

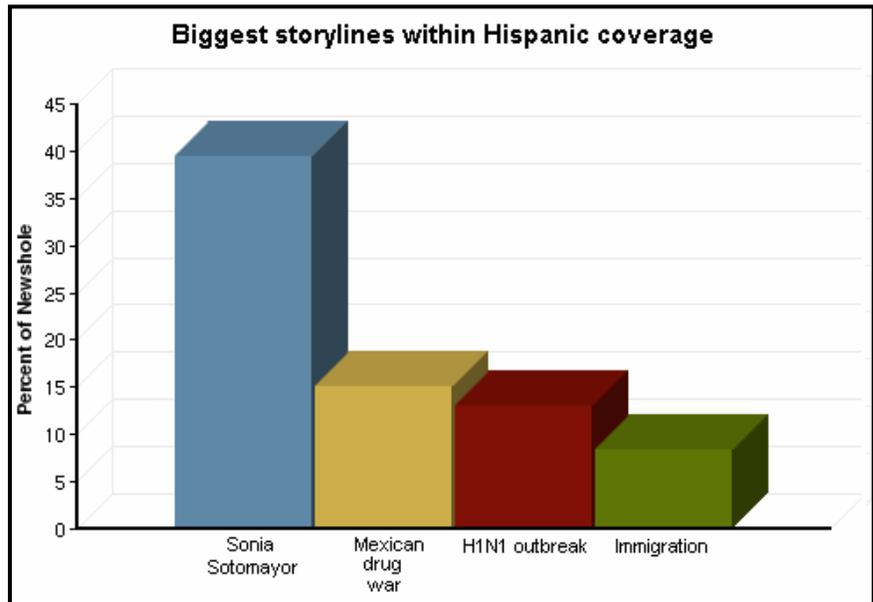


Hispanics in the News: Events Drive the Narrative

Hispanics are already the largest minority group in the United States—accounting for 47.4 million people or 15.8% of the total population—and that percentage is expected to nearly double by the middle of this century.¹ As their population grows, so does the importance of how they are portrayed in the media.

A study of more than 34,000 news stories that appeared in major media outlets finds that most of what the public learns about Hispanics comes not through focused coverage of the life and times of this population group but through event-driven news stories in which Hispanics are one of many elements.

From February 9 to August 9, 2009, only a fraction of stories contained substantial references to Hispanics—just 645 out of 34,452 studied. And only a tiny number, 57 stories, focused directly on the lives of Hispanics in the U.S., according to a media content analysis done jointly by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Pew Hispanic Center, both of which are projects of the Pew Research Center.



In the six months studied the biggest news event by far that referenced Hispanics was the nomination and confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Latino to serve on the high court. More than a third of all the coverage that dealt with Hispanic people or issues was about Sotomayor’s nomination.²

¹ U.S. Population Projections, Pew Research Center, February 11, 2008. (create live link).

² Our definition of “Hispanics” includes anyone from a Spanish-speaking Latin American country or Spain. It also included people referred to with terms that traditionally apply to Hispanics, such as “Latino/a” or “Chicano/a.”

Immigration, which from 2006 through 2008 had been heavily debated in Congress and on the political campaign trail, was the subject of fewer than one in ten stories involving Latinos, a reflection of the degree to which the issue largely fell off the radar during the early months of the Obama Administration.

These are some of the central findings of a study that examined coverage of four prominent ethnic, racial and religious groups—Asians, Africans/African-Americans, Hispanics and Muslims—in 55 U.S. news outlets, including 13 newspapers, 15 cable programs, the 7 broadcast network evening and morning news programs, 12 prominent news websites and 9 news radio and talk programs.³

Among the key findings:

- During the six months examined, 2.9% of the news content studied contained substantial references to Hispanics.⁴ That was more attention than any other group studied except for Muslims. Nearly all of the Muslim coverage involved foreign affairs, while the majority of Hispanic coverage concerned domestic issues and events.
- The nomination of Sonia Sotomayor made up the largest share of this Hispanic-related news, 39%, more than twice than of any other storyline. The Mexican drug war came second at 15%; the outbreak of H1NI flu (with its origin in Mexico City) was third, at 13%.
- Immigration, the number four topic, accounted for just 8.4% of the coverage involving Hispanics during these six months. When immigration was discussed, however, Hispanics were the group mentioned most often. Looking at all of the news about immigration, 34% referenced Hispanics, 10 times that of any other ethnic group.
- In the small portion of coverage that dealt with the experiences of Hispanics living in the U.S., the most common storyline was the effect of the recession. Next was the immigrant experience, after that was population growth and changing demographics, and then the question of fair treatment and discrimination.
- Looking at Hispanic figures mentioned in the news, Justice Sotomayor received far more coverage than anyone else. She was a lead newsmaker⁵ in 30% of all stories with a Hispanic element. The only other people to garner even one percent of the total were leaders of Latin American countries: ousted Honduran president

³ In any given week, our coding universe includes a total of eight radio shows: 3 news programs and 5 talk shows. However, during this six-month period, our lineup of radio talk programs changed as we switched between Randi Rhodes' program and Stephanie Miller's show. Both of these programs were a part of this study. (For details, see our [News Index Methodology](#).)

⁴ Percentages in this report are based on newshole, measured as time on TV and radio and space online or in print. For this analysis we studied a total of 815.62 broadcast hours and 6.9 million words across 34,452 stories.

⁵ In our coding, "lead newsmaker" refers to a person mentioned in over half of a given news story or segment.

Manuel Zelaya (1.7%), Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez (1.4%), and Mexican president Felipe Calderón (1.1%).

- The degree to which Hispanics are covered in the news varied by media sector. Newspapers gave them the most attention, with Hispanic references in 4.3% of the front-page coverage studied. Hispanics were least likely to be referenced on cable television, appearing in 1.9% of the newshole studied. (Newshole is the percent of total time on TV and radio and space online or in print studied.)

The Population Picture

Since 1990 the U.S. Hispanic population has more than doubled, increasing from 21.9 million to 47.4 million in 2009. And, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, it is projected to nearly triple in size to 129 million by 2050, when nearly one-in-three (29%) Americans are expected to be Hispanic ([Passel and Cohn, 2008a](#)).

This growth has also broadened across the U.S. According to U.S. Census data, between 2000 and 2007 the Hispanic population grew in 3,000 of the nation's 3,141 counties.

As of 2007, the majority of Hispanics (60.2%) were born in the U.S. ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2009a](#)). Nearly two-thirds (64.3%) of all Hispanics identify their ancestor's country of origin as Mexico. This is followed by 9.1% who say they are of Puerto Rican origin, 3.5% who say they are of Cuban origin, 3.2% who say they are of Salvadoran origin, and 2.6% who say they are of Dominican origin ([Pew Hispanic Center, 2009b](#)).

