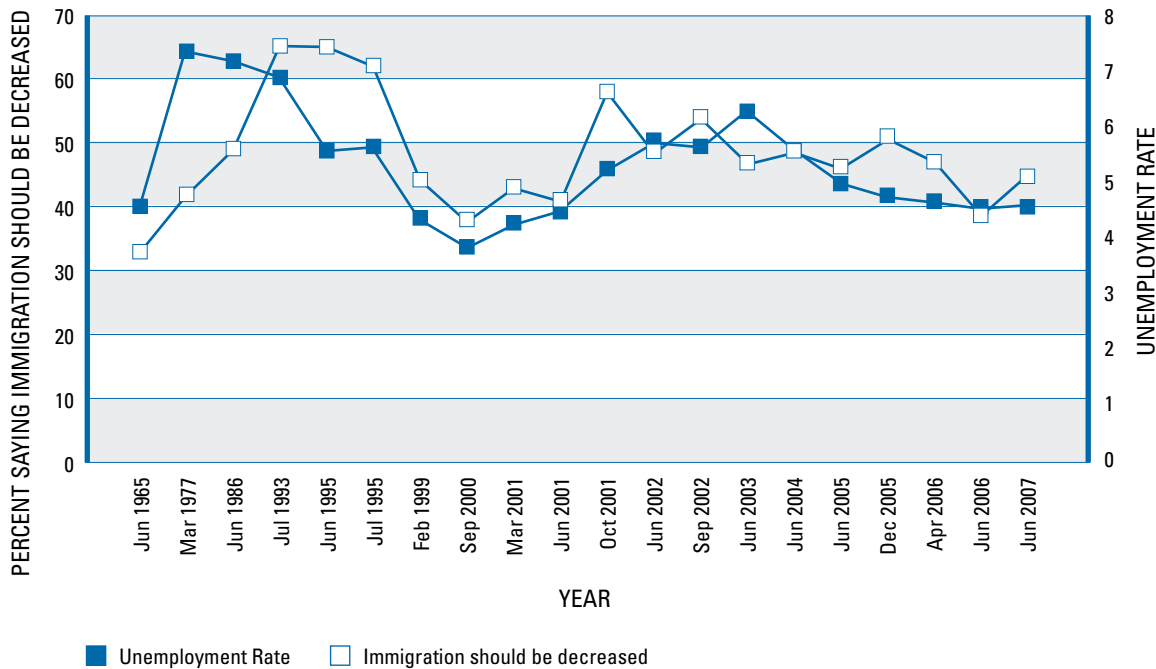
A 2006 Gallup poll reported that one in five Americans (20 percent) said “too many” immigrants from European countries were entering the U.S., and a comparable share said that too many were entering from African countries. More (31 percent) said that too many immigrants were coming to the U.S. from Asian countries. Thirty-nine percent said that too many immigrants were entering the U.S. from Arab countries. By far the strongest opposition was to immigration from Latin American countries: 48 percent of Americans said that too many

CHART FOUR AMERICANS' VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION LEVELS



Source: The Gallup Organization, Inc. The surveys were conducted in March 6–9, 2008; March 11–14, 2007; March 13–16, 2006; March 7–10, 2005; March 8–11, 2004; March 24–25, 2003; March 4–7, 2002; March 5–7, 2001.

CHART FIVE IMMIGRATION ATTITUDES AND UNEMPLOYMENT



Source: The Gallup Organization, Inc. The surveys were conducted in June 4–24, 2007; June 8–25, 2006; June 12–18, 2003; June 3–9, 2002; and June 11–17, 2001.

immigrants were arriving from those nations. Clearly, reaction to immigration is not simply a generalized phenomenon. There is greater opposition to Latin and Arab immigration than to immigration by other groups. Opposition to Arab immigration is no doubt a product of the post-9/11 reaction that produced a spike in negative feelings toward immigration generally. The reaction to Latinos suggests a cultural and perhaps also a racial response, but it may primarily be a response to the fact that Latinos make up such a significant and visible proportion of recent immigrants.

According to a 2007 Gallup poll, the majority of Americans (58 percent), including a majority of blacks (52 percent) and whites (63 percent), said immigrants to the United States were making the crime situation in the country “worse.” Strikingly,

41 percent of Hispanics also said immigrants were worsening the crime situation.

