

Media Frames and the Immigration Debate

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Abstract: Recent work has found that framing effects depend not only on the content of communication frames, but also on individuals' frequency of exposure to them and perceptions of the credibility of their source. But in considering the influence of immigration news on public opinion, existing research has not systematically analyzed the various frames and sources that have appeared in media coverage of the immigration reform debate. Here, I examine immigration-related communication frames on network television news from May 2005 through June 2007, the most recent sustained period of congressional debate on the issue. Though the frames on different sides of the debate—those arguing for more “restrictive” immigration policies and those arguing for more “welcoming” policies—were given nearly equal air time, the sources of those frames were dramatically different. Restrictive frames came largely from government officials and politicians. Welcoming frames were articulated predominantly by immigrants and demonstrators at rallies. The results suggest that to the extent elected officials, on one hand, and immigrants and demonstrators, on the other, are perceived as differentially credible sources, the media's representation of the immigration debate may provide an advantage to proponents of more restrictive policies.

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On May 1, 2007, the CBS Evening News aired a story about two sisters, Adeline and Leslie Munoz, whose parents recently had been deported to Mexico. The couple had lived illegally in the United States for 18 years. Describing the fear and heartbreak that came from watching their father hauled away in handcuffs, correspondent Sandra Hughes reported on the hardship that had befallen the two girls, ages 9 and 16. “The deportation was inhumane,” their mother Zulma Miranda said. “Our kids will never forget it. The little one always tells me, ‘Every time I hear a knock on the door I think it’s immigration.’”

Three weeks later, as the U.S. Senate approached a debate on a bill that proposed to overhaul the nation’s immigration laws, CBS’ Jim Axelrod reported that the measure was under fire from Republican opponents. Noting that the legislation would allow undocumented workers to apply for permits to stay in the United States, Sen. David Vitter said it would send the wrong message about criminal behavior. “It rewards folks for breaking the law,” the Louisiana Republican said, laying out his opposition to the bill.

The two contrasting arguments—that strict enforcement of immigration laws damages families, and that criminal actions should not be rewarded—are common themes in the debate over, and media coverage of, immigration reform in the United States. Based on a large body of work in political science and communication, we would expect that exposure to these perspectives in the news would have consequences for Americans’ attitudes toward immigration policy. Indeed, recent work suggests that alterations in the amount or content of news coverage of immigration can have effects on public opinion (Albertson and Gadarian n.d.; Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano 2010; Hopkins 2010).

But despite the increasing attention to the relationship between the news and immigration opinion, little work has connected the content of media coverage to the central

tenets of the theory of framing, the predominant framework used to explain how public policy news influences public opinion (e.g., Entman 2004; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Scheufele 1999). The evolving consensus is that exposure to frames does not necessarily result in alterations to or reinforcement of attitudes. Rather, the effect of news coverage depends on the content of the frames deployed by political actors that are carried in the news, and the credibility of the frame's source (Druckman 2001; Chong and Druckman 2007b). Thus, understanding how frames in the news can shape public opinion first requires mapping who says what in media coverage of immigration reform.¹

This paper explores the frames that appeared in the news during the last sustained period of congressional debate over immigration reform, from May 2005 through June 2007. Using a content analysis of every immigration-related story on the network television nightly newscasts, I show that though the frames on different sides of the immigration debate—those arguing for more “restrictive” immigration policies and those arguing for more “welcoming” policies—were given nearly equal time on the news, the sources of those competing frames were dramatically different. Restrictive frames came largely from government officials and politicians, such as members of Congress. Welcoming frames were articulated in the news largely by immigrants themselves and demonstrators at rallies, individuals who operate well outside the walls of institutional power. Because source credibility is an important mediator of communication effects (e.g., Hovland and Weiss 1951), these patterns suggest that, all else equal, news coverage is more likely to move public opinion in a restrictive direction than in a welcoming one.

¹ Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins (2011) provide an analysis of media frames in numerous newspapers from 1997 through 2006. While the authors shed valuable light on the media's portrayal of the nature of, causes of, and solutions to the immigration problem, they do not consider the sources to which the media attended most frequently.

Communication Frames and Framing Effects

Framing is fundamental to political debate. In the search for a winning strategy, political actors selectively emphasize aspects of an issue to win support for their preferred alternative (Riker 1986, Schattschneider 1960). Every communication involves a selective presentation of reality, and when political actors seek to win support for their policies, they frame arguments in ways most favorable to their position. As a result, political argumentation involves the creation of a “communication frame” (Chong and Druckman 2007c), “a central organizing idea ... for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 3). As an example, the proponent of a large real estate project may argue that the project represents economic development, while an opponent might argue the endeavor represents environmental degradation. When exposure to a communication frame causes an individual to alter her opinion on an issue—for example, a citizen decides to oppose the real estate project after seeing a news story about its potential environmental impact—a “framing effect” is said to occur.