Table 1
Characteristics of the U.S. Population, March 2009
by Race and Ethnicity

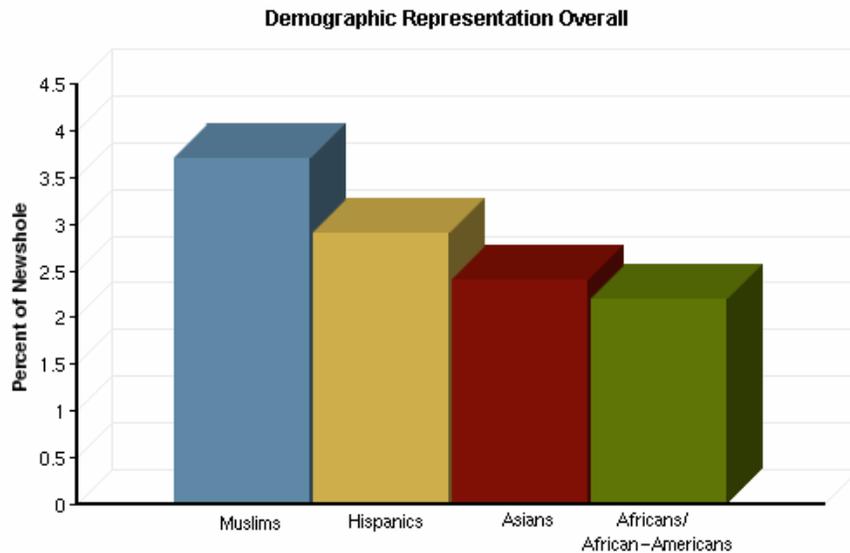
	Population in millions	Share of Population (%)
All	300.5	
Non-Hispanic Whites	195.5	65.1
Hispanics	47.4	15.8
Non-Hispanic Blacks	36.5	12.1
Non-Hispanic Asians	13.7	4.6
Non-Hispanic Others	6.5	2.2

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the March 2009 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement

Note: Estimates are for the civilian, non-institutional population. Asians includes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders. Numbers may not total due to rounding

Overall Coverage of Hispanics in the News

Of the four major ethnic and religious groups studied, Hispanics were covered slightly more (2.9%) than Asians⁶ (2.4%) and Africans/African-Americans⁷ (2.2%). Muslims⁸ received the most coverage (3.7%).

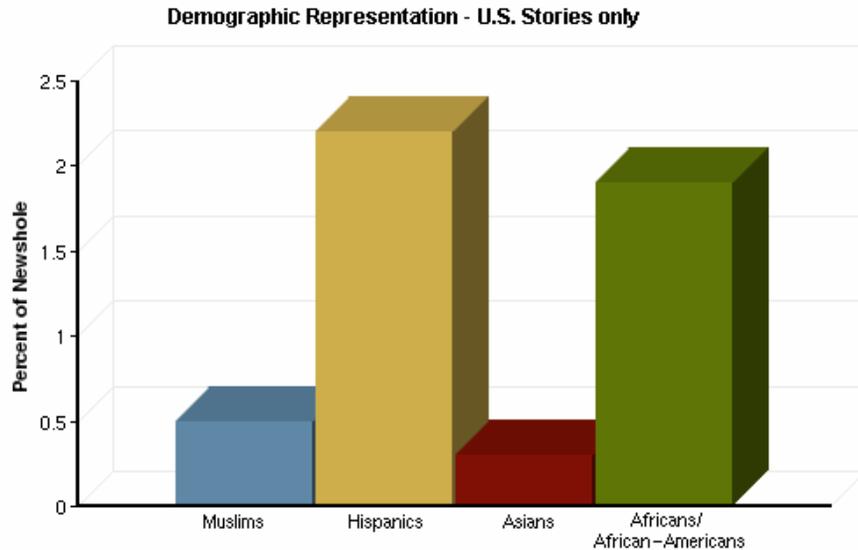


For both Muslims and Asians, nine out of ten stories involved events abroad. By contrast, Hispanics were much more of an American story—58% of the coverage with significant references to Hispanics involved domestic news. Likewise, about two-thirds (65%), of the coverage of Africans and/or African-Americans involved domestic news.

⁶ The Asian/Asian-American group was understood as encompassing people or groups from most eastern and south Asian countries, as well as anyone noted as Asian, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, or Hawaiian.

⁷ The African/African-American group included people or groups from any African country except Egypt, as well as those noted as African, African-American, or Black.

⁸ The Muslim group included anyone noted as Muslim, Islamist, as well as belonging to Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other groups with strong Muslim identities.



Biggest Storylines

If foreign affairs drove coverage of Muslims and Asians, it was one domestic storyline, in particular, that stood out in Hispanic-related coverage: the history-making nomination and confirmation of the first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor. During the period under study, it was also one of the biggest stories of any kind in the national news media. Across PEJ’s entire [News Coverage Index](#) during these six months, from the early days of the Obama Administration through just after Sotomayor’s August 8 swearing-in, the nomination was the seventh-biggest story, filling up 2.6% of the total newshole studied.

When it came to Hispanic-related coverage, Sotomayor was number one. Nearly four-in-ten (39%) stories containing significant Hispanic mentions were about her nomination and eventual confirmation—this despite the fact that the story did not emerge until President Obama announced her nomination on May 26, more than halfway through our period of study. Her nomination quickly became the top news story in the nation, accounting for 24% of the newshole for the week of the announcement, according to PEJ’s [News Coverage Index](#).

The Sotomayor nomination, despite considerable coverage of the partisan debate over her legal philosophy and qualifications, was portrayed mainly as a story about achievement, a Horatio Alger tale that culminated in the confirmation of a Latina to the highest legal position in the country.

The next most prominent Hispanic-related storyline, at 15% of the newshole, was the drug war in Mexico, which was at the height of its intensity in February. Much of the attention to this story was tied to the war along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The swine flu/H1N1 storyline rounded out the top three news events that had explicit and substantial reference to Hispanics. Coverage with those references accounted for 13% of this newshole studied.

In this case, several different threads of the story involved Hispanics. One was the source of the flu; another was the late April shutdown of Mexico City, the nation’s capital city. A third was travel to and from Mexico.

Broad Topics

In addition to counting major story narratives and events that had an Hispanic reference, one can also analyze Hispanic coverage by broad topic area. What percentage of Hispanic coverage had to do with race relations, health care, politics, immigration?

The largest topic category involved courts and the legal system (33%), again reflecting the significance of the Sotomayor storyline. Foreign events came next (17%). This was largely made up of coverage of swine flu outbreaks in other countries, the Mexican drug war, and the ousting of Honduran President Manuel Zelaya. International events that involved the United States directly were No. 3 (9.1% of Hispanic coverage), made up largely of the war on drugs, U.S. relations with Cuba, and U.S. response to the coup in Honduras.