Additionally, majorities said that immigrants were negatively affecting taxes. In response to a 2007 Gallup question about whether immigrants were making taxes in the country “better or worse, or not having much effect,” more than half of Americans (55 percent) said immigrants were making taxes “worse.” Only 11 percent said they were making taxes “better.” Views regarding the effect of immigrants on taxes varied by race. Close to 60 percent of whites and 54 percent of blacks said immigrants were making taxes worse; only 34 percent of Hispanics felt that way.

Gallup regularly asks an open-ended question about “the most important problem facing this country

today.” As Chart Six shows, immigration has only rarely emerged out of the single digits. In May 2008, only 4 percent labeled immigration as the most important problem confronting the U.S., but there have been spikes in concern. From March to April 2006, the proportion of Americans identifying immigration as the nation’s most important problem

of Americans identifying immigration as the nation’s most important problem dropped to 13 percent; in June, it grew to 18 percent. Concern fell back to a range of 5 to 10 percent until April 2007, when it began rising again, hitting 15 percent in June. That spike coincided with the Senate’s consideration of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007.

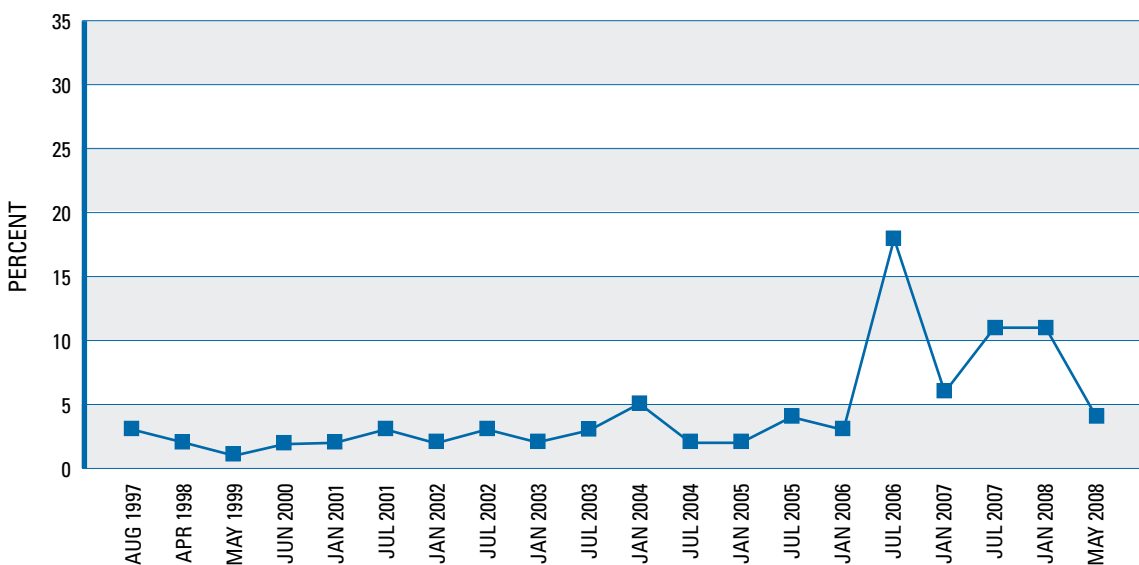
As we saw earlier, Americans are philosophically pro-immigration but operationally in favor of a variety of restrictions.

jumped from 6 to 19 percent. The increase appears to be a response to legislation, known as the Sensenbrenner bill, named for its primary sponsor, Representative F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., a Wisconsin Republican, that would make undocumented presence in the U.S. a felony. The bill was passed in the House in December 2005, and sparked protests in cities across the country. In May 2006, the share

AMERICA’S TORN MIND ON IMMIGRATION

The way the immigration issue is framed, both by the media and by activists in the battle for new legislation, is especially important because Americans are deeply torn in their attitudes about immigrants and immigration. As we saw earlier, Americans are philosophically pro-immigration but operationally in favor of a variety of restrictions. Majorities are pragmatic about the need to find solutions to the immigration problem that do not involve wholesale deportations. Yet they see illegal immigration as an injustice. They do not want