While some scholars have argued that framing effects occur by altering the cognitive accessibility of different “considerations” related to an issue (e.g., Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992)—a view that portrays citizens largely as passive recipients of elite communications—more recent work has challenged that perspective. Instead of passively responding to framing attempts, individuals “consciously and deliberately think about the relative importance of different considerations suggested by a frame” (Druckman 2001, 1043), considering both the content and source of a frame in determining whether to “accept” its argument. Thus, a person exposed to an economic or environmental frame would not reflexively respond based on alterations in the accessibility of considerations, but would also evaluate the “strength” of the argument and its source (Druckman 2001; Chong

and Druckman 2007b). Their opinions would then reflect both an assessment of the merits of the message and its relationship to their own predispositions—for instance, the extent to which they generally care more about economic development or environmental protection.

Experimental work has provided support for this latter interpretation (e.g., Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). In particular, Chong and Druckman (2007b) have shown that variation in the strength of frames, the frequency of exposure, the presence of competing frames, and source credibility mediate framing effects. If an individual is exposed to one frame more frequently than another, competing frame (of equal strength), the frame with a “competitive advantage” is likely to have a larger effect on an individual’s attitude. And frames (of equal levels of exposure) attributed to sources with higher levels of perceived credibility are more likely to be persuasive than those from less credible sources. Ultimately, they conclude, “competition is also likely to stimulate expressions of opinions that are closer to an individual’s true preferences” (Chong and Druckman 2007b, 652), suggesting that the ability of citizens to express their interests depends on their exposure to multiple, competing political arguments.

These findings place the mass media at the center of the deliberative process. The news media, and particularly television outlets, represent the public’s primary sources of political information (Graber 2009). In devoting attention to policy debates, the media make it possible for political actors to attempt to win over public opinion through framing (Entman 2004), and for citizens to consider those competing arguments. While journalists have autonomy over the raw material of their stories and the sources they seek out, news coverage of national politics tends to be “indexed” to the dominant views in the government (Bennett 1990; Sigal 1973), and in practice, the news media often serve as conduits of mainstream political debate.

Framing research is often conducted in controlled settings, using either laboratory or survey experiments, and for good reasons (Kinder and Palfrey 1993). But in order to design framing studies that mimic real-world conditions as closely as possible, the first step in studying a public policy debate should be to analyze the frequency with which different frames appear in the mass media, and the source of those frames (Chong and Druckman 2007a). Those results can then be used to design treatments that attempt to replicate real-world communications patterns. If researchers design treatments that do not map to the contours of political debate, the findings will shed less light on actual public opinion than they could otherwise.

The point is illustrated by existing work on source credibility as a mediator of framing effects. For example, in Chong and Druckman's (2007b) important study, they examine, among other things, whether framing effects are weaker when the source is a high school newspaper than when it is a major metropolitan daily. Not surprisingly, they find that, *ceteris paribus*, framing effects are larger in the professional newspaper condition, confirming that perceptions of source credibility mediate the effectiveness of framing attempts. The finding is worthwhile, but there is a limit to what we can learn about the influence of source effects in actual political debate from this type of study. Most political debates do not pit sources of scant credibility against those with well established credibility.

Thus, it is important for research in any given policy area—environmental politics, health care, foreign policy, and so forth—to empirically determine which frames appear with regularity in political debate, and which political actors who are most often the source of those frames. Those findings can then be used to design experimental studies that are faithful to the nature of actual debate.

Content Analysis of Immigration News

This paper reports the results of a content analysis of media coverage of the immigration debate, focusing on the appearance of different frames in the news. I follow Chong and Druckman (2007b) by operationalizing a frame as an argument that articulates a way of thinking about potential immigration reform. The vast majority of frames thus consist of a reason or motivation for changes to immigration law. For example, among the most common arguments for more restrictive immigration policies (such as increasing border security) is that illegal immigration represents a threat to national security. On the other side, among the most common frames arguing for a policy more welcoming to immigrants (a guest worker program, for example) were those that argued stricter immigration laws would harm the U.S. economy by reducing its workforce. Both of these entail a selective focus on particular aspects of the issue (security or economic health) in service of a particular outcome (more restrictive or more welcoming policy). To be clear, I am analyzing the frames used by political actors—politicians, government officials, interest groups, demonstrators, and so forth—that are reported by the news media. I am not analyzing the media’s thematic presentation of policy debates, such as whether the “issue” or “game” aspects of political conflict receive more attention (Lawrence 2000).²

² This is a different approach than some research that has focused on the news media’s more general framing of political debates (e.g., Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins 2011). The most well-known example is Iyengar’s (1991) demonstration that news stories that frame political news episodically (focusing on personal stories or individuals) rather than thematically (focusing on broad trends and statistics) encourage citizens to attribute responsibility for political problems to different sources. Similarly, Lawrence (2000) has focused on journalists’ framing of news stories about policy debates as “issue”- or “game”-focused. These represent overarching themes or portrayals of social or political phenomena, a dynamic separate from what I am interested in, which is the appearance in the news of arguments from competing political actors. To be sure, journalists play a role in deciding which frames to report, and how to do so; their role is not purely passive. But my approach sets aside the question of why certain frames make their way in to the news in order to focus on the question of which ones do.