Crime was the No. 4 general topic category involving Hispanics (6.5%). Roughly half of this was made up of stories about the Mexican drug war, and about half was American crime incidents in which Hispanics were specifically referenced as either victims or perpetrators of crime.

Next were stories about immigration (6.3%), followed by health and medicine (6.1%), which were largely stories tied to the H1N1 outbreak.

Broad Topics in Stories with Significant Hispanic Presence	
Broad Story Topic	Percent of newshole
Court/ Legal System	32.8%
Foreign	16.7
U.S. Foreign Affairs	9.1
Crime	6.5
Immigration	6.3
Health/ Medicine	6.1
Additional Domestic Affairs	4.6
Race/Gender relations	5.3
Elections/ Politics/ Campaign	2.1
Government	2.0
Education	1.9
Economics	1.9
Lifestyle	1.8
Sports	1.4
Business	0.5
U.S. Miscellaneous	0.4
Religion	0.3
Environment	0.3
Disasters/ Accidents	<0.1

The Hispanic Experience

One of the central findings about the portrayal of Hispanics in the press is that it mostly comes as bits and pieces inside coverage of other news events. There is little coverage directly about the lives of Hispanics and their experiences in the U.S. Of the 645 stories that related in some way to Hispanics and the Hispanic population, just 57 were primarily about Hispanics as a group.

Coverage cut across all media sectors, but three outlets in particular provided more coverage than others. In March, NBC Nightly News produced a week-long series, *We the People*, which explored how the growing Hispanic population is both adapting to and affecting life in the United States. CNN's *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, a program that no longer is on the air but was known for Dobbs' opposition to illegal immigration and job loss to Mexico, contributed half (6 out of 12) of the cable stories. And the *New York Times* contributed 8 of 18 newspaper stories, most of which were in-depth looks at issues connected to immigration, such as education and employment.

In this select universe of stories, what type of image does the press portray? What kinds of subjects triggered specific coverage?

During the time period studied, four main subject areas drove the coverage of Hispanic life in the U.S. Three of them inherently overlapped with each other: the troubled U.S. economy, immigrants—both legal and illegal, and the Hispanic population overall. The other main area dealt with the question of fair treatment and incidents of racial bias.

A number of the recession-focused stories discussed remittances, the money that immigrants send back to their families still living in their home country. Remittances fell in 2008 for the first time in decades. USA Today.com, on July 10, reported that the decrease had adversely affected Hispanics both in the U.S. and in Latin American countries. "Desperation is increasing among the millions of families who depend on money sent home by relatives in the United States."

In a March 4 story, *NBC Nightly News* described the emotional toll that accompanied this trend, as foreign-born workers "had made a promise to their families back home to work hard and support them."

NBC News also explored on March 3 how businesses and organizations are targeting their marketing towards the growing Hispanic population as a way of surviving the recession.

And the troubled U.S. economy was also tied in media coverage to the narrative about Hispanic immigrants, particularly immigrant labor. A Mexican census figure released in early May showed a 25% drop in emigration to the U.S. The *New York Times* and *Lou Dobbs Tonight* produced stories about this drop and conjectured that the recession might be a major cause, as U.S. jobs grew scarce.

There were a few stories about the lives of Hispanics that were not tied specifically to news events. One from the *Washington Post* on March 8, reported that second-generation Hispanics and Asians are marrying within their own ethnicities at growing rates. As the number of immigrants continues to grow, according to the story, so has the pool of potential partners.

A handful of stories talked about other impacts from the growing immigrant population. An *NBC Nightly News* package, for instance, considered the population spread through a look at a small Wisconsin city, Waukesha. “Latino families having families, growing roots and opportunity,” NBC Correspondent Lee Cowan reported.

A *New York Times* article on April 19 related some of the problems that arise in absorbing new immigrant groups. Smaller communities, the article stated, find themselves “unused to [the immigrants’] presence and unprepared to meet their needs.”

The *New York Times* also considered the impact of this growth on schools. A March 15 article examined a Virginia high school that had a surge of immigrant students. This school responded, according to the article, by “channeling them into a school within a school. It is, in effect, a contemporary form of segregation that provides students learning English intensive support to meet rising academic standards.”

Finally the question of fair treatment and sometimes even racism spurred broad stories about Hispanics in the U.S. The Associated Press, for example, conducted a months-long investigation of the accidental arrest and deportation of legal immigrants, finding 55 such cases: “In a drive to crack down on illegal immigrants, the United States has locked up or thrown out dozens, probably many more, of its own citizens over the past eight years.”

Fox News anchor Bret Baier commented that Obama’s choice of Judd Gregg as Commerce Secretary nominee caused some trepidation among black and Latino voters, as they feared he would cut census funding and thus potentially government money to their districts.

In addition to broad discussion of fairness, some outlets produced stories about specific incidents of racial bias. *Anderson Cooper 360* investigated one Texas town where Latino and black drivers claim they are being disproportionately pulled over by police. And ABC News investigated a club in Philadelphia that attempted to bar a group of black and Latino inner-city children from swimming in their pool.

In the end, though, this coverage of Hispanics made up a very small part of the portrait of Hispanics in the media. In order to get the fuller picture, we can look more broadly at the larger swath of coverage.

Sonia Sotomayor

Questions of ethnic heritage began on day one of Sonia Sotomayor's nomination, as media outlets remarked on the first-ever nomination and both political parties debated the implications of Obama's choice.

And throughout the nomination process, Hispanics remained closely tied to the coverage. About half (48%) of stories about Sonia Sotomayor included a significant mention of her Hispanic heritage.

Most of the Hispanic references in stories about the nomination, indeed, were aimed directly at the nominee and the role that her ethnic heritage could play in the confirmation process.

The first rush of stories following the May 26 announcement nearly all remarked on the historic potential for the first-ever Hispanic Supreme Court justice. *NBC Nightly News* Anchor Brian Williams, for example, opened the May 26 newscast with, "President Obama makes history by choosing Sonia Sotomayor for the United States Supreme Court. Raised in New York City public housing, will she be confirmed as the first Hispanic woman on the high court?"

Brett Baier of the Fox News *Special Report* also led off his May 26 broadcast by commenting on the historic significance of Obama's choice: "The nation's first African-American president today nominated the person who could become the nation's first Hispanic Supreme Court Justice and only the third woman to serve on the high court."

Spokane's *Spokesman Review* likewise remarked that Sotomayor "would be the first Hispanic justice on the high court" but also sought out the opinion of the Hispanic community. The Latino advocacy group Hispanics for a Fair Judiciary praised Obama and Sotomayor, telling the *Spokesman Review*, "The president deserves praise for working to make a Hispanic voice heard in the exclusive chambers of our nation's highest court."