CHART SIX MEASURING IMMIGRATION’S IMPORTANCE, 1993–2008



Source: The Gallup Organization, Inc. The surveys were conducted in June 4–24, 2007; June 8–25, 2006; June 12–18, 2003; June 3–9, 2002; and June 11–17, 2001.

immigrants to lack basic social services (notably education and health care), yet they are unhappy offering too many public services to immigrants and worry about the impact of doing so on taxes. At bottom, Americans are deeply practical in their view of immigration. They understand how difficult the problem is to solve. They see mass deportations as posing economic and logistical difficulties, and moral difficulties, too. That is why many polls have found majorities in favor of a path to citizenship. Yet majorities are also bothered that so many immigrants are here illegally. In areas of rapid recent immigration, taxpayers worry about the impact of immigrants on services, and some citizens worry about sudden changes in the character of their communities. That is why surveys can sometimes also find majorities in favor of requiring all illegal immigrants to leave. And the attitudes of respondents toward individual immigrants are often more positive than their view of immigrants as a group. Indeed, the citizens of areas with high levels of immigration often have a more positive view of individual immigrants than do residents of areas where few immigrants have come, simply because residents in high-concentration localities have had positive contacts with hardworking new arrivals to the country.

The upshot is that three broad camps of opinion emerge on the immigration question. Roughly speaking, a third of the country is broadly pro-immigration; a third is strongly inclined to favor restrictionist measures; and the middle third is ambivalent. Members of this middle third admire our long immigration tradition and believe that the newest arrivals make a significant contribution to the country, but they worry about the economic and social impact of illegal immigration and the government's apparent inability to "control the borders." This middle group is especially influenced by how the immigration issue is framed.

In recent years, two major studies were especially successful in capturing the complexity of American opinion on immigration. In March 2006, the Pew Research Center and the Pew Hispanic Center released their seminal report, "America's Immigration Quandary." And in December 2007, Democracy Corps released "Winning the Immigration Issue," a paper addressed to Democratic candidates and officeholders based on a highly detailed study of many dimensions of the immigration question.

Some of the Democracy Corps' key findings are summarized in Tables Five and Six, and they offer a portrait of ambivalence and uncertainty. The survey of likely voters found a narrow majority (52 percent) responding favorably to the idea of deporting all illegal immigrants even as strong majorities also supported implementing a guest worker program (76 percent) and allowing illegal immigrants who pay a fine and learn English to be eligible to apply for citizenship (64 percent). Those surveyed overwhelmingly favored allowing illegal immigrants to use hospitals and emergency rooms (64 percent) but overwhelmingly opposed giving them coverage under Medicaid (only 25 percent favored this). There was great sympathy (74 percent) for allowing the children of illegal immigrants to attend public schools in grades kindergarten through 12, but there was strong opposition to granting the children of illegal immigrants in-state tuition rates at public colleges (only 35 percent in favor).

The 2006 Pew study found similar ambivalences. A strong majority (67 percent) opposed making illegal immigrants eligible for social services at the state and local level. But close to three-quarters (71 percent) said that the children of illegal immigrants should be allowed to attend public schools. Like other surveys, it pointed to a country divided roughly into thirds on the immigration question.

TABLE FIVE AMERICANS' AMBIVALENCE TOWARD IMMIGRATION

WORDING OF QUESTION: "Now let me read you some immigration policies. For each one, please tell me whether you favor or oppose that measure."

	APPROVE	DISAPPROVE
Deport all illegal immigrants	52	45
Implement a guest worker program to allow immigrants to work in the U.S. for a set period of time	76	21
Allow illegal immigrants who pay a fine and learn English to be eligible to apply for citizenship	64	34
Cut off non-essential public services, such as welfare programs, to illegal immigrants	65	33
Double the number of border patrol agents	77	21
Tougher enforcement so businesses don't hire illegal workers	80	18
Build a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border	51	46

Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps. Nov. 29 – Dec. 3, 2007 survey of likely voters.

TABLE SIX AMERICANS' ATTITUDE TOWARD PUBLIC SERVICES FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

WORDING OF QUESTION: "I am going to read you a list of public services. After I read each one, I would like you to tell me whether you approve or disapprove of illegal immigrants receiving that service."