Coding

I coded every television news story about immigration and immigration reform on the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly news programs from May 1, 2005 through June 27, 2007.³ The first major immigration reform bill of recent years was introduced on May 12, 2005, and the most recent bill failed to pass the Congress on June 28, 2007. In addition to the introduction (and failure) of a number of pieces of congressional legislation, the period included several immigration speeches by President Bush, dozens of immigration rallies and protests, the first widely reported activities of the Minutemen, and the deployment of U.S. National Guard troops to the border. I focus on television coverage because the nightly news programs represent the single largest source of political information for the American public (Graber 2009).

To identify the relevant television news stories, I searched Lexis-Nexis transcripts of each network's nightly news program for the word "immigration" or "immigrant." I then read each story returned by the search protocol. I selected for inclusion in the content analysis only stories that dealt with the debate over immigration or immigration reform. Stories that contained the search terms in a different context were excluded.⁴

For each story included in the content analysis, I coded for several variables, including the date of its airing, its length, and its primary focus. Stories focused on a variety of topics, including legislative debates over immigration reform, President Bush's speeches, immigration protests and rallies, the role of immigrants in the U.S. economy, and border security.⁵

³ These are ABC's World News Tonight, World News Saturday, and World News Sunday; CBS' Evening News; and NBC's Nightly News.

⁴ For example, I excluded stories that quoted officials from the Immigration and Naturalization Service in stories about unrelated topics, such as the bureaucratic organization of the Department of Homeland Security, or cases that referred to immigration controversies in foreign countries (unless they were discussed in the context of the American debate).

⁵ A full list of the story topics is available from the author upon request.

My focus here is on the coding of immigration frames. I defined a frame as any argument for or against some type of immigration reform. Most often, these were quotes from politicians, employers, members of interest groups, citizens, or immigrants themselves explaining why immigration reform was needed. To create a comprehensive list of frames, I used an inductive approach.⁶ I read through each story and made a determination about the content of the frame being used. For each specific frame, I identified its specific content (see Table A-1), its direction—arguing for a more “restrictive” or a more “welcoming” immigration policy—and its source. Each frame was placed into a single category (see Table A-1), as was each source (see Table A-2).

This is clearly a simplification of what is a more complicated policy debate and may strike knowledgeable observers of immigration politics as an indefensible error. My reason for this simplification is partly practical—it makes more manageable the analytical task—but also grounded in the actual nature of political debate. Virtually every argument I identified had a clear directional component—arguing either for immigration laws that would ease the incorporation of immigrants into American life or allow more workers into the country (welcoming), and those that argued for more limitations, either by tightening border security, imposing criminal penalties on illegal immigrants, or other methods (restrictive). To be sure, most proponents of more welcoming proposals would probably also agree that border security is a valuable goal. And many proponents of more restrictive policies would probably concede that deporting the illegal immigrants currently living in the United States is impractical. So by creating two broad frame categories, I do not mean to say that all proponents take one position and see no merit in the other. But in practice, most proponents tended to use frames that were easily categorized into one of the two categories.

⁶ Though other research has identified some common frames in immigration debates (e.g., Bauder 2008), I am not aware of any that have done this systematically in the current iteration of the debate in the U.S.

The one prominent exception to this pattern is George W. Bush, who regularly followed his calls for greater border security with arguments for a guest worker program. But when he, or the rare other person, did indeed use a welcoming and restrictive frame at the same time, I accounted for both in my coding.

As an example of how the direction of frames was coded, a common “restrictive” frame focused on the fact that immigrants in the United States unlawfully should be treated no different than other criminals. A Senate bill that would have created a guest worker program “rewards folks for breaking the law,” as Vitter noted in the CBS News story referenced in the introduction. On the NBC Nightly News on March 26, 2006, Republican Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado, arguing against George W. Bush’s immigration proposal, which would have created a guest worker program and provided a path to citizenship for some immigrants, said: “Let’s try enforcing the law.”

A common “welcoming” frame focused on the role immigrants play in the U.S. economy. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in a July 5, 2006 story on CBS, said the city’s economy “would collapse if they were deported.” Proponents of the provision of a path to citizenship for immigrants also regularly argued that immigrants “are the one that makes the American dream,” as did radio personality Pedro Biaggi on ABC’s World News Tonight on April 9, 2006.