By the next day, much of the media had concluded that Sotomayor's race would be a stumbling block for Republicans opposed to her confirmation. As a May 27 Associated Press article in the *Meadville Tribune* summarized, "Republicans, at sea as a party and having lost ground with Hispanic voters, the fastest-growing segment of the population, will have a hard time defeating the woman who would be the first Hispanic justice. And the inevitable partisan fights over Sotomayor's nomination hold heavy risks for a party striving to draw beyond its mostly white, Southern and conservative base."

The notion that race was too much a part of Sotomayor's legal thinking became a major talking point and dividing line in the media debate.

On the May 26 edition of *Hardball*, for example, Pat Buchanan said that he thought Sotomayor's statements about her race and gender should disqualify her. "I'm saying

that she herself says that her gender and her ethnicity will influence her decision, and that would be for me a disqualification for the Supreme Court. She is an affirmative action pick... Clearly the President was down to four choices, all of them women, and he picked the Hispanic.”

Yet almost all of these were matched by defenses by Democrats or liberal commentators backing her nomination, such as the answer by Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY), responding to such claims in a May 27 interview on the *Today Show*: “It’s not fair at all. She is just top-notch legally...and her record on the bench is outstanding.”

While the high-profile commotion over Sotomayor’s nomination took place in the newspapers and airwaves, a quieter but nevertheless impassioned debate was taking place online about whether Sotomayor was actually the first Hispanic on the court, or if one should count former Justice Benjamin Cardozo, who was of Portuguese descent. At the heart of this discussion was the question of the meaning of “Hispanic.”

On the *Wall Street Journal*’s law blog, Harvard Law professor Andrew Kaufman gave a decidedly undecided answer: “I have had many long conversations with a variety of newspaper people about whether Cardozo was the first whatever-name-you-want-to-use. It’s all in the context.”

Adding to the semantic discussion was the *Los Angeles Times*, which ran a May 31 article asking this very question, entitled “Would Sotomayor really be the first Supreme Court Latino?” The paper was then forced to run a correction on June 2, as an editor had changed the reporter’s references from “Hispanics” to “Latinos.” The correction stated, “The article referred to a semantic debate over whether Sotomayor was the first Hispanic to be nominated to the Supreme Court and not Cardozo. The article should have said that advocacy groups praised Sotomayor, a New York-born Puerto Rican, as the first Hispanic, which prompted political opponents to argue that Cardozo’s Portuguese heritage qualified him as the first Hispanic.”

(A May 2009 report released by the Pew Hispanic Center explains that the question can be boiled down to who is creating the definitions, distinguishing between the Census Bureau’s approach to defining a person as Hispanic “You are if you say so” and the more concrete OMB definition, which distinguishes between countries of origin in determining ethnicity.) Read more about this subject in the Pew Hispanic Center’s May [report](#) on the topic.

After the initial wave of excitement created by her nomination, coverage dropped gradually, only to see another large spike in July, during Sotomayor’s confirmation hearings. Once again, her Hispanic heritage featured heavily in the discussion as senators questioned Sotomayor in particular about remarks she made eight years ago about her Hispanic heritage. In a 2001 address to the University of California at Berkeley School of Law, Judge Sotomayor stated, “I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn’t lived that life.”

These comments, along with Sotomayor's decision on a case about racial profiling at a fire department in Connecticut, brought about allegations that Sonia Sotomayor herself was a racist. Much of this keyed on her speech at Berkeley.

Indeed, in a separate analysis run for PEJ by a team of academics from Cornell and Stanford of the most repeated concepts in the media during this period, the term "wise Latina" ranked fourth out of all the concepts captured. Through a new technology-based media analysis system called "Meme-tracker," the team examines a much wider swath of media—1.6 million media sites and blogs—and can identify and track the most frequently quoted phrases and concepts resonating throughout the media. Through a process of identifying the phrases and then searching for the words around them and similar ideas that might have come from other people, the researchers identify what they call "memes," a word derived from the Greek word *mimema*, that in the internet age has been adopted to mean cultural idea. They found that from February 1 through July 3, the quote "wise Latina" was repeated more than 2,500 times, coming in behind only three other phrases, all of which came from President Obama's public remarks.

This politicization of race caused frustration among some conservative news personalities. On *The O'Reilly Factor* on July 15, Fox commentator Monica Crowley voiced a common opinion among some pundits, as she wondered if "white guilt" contributed to Sotomayor's nomination and popularity: "Given the politically correct multicultural environment in America today," said Crowley, "the most radical thing President Obama could have done is nominate a white guy to the court."

One aspect of the coverage of the Sotomayor nomination was the propensity of the press to make comparisons in order to more easily gauge the political climate at the unprecedented prospect of a Latina on the Supreme Court. Outlets both liberal and conservative searched for reference points to other politically successful women and minorities in their debates and predictions surrounding Sotomayor's nomination and confirmation.

On *O'Reilly*, for instance, Crowley compared Sotomayor to people she considered to be more conservative and to have sustained a tougher beating in the political arena, such as failed Bush Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers, former vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin, former justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and sitting Justice Clarence Thomas.

But some more liberal outlets used this same tactic to make opposite points about the prospects for ethnic minorities, as well as women, in political appointments. Keith Olbermann often expressed anger at what he considered to be unfair right-wing charges of "reverse racism" on Sotomayor. On a May 27 episode of *Countdown*, Olbermann made his own comparison of Sotomayor to former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, complaining that Democrats during Gonzales' confirmation feared charges of racism themselves: "Four years ago, we were being told that Alberto Gonzales had to be confirmed as attorney general for Mr. Bush and if you questioned what were truly sketchy credentials, you were an anti-Hispanic racist."

For all the conversation about race and, to a lesser extent, gender, though, the likelihood of Sotomayor's confirmation itself was never seriously in question. This, along with her controversial comments about ethnicity and the law, may have helped create an atmosphere in which race became a central part of the debate.

Mexican Drug War

The next most prominent Hispanic-related storyline, at 15% of the newshole, was the drug war in Mexico, which was at the height of its intensity in February. Much of the attention to the drug war was tied to specific events along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The story filled just 1% of the total newshole during the period studied, but with inherent ties to Hispanics, it was a major element of Hispanic-related news during the period. Coverage here was less about the larger Mexican or Hispanic population and more about increasing violence and leaders' actions in response.

While the subject is hardly new, media attention grew in the spring of 2009, with increased drug-related violence in the U.S., questions of new border controls, and an eventual visit by President Obama. After taking up a negligible portion of the media's newshole from early 2007 through February 2009, coverage more than tripled (to 2.3%), in March and would remain high through April. That made it the number four story in March and the number nine story in April. Coverage of the drug war hit its peak in late March, when it became the second-biggest story in the media for the week of March 23-29.

A substantial portion of the coverage, 43%, made explicit references to an Hispanic dimension of the story, mostly to the cartels themselves and their activities in both Mexico and the U.S.