	APPROVE	DISAPPROVE
Public schools from kindergarten through high school for the children of illegal immigrants who are American Citizens	74	24
Public schools from kindergarten through high school for children who are here illegally	50	49
Entrance to state colleges at in-state tuition rates for children of illegal immigrants	35	62
Use of hospitals and emergency rooms	64	33
Medicaid	25	73
Driver's licenses	31	68

Source: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner for Democracy Corps. Nov. 29 – Dec. 3, 2007 survey of likely voters.

When offered a choice between requiring illegal immigrants to go home or granting them permanent legal status, 53 percent of Americans in the Pew study favored deportation and 40 percent opted for allowing them to stay. But when an additional option was introduced—allowing immigrant workers to stay temporarily—opinion splintered further. Pew found that 32 percent of Americans favored allowing immigrants to gain permanent legal status, 32 percent favored the temporary worker option and 27 percent favored deportation. A significant plurality (46 percent) of conservative Republicans favored a temporary worker program, while a large plurality of liberal Democrats (49 percent) favored a path to permanent legal status.

The Pew study is so rich in detail that it cannot be fully summarized here. However, it is worth focusing briefly on the survey's important findings that underscore how differently the immigration issue was viewed in different parts of the country, and also in different localities.

Among Americans living in areas with a high percentage of foreign born, 33 percent considered immigration as a very big problem in the community, while only 10 percent of those living in areas with low concentrations of immigrants shared that view. This finding is not surprising. Yet respondents living in areas with high concentrations of immigrants also tended to assess immigrants more positively than did people living in areas with a smaller foreign-born population. While 60 percent of Americans living in areas with low proportions of immigrants saw newcomers as threatening to traditional American customs and values, only 47 percent of those in areas with high concentrations of immigrants held that view. And while 65 percent of residents in areas of low concentration saw immigrants as a burden because of a perception that they took away jobs, housing and health care

of the native born, only 47 percent of those in areas of high immigrant concentration felt that way. One of the many paradoxes of the immigration debate unearthed by the Pew study is that Americans who live in areas of low concentrations of immigrants were more likely to favor a reduction in immigration—52 percent said this—than those who live in areas of high concentrations, where only 37 percent took this view. This seeming contradiction is explained in part by the fact that those who live in high immigrant areas were more likely to see immigrants as contributors to their local economy.

The Pew study also showed how attitudes toward immigration differed even among cities and regions that have high levels of immigration. Residents of cities on the Eastern Seaboard and in the Midwest with long-established immigrant populations tended to be less concerned about immigration than residents of cities in the Southwest and, to a certain extent, the South. In Phoenix—often seen as the gateway for the new wave of Hispanic immigration—78 percent of those surveyed identified immigration as a “moderately big” to “very big” problem. In Las Vegas, a similarly high-density, new immigrant city, 64 percent identified immigration that way. By contrast, in areas with long-established immigrant populations, the comparable figure for Chicago was 35 percent; for Washington, D.C., it was 44 percent; and for Raleigh, N.C., it was 56 percent.

Cities that experienced high levels of immigration in the past appear not to view immigration with as much hostility as do the cities in the Southwest that are undergoing a more recent immigration boom. Residents of the southwestern cities were also somewhat more likely than residents of the other cities to see immigration as a “burden” in connection with social problems such as crime and welfare dependency. Nearly half of the respondents in Phoenix (46 percent) and Las Vegas (45 percent)

said that Hispanic immigrants significantly increased crime. In Chicago, Raleigh and Washington, the comparable figures, respectively, were 30 percent, 37 percent and 31 percent. Residents of Phoenix and Las Vegas were more likely than residents of the other cities to say that Hispanic immigrants often ended up on welfare.

The Pew authors nicely summarized the complexity of public opinion:

Most Americans express some concern about the growing immigrant population in one way or another, but the nature of those concerns vary and are expressed with varying intensity by different segments of the population. Competition for jobs, the erosion of traditional American values, the costs to local government and the threats of terrorism and crime are all sources of immigration-related concern to some Americans, but none of these is a dominant or primary cause of worry. And on virtually every one of these points, a substantial share of the population takes a positive view of immigrants or finds no cause for concern.

Two years later, that is a fair reading of a country that is ambivalent, divided and, in some ways, indifferent to the issues surrounding immigration.