If an individual was quoted as articulating two separate arguments—for example, arguing for tighter border security and harsher penalties for immigrants living in the United States illegally, I coded those as two separate frames, as they represent distinct arguments. I did not double-count, however, when reporters previewed a source’s position that was immediately followed by a direct quote from the source, re-stating the argument. In such cases, only a single frame was counted.

In 80% of the cases, frames were direct quotes from people interviewed in a story. But I also included in the coding the 20% of frames that were articulated by reporters stating a particular person or group's position on the immigration debate. For example, in a story on ABC News on May 12, 2006, reporter Martha Raddatz reported that "conservatives" were arguing that border security was the paramount issue in the immigration fight. Even though no one was directly quoted, I coded the source of that frame as "conservatives."

Of the 284 stories included in the coding, 192 contained at least one identifiable frame. Each story with at least one frame contained, on average, 2.5 frames.⁷ In all, I identified 498 instances of frames. The data set allows me to analyze the content of immigration frames, the frequency with which different frames made their way into the news, and the sources of different frames. I turn now to the results of the analysis.

Results

Table 1 presents the distribution of "restrictive" and "welcoming" frames in news coverage on each network. The unit of analysis is the individual frame, rather than the news story. Two findings are notable. First, the distribution of welcoming and restrictive frames was relatively even. As indicated in the final column, restrictive frames appeared slightly more often, but the difference is negligible. A difference of proportions test between restrictive and welcoming frames is not statistically significant (52% to 48%, $p=0.25$). Consistent with the dominant norm of journalistic objectivity (see Bennett 2007; Graber 2009), the framing attempts of proponents of restrictive and welcoming policies were accorded roughly equal air time on television news.

[Insert Table 1 here]

⁷ Including the stories without a frame, the mean is 1.75 frames.

The second point is that news coverage across the networks is largely the same. The split between the proportion of welcoming and restrictive frames on each network's news program is very similar. ABC and CBS included more restrictive frames than welcoming ones, while NBC had more welcoming than restrictive frames, but the differences are not large. The largest difference on a single network is on CBS where restrictive frames received 55% of the coverage, but it would be hard to describe that distribution as one-sided. A chi-square test reveals that the differences among the networks are not statistically significant. Regardless of which network(s) a person may have watched regularly, they were likely to be exposed to fairly evenly balanced, two-sided, competitive information flow, validating the call for research that reflects the reality that people are typically exposed to multiple frames during policy debates. Because of the similarity in coverage across the three networks, the results in the remainder of the paper will report coverage overall, rather than by network. This will simplify and ease the interpretation of the data.

Though Table 1 suggests the flow of competing arguments about immigration in the news was similarly intense, the amount of media attention to immigration across the two-year period was not. Figure 1 shows that most of the coverage of the immigration debate was concentrated in March, April, and May of 2006. (The data points represent the number of frames that appeared on the news in a single month.)

The spike in coverage resulted from protests and rallies organized across the country by immigrant advocacy groups. The rallies were sparked by opposition to congressional legislation that would have tightened border security, sought to deport immigrants living in the U.S. illegally, and would not have provided a path to citizenship for undocumented residents. For example, during the month of May, 106 frames appeared in the news (58 restrictive, 48 welcoming). In other months, such as December 2006, there were no

immigration frames in the news at all. The patterns are consistent with an “issue-attention cycle” (Bosso 1989; Downs 1972), in which media coverage of a policy debate spikes in response to dramatic events before just as swiftly receding. In the results that follow, it is important to keep in mind that 52% of the frames over the two-year period came in this three-month “protest” period. In the remaining 23 months, the distribution of frames tilts restrictive (57% to 43%, $p < .01$) compared to the overall patterns in Table 1.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

The directional thrust of a frame (restrictive vs. welcoming) is only one element of its content. As recent work has pointed out, the strength or weakness of a frame—defined as its ability to tap into accessible, available, or applicable considerations—is central to its effectiveness (Chong and Druckman 2007b). Some frames are likely to be perceived as stronger than others, so it is imperative to determine whether there is variation in the strength and weakness of different frames on each side of the debate.⁸ The determination of each frame’s effectiveness is beyond the scope of this paper, but by examining the distribution of specific frames, I can (perhaps irresponsibly) speculate about whether one side’s most frequently reported frames appear stronger than the other’s.

Figure 2 presents the frames that appeared in the news most often. The distribution contains both restrictive (designated by “R” and the lighter gray bar) and welcoming (designated by “W” and the darker shade of gray) frames. The bars represent the percentage of all frames made up of frames from each specific category. The exhaustive distribution of frames is shown in Table A-1, but the top 10 in Figure 2 comprise 82% of all frames.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

⁸ The strength of any given frame of course varies from person to person, based on their predispositions.