And this was very much a U.S. story. Most of the coverage, fully 79%, considered the actions in Mexico or along the border as they related to the United States—first, largely in terms of increased violence that was spreading into the states and second in terms of U.S.-Mexico relations. Only one-fifth (21%) focused solely on the drug war's effects on Mexico. Similarly, any discussions of the Hispanic population as a victim of the crimes—either as a whole or as individuals—were rare.

In February, increased crime and other “spillover violence” in several U.S. cities also drew media attention. A February 12 piece in the *Los Angeles Times* highlighted the scope of the problem: “Arizona has become the new drug gateway into the United States. ... One result is an epidemic of kidnapping that many residents are barely aware of. Indeed, most every other crime here is down. But police received 366 kidnapping-for-ransom reports last year, and 359 in 2007. Police estimate twice that number go unreported.”

Then Mexican President Felipe Calderón took strong action to regain border control, calling in 7500 Mexican soldiers and 1700 Mexican federal agents to Ciudad Juárez — the area with the worst of the cartel fighting. The first of these reinforcements arrived on March 3, and as USA Today.com noted that day, Americans in El Paso, Texas, just across the border from Juarez, welcomed this action. El Paso mayor John Cook told *USA Today*, “I’m relieved ... It shows President Calderon is serious about winning this battle with the cartels.”

The next day, March 4, the *NewsHour* aired an interview with Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano who distinguished between what she considered normal levels of violence from cartels and new spillover violence that might specifically target Americans. “There’s always been a certain amount of violence and crime associated with drug trafficking per se. ... In terms of the spillover violence that you’re referring to, I think what you’re really talking about is this big war between these big cartels and between these big cartels and the Mexican federal government. Is it spilling over in terms of intentionally identifying individuals on this side of the border to kidnap, murder, and the like? We haven’t really seen that yet,” said Napolitano.

Meanwhile, some outlets began addressing the topic of U.S. culpability in the drug war. On February 27, CNN’s *Situation Room* commentator Michael Ware, reporting live from Mexico, emphasized that “all of this is fueled by America’s demand for illicit drugs, and is being fought on both sides—government and cartel—with American weapons.”

Likewise, Mexican President Felipe Calderón told NPR’s *Morning Edition* on March 11 that he considered the U.S.’s sizable demand for drugs a driving factor in his country’s drug-related violence, and as such, he called on the U.S. as one of the world’s largest drug markets to shoulder part of the burden.

In considering whether to send reinforcements, U.S. concerns about the effects on civilians also grew. The State Department issued a travel alert, warning vacationers away from Mexico. Not all travelers heeded this advice, as depicted in a March 12 *NBC Nightly News* package about U.S. college students on spring break in Cancún. “I feel very safe,” one student told NBC. “I wouldn’t even know that there’s a drug war going on.” However, NBC correspondent Mark Potter was quick to point out the presence of “two Cancúns”: “There’s the famous hotel strip...for the tourists and spring-breakers, and there’s the city center, miles away, where the drug-related violence and corruption are present.”

The storyline evolved further in April when President Obama made a visit, following visits by three other top U.S. officials: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, and Attorney General Eric Holder. The attention from the administration sparked heavy coverage from many news outlets as they examined how the U.S. might stop the flow of guns, drugs, and money across the border.

But Obama's trip also inspired an April 16 story on *Morning Edition* that looked at the drug war and larger Mexico-U.S. relations from a different perspective: *Morning Edition* spoke to Mexican-Americans about their hopes for Obama's visit to Mexico and found the drug war to be deeply troubling to many of their interview subjects. "The main concern here," said NPR reporter Mandalit del Barco, "is the same as for many south of the border: stemming the deadly violence being waged by deadly drug cartels." One Mexican-American citizen told del Barco, "Juárez, yeah, it's really bad. A lot of people are dying, and it's tough. It's tough. Hopefully, [Obama and Calderón] can work something out."

Swine Flu/H1N1

The swine flu/H1N1 storyline rounded out the top three news events that had explicit and substantial reference to Hispanics. Coverage with those references accounted for 13% of this newshole studied.

The H1N1 strain of influenza became a cause for global concern in late April, when the virus spread through Mexico and virtually shut down Mexico City. Soon afterwards, foreign tourists who had recently returned from Mexico began to show symptoms of the deadly virus. Around the same time, the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency, and fears of cross-border contamination became more common.

While some argued that the U.S. should close the U.S.-Mexico border, others said that the U.S. should do all it could to help its neighbor. On an April 27 episode of *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, Dobbs cited the strains swine flu placed on the Mexico public health system and commented, "We have Tamiflu in our public health system, we have masks; why are we not doing both the neighborly thing and the intelligent thing, which is to help out our neighbors?" CNN medical correspondent Sanjay Gupta agreed, saying that a strategy of containment could be a smart move for the U.S.

In a story that spanned the U.S. and Mexico, as well as other countries, where did coverage of Hispanics come in? Was this third-biggest storyline for Hispanic-related news largely tied to the events inside the U.S., outside the U.S., or a mixture of both?

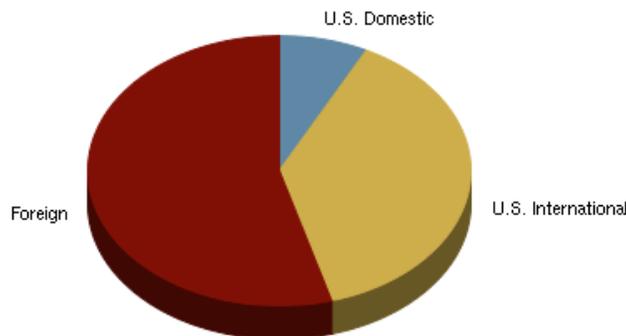
Overall for these six months, the H1N1 accounted for 2.1% of the total national media newshole, as studied in PEJ's News Coverage Index, making it the ninth most reported story of the period.

And the story was not overwhelmingly tied to Hispanics. References to Hispanics were a part of just 18% of the total coverage of the H1N1 during these six months. When it occurred, generally the focus ranged from the Mexican government's attempts to contain the disease, comparisons between the severity of U.S. and Mexican outbreaks, to profiles of swine flu victims.

And a good deal of this story was not about the United States. About half of the Hispanic-related stories, 54%, were tied to events in Mexico or other non-U.S. countries. One of note was the discovery of “boy zero” in late April, Edgar Enrique Hernandez, the five-year-old Mexican boy believed to be the first to contract the disease. A rash of stories profiling Edgar and his health followed. “I feel good,” he told the *Washington Post* on April 28, though his mother, Maria, was less cheerful: “I feel terrible about all of this, because the people are thinking that this was all my son's fault. I don't think this is anyone's fault.”

Another subset of stories dealt with the U.S. in relation to other countries. St. Francis Preparatory School in New York was the source of a rash of swine flu stories when several of its students returned from a trip to Mexico, and nearly 100 St. Francis Prep students subsequently fell ill. Stories like that of St. Francis fueled travel worries as well as fears of schools becoming hotbeds of swine flu transmission. (Coverage of the swine flu outbreak among various foreign-language news sources was more closely examined in a [May PEJ report](#).)