CONCLUSION: THE MEDIA'S POWER IN AN AMBIVALENT ENVIRONMENT

The profound ambivalence of Americans about so many aspects of the immigration question suggests that the politics of this issue will remain complicated for a long time to come. There are different majorities on different aspects of the issue, but no single majority overall. These multiple majorities make compromise especially difficult. Concessions designed to win over one key constituency can easily turn off another. For example, temporary worker programs can attract conservative Republicans

who might otherwise support more restrictionist measures. But such programs are especially unpopular among liberal Democrats who form one of the core support groups for a comprehensive solution that would allow illegal immigrants to stay. There are many other examples of how compromise proposals can easily misfire politically.

Because immigration is usually of concern to only a small minority of Americans, mobilized groups on either side of the issue can disproportionately influence the outcome of any given skirmish. And because middle ground opinion is so torn between its search for practical solutions and its sense of aggrievement over the presence of illegal immigrants, its views can easily be shaped by how the issue is framed and which aspects of the problem are accentuated.

If anything, in recent years the politics of the issue have become more, rather than less, complicated. In the past, the immigration issue had little partisan or ideological salience. Conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats were about equally divided. That made for complicated alliances, but it also facilitated cross-party compromises such as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act of 1986. Today, as the issue is drawn more into ideological politics and particularly as conservative Republicans move toward more restrictionist positions, the older style of compromise politics may become obsolete. And outside the Latino community, there is considerable evidence that the most intense feeling about immigration is held, for the moment at least, on the conservative side.

In this environment, the media have a larger impact than usual. As Roberto Suro's paper shows, the immigration reform bill of 2007 foundered for a broad range of reasons. The media effect was just one factor. But the current media environment

may have been especially hostile to reform efforts. Talk radio accelerated the movement of Republicans away from compromise. Lou Dobbs' efforts raised the price of compromise for Democrats. And taken together, talk radio and Dobbs were by far the most energetic and opinionated voices in the immigration debate. The traditional media lacked the interest in the issue shown by passionate media opponents of immigration reform, and the more liberal media were far less engaged in the issue than their conservative counterparts. There is some evidence that African-American talk radio was ambivalent about reform, and some

important black hosts voiced skepticism about proposals for legalization. The Latino media were certainly forceful, engaged and effective with their own constituency.⁹ But ambivalence about compromise proposals blunted their impact. And, in any event, the ability of Latino media to influence the swing votes in Congress among Anglos—conservative Republicans and moderate Democrats—was limited. With the country divided and ambivalent about immigration reform, the current balance of forces in the media is more likely to contribute to the Triumph of No than to blaze a path to Yes.

ENDNOTES

¹ Weisberg, Jacob, "The Lou Dobbs Democrats: Say Hello to the New Economic Nationalists." *Slate*, November 8, 2006, from: <http://www.slate.com/id/2153271/>.

² Swarns, Rachel, "Bipartisan Effort to Draft Immigration Bill." *The New York Times*, December 26, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/26/washington/26immig.html?_r=3&pagewanted=1&ref=politics&oref=slogin.

³ This section draws on an analysis from my *Washington Post* column. See E.J. Dionne Jr., "The Split-Level Politics of Immigration," December 11, 2007. Available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/10/AR2007121001562.html>.

⁴ See Jessica Richardson, "Rep. Shuler attempts to combat illegal immigration with the SAVE Act," November 15, 2007, available at http://www.maconnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1694&Itemid=34. Rep. Heath Shuler's congressional website: <http://shuler.house.gov/content/issues/immigration.htm>.

⁵ See the president's statement on immigration: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040107-3.html>.

⁶ This section relies in large part on the analysis and data in "Gallup's Pulse of Democracy: Immigration," available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1660/Immigration.aspx>. As we note elsewhere, we are very grateful for Gallup's help in analyzing its data.

⁷ Phillips, Alberta, "For Blacks, Debate Means a Fight Over Value, Values." *Austin American-Statesman*, May 25, 2007.

⁸ See George Gallup, Jr. *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 2002* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

⁹ De Lafuente, Della, "Look Who's Talking: Putting a Face on Hispanic Radio." *Brandweek*, September 17, 2007.



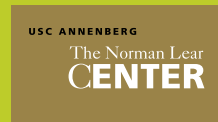
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