The figure reveals several substantively important results. The most frequently reported frame was a law enforcement frame (19%), in which proponents of more restrictive immigration policy cast illegal immigrants as “criminals who need to be sent home” or who noted that “these people are law breakers, and don’t deserve to be here.” Combined with the 3% of arguments I coded as “crime” frames—in which specific criminal activity was invoked—law-related frames constituted more than one in five of every frame in the immigration debate.

The second most common restrictive frame, and the third most common overall, was a security/terrorism frame. It is not surprising that proponents of increased border security not only focused on the importance of stopping illegal immigration itself, but on the possibility that a porous border would ease the entrance of terrorists into the U.S. Though it is only conjecture, I assume this frame was far less prevalent in immigration debates before Sept. 11, 2001. If that is true, it is a clear example of the way political actors seek to use political events to their advantage in framing policy debates.

Less frequently reported restrictive frames focused on the burden illegal immigrants placed on taxpayers through their use of health care facilities, education, and other social services (7%). Perhaps surprisingly, the argument that illegal immigrants were taking away American jobs received relatively little attention, just 4%. Overall, the reported frames arguing for more restrictive policy were dominated by law enforcement and security concerns.

The frames on the side of a more welcoming immigration policy focused on two primary themes. The first was the fact that immigrants constitute an important part of the American economy, and that imposing new regulations would damage the U.S. economy by

leaving many jobs unfilled. The “economy dependent” frame constituted the most common argument on the welcoming side of the debate, and made up 15% of all frames.

The other prominent frame focused on the behavior and motivations of immigrants themselves and the tradition of the United States as a “nation of immigrants.” About 7% of frames focused on the fact that immigrants, like other residents of the U.S., were hard-working people who were simply trying to provide a good life for themselves and their families. Another 6% invoked the concept of the “American dream,” focusing on the national importance of the idea that people can work their way up in society. A combined 7% of frames focused on the harm done by restrictions that keep family members of immigrants from migrating to the United States and the ethical imperative of treating immigrants humanely (which usually implied providing them a path to citizenship). Appendix Table A-1 shows that several other infrequently used frames were consonant with this theme (e.g., “the United States should be welcoming”).

Without independent measures of the actual persuasiveness of these frames (Eagly and Chaiken 1993), it is impossible to conclude with certainty that one side or the other has the “upper hand” in terms of the power of the frames reported in the media. One commonality is that the most prominent frames on both sides—law enforcement and security on the restrictive side, the economic importance of immigrations on the welcoming side—focus on the potential threat (security or economic) that could accompany different types of policies. One divergence, however, is that many of welcoming frames made appeals about the nature of immigrants’ goals and the cultural heritage of the United States. It is likely that individuals with different predispositions—people, who on one hand, see security as the paramount concern, compared with those who view egalitarianism as a more important ideal—are likely to respond to these arguments in different ways (Sniderman and

Theriault 2004). And it is also important to note that the acceptance of these arguments among non-Hispanics will rest in part on perceptions of national identity and attitudes toward out-groups (Citrin et al. 1997; Sides and Citrin 2007), attitudes that may prove powerful enough to strongly limit framing effects.

In addition to its content, the source of a persuasive communication is an important mediator of its effects, something that has regularly been obscured in the framing research (see Druckman 2001). For example, work that focuses on mass media framing of policy debates rarely include measures of individual's attitudes toward the media as potential influences on whether those frames have effects or not (see Miller and Krosnick 2000 for a discussion in the context of priming). More importantly, given that most frames are not created by journalists, but instead emanate from other political actors who are being quoted or referenced in news stories, the credibility of the quoted sources may influence whether different frames have effects or not. That means that the likelihood of a communication frame affecting a person's attitude will depend not only on the content of the message but who's sending it.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of sources of all restrictive frames. As shown in the top five bars in the figure, official government sources comprised the largest group of sources of restrictive frames. Members of Congress were the single largest entity, with 22%, while local government officials and George W. Bush made up 15% and 10% of the frames, respectively. The tendency for government or "official" sources to be the source of restrictive frames increases slightly by including the 6% of frames attributed to "conservatives" or "Republicans" who were not directly quoted. In isolation, those results are not remarkable; government officials and prominent political actors are the single most common source of news for the mass media (Bennett 2007; Cook 2005; Sigal 1973). But

they take on more meaning, and importance, when compared to the sources of welcoming frames.