Coverage of H1N1 and Hispanics by Geographic Focus



Only 7.5% of swine flu news containing Hispanic references dealt solely with the U.S. These stories tended to be summaries of the U.S. swine flu situation, with only brief mentions of Mexico’s numbers. A May 4 story in *USA Today* illustrates this trend: “The H1N1 virus has spread throughout most of the country, and health officials said Sunday that they expect more severe cases and deaths from what's commonly called swine flu. Doctors at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) expressed caution about the outbreak even as Mexican health officials said that the new flu strain appears to have peaked, with fewer cases overall and fewer people being hospitalized.”

Because of Mexico’s place as the H1N1 pandemic epicenter and the subsequent news frenzy, some grew concerned about the flu being portrayed as a “Mexican problem.” The *New York Times* reported on May 4 that “nonstop media coverage of a feared pandemic and the belief that the sometimes fatal virus originated in Mexico” were causing

worldwide discrimination against Mexicans: “From Chile, where sports officials declined to host Mexican soccer teams, to China, where the authorities forced even healthy resident Mexicans and Mexican travelers into quarantine, Mexicans say they have been typecast as disease carriers and subjected to humiliating treatment.”

In some cases, news outlets noted that U.S. swine flu cases could be linked to recent travel to Mexico. Radio talk show host Michael Savage was vocal in linking the swine flu to Hispanics and immigrants, calling for the closing of the U.S.-Mexico border, explaining for his listeners the relationship between immigrants and epidemics.

Indeed, as the H1N1 reemerged this fall, infecting thousands across the U.S., the storyline and the treatment of Hispanics within it bears watching.

Immigration and Hispanics

One topic area that people often associate with Hispanics is that of immigration. Hispanics make up a plurality, 47.4%, of U.S. immigrants and are steadily becoming a larger proportion of the U.S. population.

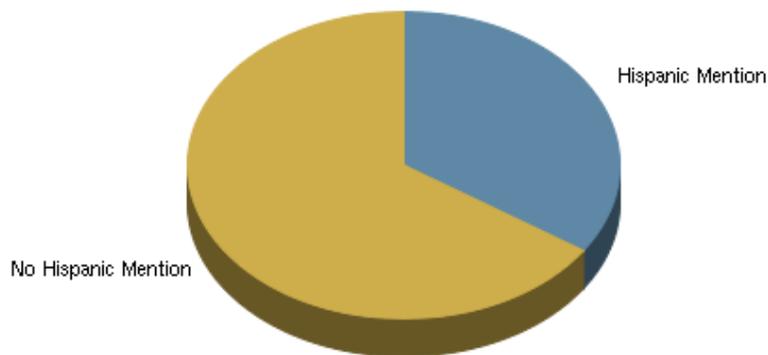
During these six months, no major immigration policy debate or immigration-related events occurred. Instead, a steady stream of smaller stories, such as administration actions on immigrant labor and illegal border crossings provided a low but consistent level of immigration news. In this coverage, how closely did the media tie immigration to “Hispanics”?

Judging from our findings, the answer is complicated. While there is not anywhere near a total overlap between Hispanics and the topic of immigration, Hispanics by far were the single group most often referenced in stories about immigration.

While immigration accounted for just 8.4% of the stories that referenced Hispanics, much of that may have to do more with the legislative agenda and other news events during this time than choices made by the press.

Flipping the picture around and looking at all of the coverage about immigration suggests that Hispanics are more closely associated with the issue than other groups. More than a third (34%) of immigration coverage referenced Hispanics. This was more than ten times that of Asians (3.3%) and more than twenty times that of Africans/African Americans (1.5%). There were absolutely no mentions of Muslims within this coverage.

Hispanic Representation in Stories about Immigration



These references came in immigration stories ranging from immigration statistics to labor to crime. Some told success stories, such as an April 22 story in the *San Antonio Express News* about students benefiting from a program at 5000 U.S. colleges that gives tuition aid to illegal immigrants. Others connected Hispanics to immigrant crime, such as the May arrest of illegal Salvadoran immigrant Ingmar Guandique for the killing of Chandra Levy.

The most popular theme, though, was U.S. immigration policy—often triggered by President Obama or another prominent political figure. An August 4 story on NYTimes.com, for example, discussed Obama’s “aggressive strategy for an illegal-immigration crackdown that relies significantly on programs started by his predecessor.” The piece went on to seek the opinions of immigration advocacy groups frustrated with Obama’s stance. As a representative of the National Council of La Raza told the *Times*, “Our feelings are mixed at best... We understand the need for sensible enforcement, but that does not mean expanding programs that often led to civil rights violations.”

How does this press treatment comport with the ethnic make-up of the immigrant population?

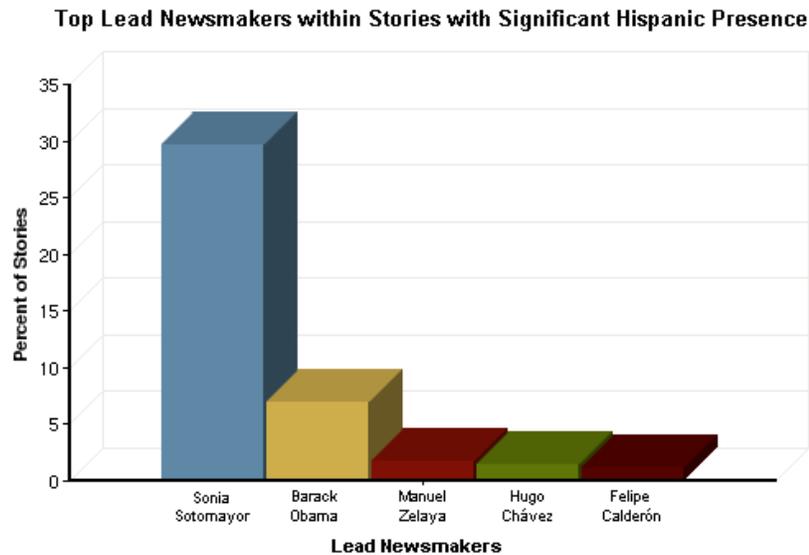
Comparing coverage to the actual population breakdowns suggests that Hispanic immigrants are proportionally represented, but other immigrant groups, like Asians, might be underrepresented. According to 2000 census data, 51.7% of the U.S. foreign-born population is from Latin America, 26.4% from Asia, and 2.8% from Africa.

Lead Newsmakers

Another metric by which we can examine news about Hispanics is to consider *who* was making the news. What specific people—and more specifically, what people of Hispanic heritage—drove these news stories?