[Insert Figure 3 here]

In stark contrast, as shown in Figure 4, immigrants were the single most common source of welcoming frames, at 21%. Viewers of television news, rather than hearing the argument for more welcoming policies from government officials, instead heard it from immigrants themselves. An additional 10% of welcoming frames came from demonstrators at one of the numerous immigration rallies, meaning that close to one-third of all welcoming frames came from immigrants or protestors. George W. Bush was the second most frequently quoted proponent of a welcoming immigration policy (15%). Bush's appearance as a prominent source of both frames reflects his positions that comprehensive immigration reform required strong border security (restrictive) and a guest worker program that would allow immigrants to continue working in the United States (welcoming). Business owners and employers were the source of about 11% of the welcoming frames, which fits with the findings in Figure 2 that showed the economic dependency argument to be the most common among all welcoming frames. In contrast to restrictive frames, however, members of Congress were the source of just 8% of all welcoming frames.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

As with the distribution of different frames, it is impossible from these patterns to draw conclusions about the implications of the difference in sources of restrictive and welcoming frames; opinion data are needed to make those determinations. But it does not seem controversial to posit that the public is likely to process messages from elected officials differently than those from demonstrators at protests and rallies. Despite the fact that many people view politicians and government officials with great skepticism (Hibbing and Theiss-

Morse 2002), it is incontrovertible that people respond to cues from political elites about policy issues (Zaller 1992). The dynamics of this process depends on the nature of the information environment and attributes of individual citizens, but elites play an important role in determining the shape of public opinion. There is little evidence that citizens take cues from immigrants or protestors. To the extent that official sources other than a president bucking the preferences of his own party are rarely the source of frames supporting a more welcoming immigration policy, proponents may have a hard time winning over public opinion.

Conclusion

In June of 2007, a Zogby International/UPI poll asked a representative sample of Americans whether “illegal immigrants are a benefit or burden.” Roughly one-fifth of respondents—22%—answered “benefit,” while nearly one-half—46%—said “burden.” Among those who offered a clear opinion—30% said neither or both—the tilt was toward more restrictive policies. In the same survey, respondents were asked which element of immigration reform was most important: enforcing current immigration laws, increasing border security, or creating a guest worker program/reforms that would provide a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants. More than 70% of respondents chose one of the first two options (42% law enforcement, 29% border security), while just 23% chose the welcoming option.

Public opinion toward immigration has its roots in many sources beyond the framing attempts of political elites (e.g., Citrin et al. 1997; Hopkins 2010), and these data are but a narrow snapshot of Americans’ attitudes. But given the importance of information in shaping citizen attitudes (e.g., Page and Shapiro 1992; Zaller 1992), the nature of the immigration debate as portrayed in the mass media may help explain the restrictive tilt in

public opinion. While the distribution of restrictive and welcoming frames was fairly competitive on television news during the period of this study, the strength of the most prominent arguments on either side was perhaps less equal: At a time when Americans' worries about national security continued to rival their anxiety about the economy, concerns about law enforcement and security may have tapped more salient considerations than arguments about economic growth and the value of remaining loyal to America's status as a "nation of immigrants."

In addition, the sources of these differing frames were quite divergent. Sources of restrictive frames tended to be government officials and politicians, while the sources of welcoming frames tended to be immigrants and protestors. To the extent that Americans are more comfortable taking cues from (like-minded) elites than (like-minded) demonstrators, the flow of information in the mass media seems more advantageous for proponents of restrictive policies than welcoming ones.

This is of course speculation. Research is needed to determine whether, and how, these frames "matter" for citizen attitudes. But the patterns found in the content analysis underscore two important points: Policy debates portrayed in the media are rarely one-sided; for every frame, there is a counter frame, and the public typically has access to competing political arguments. The second is that even if the amount of coverage devoted to frames on different sides of the issue is equal, the strength of the particular arguments may not be. And in particular, the sources of different frames may diverge in ways that might moderate the public's willingness to accept their arguments. This is a complicated process that the existing literature has not adequately grappled with. But when it comes to the contemporary immigration debate, it appears that the greater credibility of the sources of restrictive frames may give them an advantage over those arguing for more welcoming policies.

Appendix

Table A-1. Distribution of Reported Immigration Frames in Network Television News Coverage, May 2005-June 2007

Frame	% of All Frames (N of Frames)	Type
Law enforcement	18.7 (93)	Restrictive
Economy dependent on immigrants	15.3 (76)	Welcoming
Security/terrorism	14.5 (72)	Restrictive
Immigrants are burden on taxpayers/society	7.2 (36)	Restrictive
Immigrants work hard/trying to make a good life	7.0 (35)	Welcoming
American dream	5.8 (29)	Welcoming
Immigrants take away jobs/harm economy	4.2 (21)	Restrictive
Immigrant families hurt by restrictions	4.2 (21)	Welcoming
Crime	3.0 (15)	Restrictive
Immigrants deserve humane treatment	2.4 (12)	Welcoming
Immigrants aren't criminals	2.4 (12)	Welcoming
Border fence would hurt U.S. image	2.0 (10)	Welcoming
Need to bring immigrants "out of shadows"	2.0 (10)	Welcoming
Mass deportation is impractical	1.6 (8)	Welcoming
Immigrants are ruining the country/are a nuisance	1.2 (6)	Restrictive
Deportation/strict enforcement is racist	1.2 (6)	Welcoming
Other welcoming frame	1.2 (6)	Welcoming
The United State should be welcoming	1.0 (5)	Welcoming
General threat	0.8 (4)	Restrictive
Immigrants' debt to society can be repaid	0.8 (4)	Welcoming
Guest worker plan would reduce illegal immigration	0.8 (4)	Welcoming
Immigrants have no right to be here	0.6 (3)	Restrictive
Immigration is hurting black community	0.6 (3)	Restrictive
Americans should decide who comes in	0.4 (2)	Restrictive
We are "all the same people"	0.4 (2)	Welcoming
Other restrictive	0.4 (2)	Restrictive
Loss of American identity	0.2 (1)	Restrictive
Total	100 (498)	

Table A-2. Specific Sources of Immigration Frames in Network Television News Coverage, May 2005-June 2007

1=local govt. official	33=retired border patrol agent
2=local law enforcement official	34=American Friends Service Committee
3=minutemen	35=White House
4=George W. Bush	36=lawyer
5=religiously affiliated	37=Democrats
6=supporters/backers of legislation	38=U.S. officials
7=employer/businessperson/"employers and contractors"/farmer	39=reporter/anchor
8=ordinary citizen (not an immigrant)/"residents"/radio caller	40=political advertisement
9=media personality	41="The American Resistance
10=protestors/demonstrators	42=Compete America
11=many people/some/some viewers/many businesses/groups/others/constituents	43=opponents/critics
12=immigrant	44=Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center
13=illegal immigrant	45=university official
14=Federation for American Immigration Reform official	46=Karl Rove
15=conservatives	47=unions
16=poll of Americans	48=liberals
17=U.S. senator	49=Mexican-American Legal and Educational Defense Fund
18=U.S. representative	50=U.S. Chamber of Commerce
19=Mexican official	51=Manhattan Institute
20=independent expert/"experts"/independent study	52=Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers
21=Center for Immigration Studies/CIS official	53=Texas Vegetable Association
22=presidential candidate	54=La Raza
23=Republicans (Senate, House, voters)	55=congressional candidate
24=Border Patrol union official	56=Latino Movement USA
25=Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation	57=Numbers USA
26=Federation for American Immigration Reform	58=National Immigration Forum
27=immigrants rights advocate/immigration advocates	59=Canadian Business Council
28=Michael Chertoff	60=blacks
29=doctor/hospital officials	61=Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law
30=Janice Kephart, 9/11 Commission	62=Rand Corporation
31="officials"	
32=immigration enforcement advocate	

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Table 1. Distribution of Restrictive and Welcoming Immigration Frames on Television, by Network, May 2005-June 2007

	ABC	CBS	NBC	Total
Restrictive	52.6% (71)	54.9% (89)	48.8% (98)	51.8% (258)
Welcoming	47.4% (64)	45.1% (73)	51.2% (103)	48.2% (240)
Total	100% (135)	100% (162)	100% (201)	100% (498)

Pearson $\chi^2 = 1.42, p=.50$

Figure 1. The Number of Restrictive and Welcoming Immigration Frames on Network Television, by Month, May 2005-June 2007

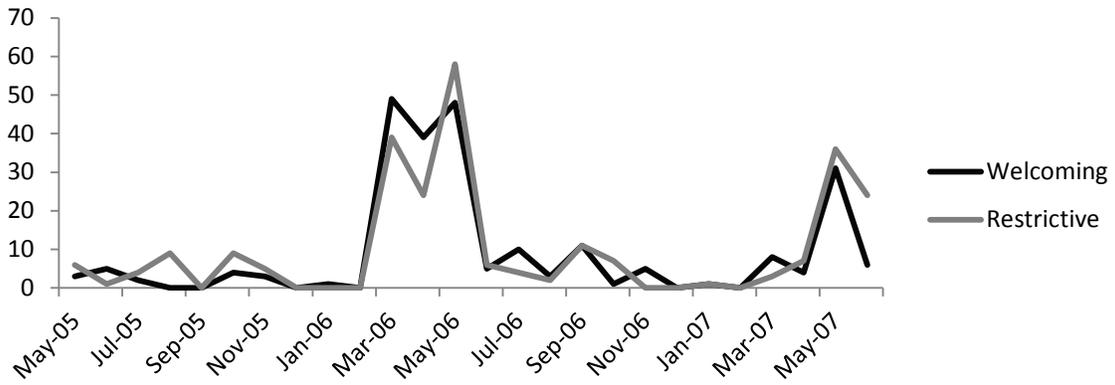
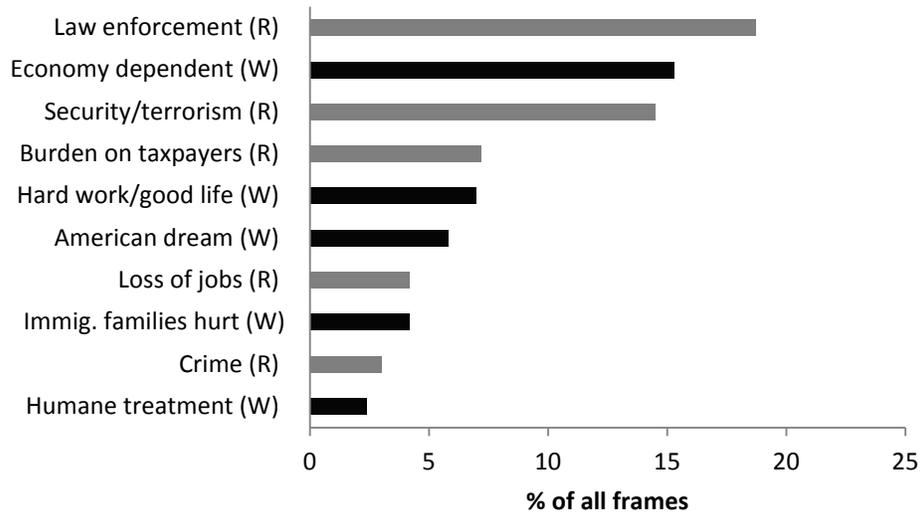