Once again, Sonia Sotomayor was the person most often at the center of coverage. Within all news coverage containing prominent references to Hispanics, she was the lead newsmaker in 29.7% of these stories. She also figured prominently in the larger news universe, with her nomination making up 1.5% of the stories in the total NCI.

The next-leading newsmaker among stories containing significant Hispanic references was Barack Obama, at 7.0%. Most of these stories dealt with foreign affairs, such as his April trip to Mexico or his historic handshake with Hugo Chávez at the April Summit of the Americas.

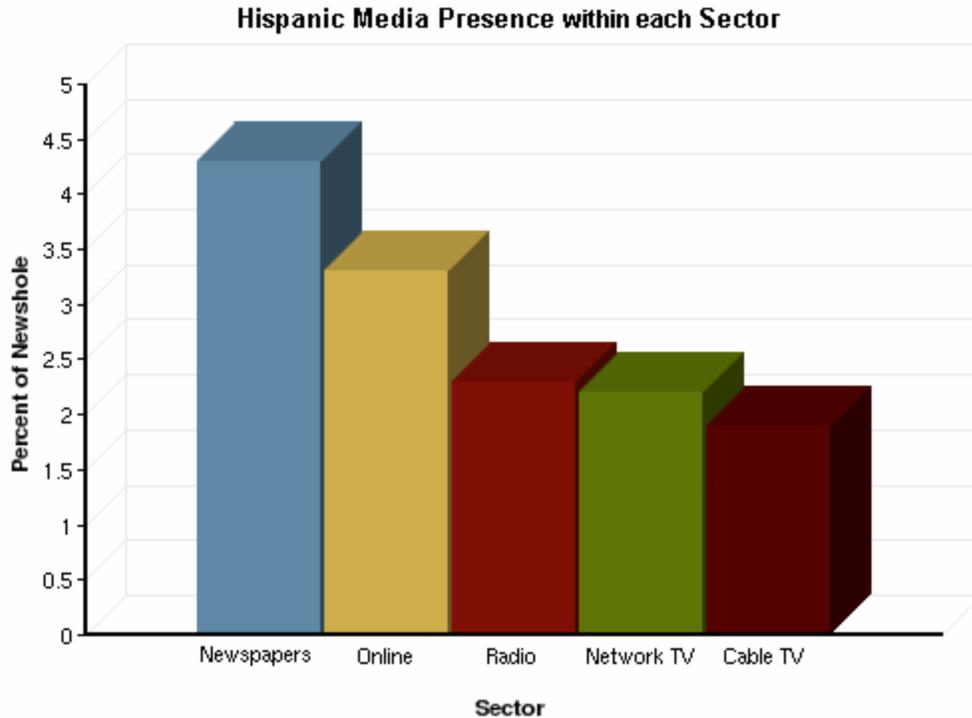


The only other people to garner even one percent of lead newsmaker status in these stories were leaders of Latin American countries that figured prominently in the news from February through August: ousted Honduran president Manuel Zelaya (1.7%), Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez (1.4%), and Mexican president Felipe Calderón (1.1%).

Differences by Media Sector

Are some media more likely to focus on Hispanics than others?

Newspapers had the greatest proportion of Hispanic related coverage of any sector. Overall, 4.3% of its coverage that began on the front pages of the 13 papers studied contained substantial references to Hispanics. Cable television had the lowest proportion, (1.9%). Online, radio news and network TV fell in between.



And not surprisingly, regional differences were substantial. Among newspapers studied, for instance, the *San Antonio Express News*, situated near the Mexican border, stood out for its attention to Hispanics. Fully 9.8% of the coverage on its front page contained significant Hispanic references. Topics like the Mexican drug war and H1N1 were prominent

On April 30, for instance, the *Express News* featured a story about a man sentenced to 51 years in a local court for smuggling ammunition to Mexican cartels. The *Express News* also ran a *Houston Chronicle* story on May 12 about the toll of drug-related kidnappings, particularly on U.S. families with relatives living in Mexico: “Some 8,000 abductions have been reported in Mexico since the mid-1990s. Scores of Americans have been kidnapped along the border, many of them still missing years later.”

The second-leading newspaper in terms of Hispanic coverage, the *New York Times*, at 5.7%, offered a greater number and wider variety of front page stories, as well as broader coverage of foreign news. The *Times* ran more front-page stories about the Honduras coup, for example, than any other newspaper.

It also often included in-depth pieces that were not about the issues du jour. A lengthy (3151 words) piece in the April 26 *Times* told the story of a Queens family whose members’ varying immigrant statuses make even daily life difficult. Another piece, run on April 16, tells about the impact and implications of massive Chinese investment in Latin American countries. Stories like this, which are thematic rather than event-driven, make for broader coverage of Latino issues, as well as of news in general.

A few other individual outlets stood out for referencing Hispanics more frequently than most. Liberal radio talk show host Randi Rhodes (7.2% of stories on her program referenced Hispanics) spent a lot of time discussing the Sotomayor nomination. Indeed, all of her stories that included significant Hispanic mentions were about Sotomayor and the surrounding political debate. Rhodes often drew out particular issues within the Sotomayor storyline that she found to be distasteful or outrageous. One example is Rhodes' May 29 show, in which she spoke for nearly 10 minutes about Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-CO) calling the Latino advocacy group National Council on La Raza, of which Sotomayor is a member, "a Latino KKK without the hoods or the nooses."

Lou Dobbs, who has over the last two years made immigration and immigrant labor signature topics on his show, referenced Hispanics more often on his program, *Lou Dobbs Tonight*, than did any other cable news show, with Hispanics referenced in 5.6% of all news on his program.

The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on PBS actually ran fewer stories that prominently mentioned Hispanics than its counterparts, but its stories tended to be longer and more in-depth—whereas even a longer story about immigration on NBC or CBS might last three to five minutes, a package on immigration on *NewsHour* might run six to seven minutes long, and often be coupled with a lengthy interview. The April 15 episode of *NewsHour*, for example, included a package on the new border czar, plus interviews that covered both the current Mexico drug war and "Operation Gatekeeper," a 1990s U.S. border security operation. Altogether, nearly ten minutes of this episode were thus devoted to Hispanic issues. Likewise, the April 17 episode dedicated eleven minutes to U.S.-Cuba relations.

Immigration by Media Sector

It is also notable that the proportion of stories about the issue of immigration that contained Hispanic mentions varied widely by sector. Newspapers included Hispanics in the greatest percent of immigration coverage, 55%. Network television was close behind, with 46%. Far less of the immigration coverage in other media sectors contained references Hispanics directly—radio (29%), cable television (24%), and online (18%).

It is worth noting that the preponderance of Hispanic representation in newspaper stories about immigration may in part be due to the proximity of some of our newspaper sources (the *San Antonio Express-News* and *Los Angeles Times*, for example) to the U.S.-Mexican border. Likewise, two of online news sites studied (BBC.com and Reuters.com) are located in the United Kingdom, likely influencing their perspective on the U.S. immigration debate.