Figure 2. The Distribution of Specific Immigration Frames on Network Television, May 2005-June 2007



Note: (W)=Welcoming frame; (R)=Restrictive frame

Figure 3. The Sources of Restrictive Frames on Network Television, May 2005-June 2007

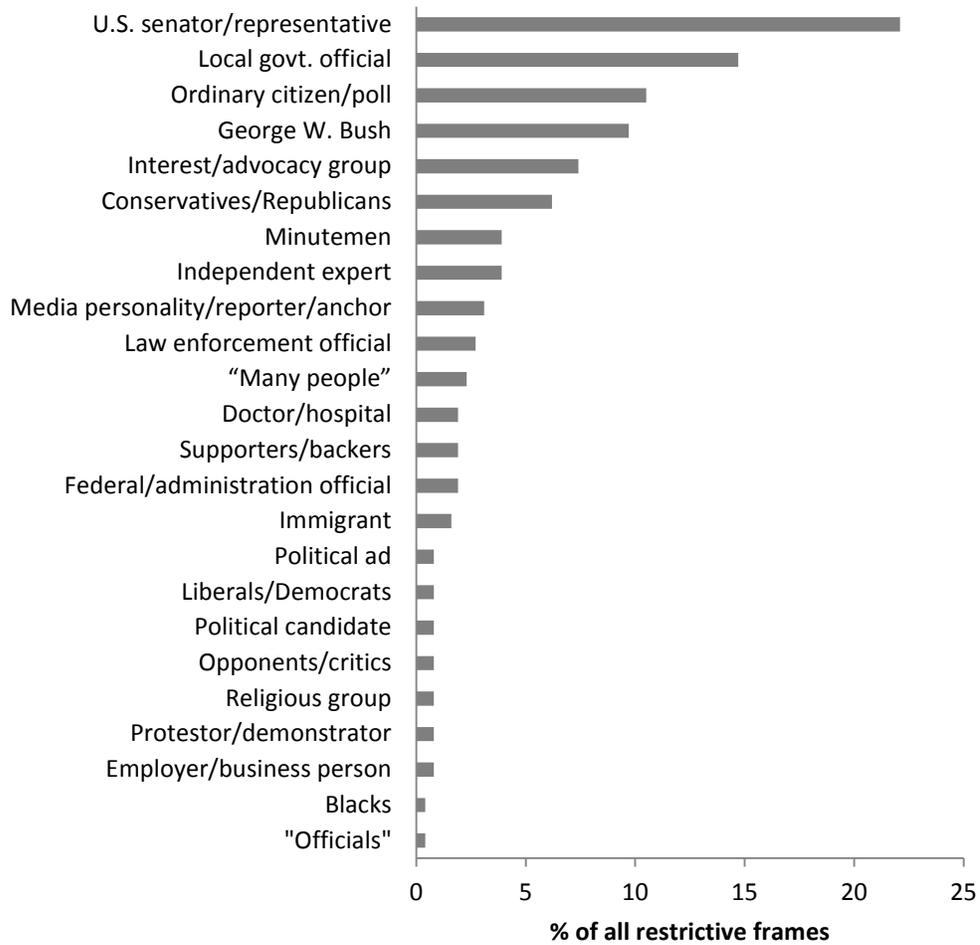


Figure 4. The Sources of Welcoming Frames on Network Television, May 2005-June 2007