Methodology

This study by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) and Pew Hispanic Center (PHC) analyzed news coverage of Hispanics during a six month time period, February 9 – August 9, 2009. The analysis is based on coding conducted as a part of PEJ's weekly News Coverage Index (NCI).

During this period, PEJ researchers coded 34,452 stories as a part of the NCI. These stories span across five media sectors, including newspapers, online, network TV, cable TV, and radio. The universe of stories was coded by a team made up of 17 trained coders, a coding administrator, and a senior research methodologist. The complete methodology of the NCI is available here: http://journalism.org/about_news_index/methodology

In addition to the main variables that are a regular part of the NCI, we added variables to track significant mentions of four separate demographic groups. We began coding for significant mentions of Hispanics, Africans and African Americans on February 9 and Asians and Muslims on February 16, 2009.

The Universe

PEJ monitors 55 different news outlets each week Monday–Friday, and Sunday newspapers, including:

- Newspapers: A rotating group of seven newspapers a day, ranging from the *Anniston Star* and *San Jose Mercury News* to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and *New York Times*. All stories on the front page with a national or international focus are captured and coded.
- Broadcast network television evening news shows: The entirety of ABC's *World News Tonight*, CBS's *Evening News*, and NBC's *Nightly News* are captured and coded every weekday. A half hour of every episode of PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* was captured and coded, with coding alternating between the first and the second half-hour of the show.
- Broadcast network television morning news shows: Every Monday to Friday the first 30 minutes of ABC's *Good Morning America*, CBS's *Early Show*, and NBC's *Today* show were captured and coded.
- Daytime cable news: Every weekday, a half-hour of news between 2-2:30 p.m. EST from two of the following channels was recorded and coded: CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC.
- Evening cable news: Every weekday, the first half-hour of a rotating schedule of six news programs from CNN, Fox and MSNBC were recorded and coded, ranging from CNN's *Lou Dobbs Tonight* and *Anderson Cooper 360*, to Fox News's *O'Reilly Factor* and *Hannity* to MSNBC's *Hardball* and *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*.

- Radio news headlines: Twice a day (at 9 a.m. and again at 5 p.m. every Monday to Friday), all news headlines from ABC and CBS radio were captured and coded, as was a half-hour of NPR's *Morning Edition*, with coding alternating between the first half-hour of the first hour, and the first half-hour of the second hour.
- Talk radio: Every day, the first half-hour of a rotating selection of two or three different talk shows was recorded and coded, ranging from Rush Limbaugh and Michael Savage to Ed Schultz and Randi Rhodes.
- Online news: Once a day (Monday to Friday and alternating between 9 a.m and 4 p.m.), the top five stories on a rotating schedule of the following news sites were captured and coded: CNN.com, Yahoo News, MSNBC.com, Google News, Foxnews.com, USA Today.com, NYTimes.com, AOL News, Washingtonpost.com, ABCNews.com, BBC News (international version), and Reuters.com.

Tracking Demographic Groups

In order to track stories in which certain demographic groups had a significant presence, PEJ devised a comprehensive set of rules.

Significant Mention

- To be considered a significant part of the story, 25% of a story needed to be about that demographic group and its race/ethnicity/religion.
- The race/ethnicity/religion needed to be explicitly stated. If a person was pictured or named without his/her race stated explicitly, that story was not coded. This rule applied even if one might assume/guess their ethnicity from the picture or name.
- Stories about foreign governments, businesses, etc. were not be coded unless they referred to how those governments/business are affecting one of the groups of people below.
- A story could be about multiple demographic groups. For example: Asian and Hispanic could both be selected if the story was 25% or more about Asians and 25% or more about Hispanics.
- Any person, group or organization referred to using the term “name of country + American” or “name of region + American” were coded for this variable if they are in 25% of the story.
- For example: Mexican American, Asian American, etc. would be coded if that person satisfied the 25% rule in the story.
- Any person, group or organization referred to by their nationality only was coded for this variable if they were 25% of the story.

- For example: A person or group referred to only as Peruvian, Kenyan, Chinese, etc. would be coded for that ethnic/ demographic group.
- The full list of terms and nationalities for each groups are listed below.

I. Hispanic Presence

Definition: This applies to stories that are 25% or more about a Hispanic person, group or organization.

SPECIFIC TERMS AND NATIONALITIES TO CODE FOR:

Argentinian	Dominican	Paraguayan
Belize	Ecuadorian	Peruvian
Bolivian	El Salvadoran	Portuguese
Brazilian	Guatemalan	Puerto Rican
Chilean	Honduran	Spanish (not language)
Colombian	Mexican	Uruguayan
Costa Rican	Nicaraguan	Venezuelan
Cuban	Panamanian	

Mexican/Mexicana	Indian (Only if Latin American indigenous heritage)
Mestizo/Mestiza (mixed race)	Chicano/Chicana
Mexican American	Cuban
Spanish/Spaniard	Dominican
Puerto Rican	Mulatto/Mulatta
Latin/Latino/Latina	Moreno/Morena

II. African/ African-American Presence (excluding Obama)

Definition: This applies to stories that are 25% or more about an African American/African person, people or organization.

SPECIFIC TERMS AND NATIONALITIES TO CODE FOR:

African American
Black
African

ALL countries (with only one exception, see below) on the continent of Africa, including those in North Africa, are automatically considered as African, i.e.:

Algeria	Rwanda
Congo	Somalia
Ethiopia	South Africa
Kenya	Sudan
Libya	Tunisia
Mali	Zimbabwe
Morocco	etc
Nigeria	

The islands of the Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritania are also African.

The exception is **Egypt**: for Egypt to be considered as African under this variable, the story must explicitly mention Egypt, Egyptians or Egyptian organizations as African – such stories are likely to be rare.

III. Asian/ Asian-American Presence

This applies to stories that are 25% or more about an Asian person, people or organization.

SPECIFIC TERMS TO CODE FOR:

Asian
Asian American
Asian American Pacific Islander
Pacific Islander
Hawaiian

Certain ethnicities are automatically considered Asian if their country of origin is mentioned. These ethnicities and nationalities are:

Burmese (Myanmar)	Korean
Cambodian	Malaysian
Chinese	Pakistani
Filipino (Philippines)	Taiwanese
Indian	Thai
Indonesian	Tibetan
Japanese	Vietnamese

Other ethnicities are sometimes considered Asian, but sometimes considered as part of a different group. For these ethnicities, there must be something explicit in the story linking them with an Asian culture or ethnicity. These include ethnicities/countries such as:

Afghans
Armenians
Georgians (Republic of Georgia)
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan

IV. Muslim Presence

This applies to stories that are 25% or more about a Muslim person, people or organization.

TERMS TO CODE FOR (Include but not limited to):

Muslim
Islamic
Islamist

The religious identity of certain groups and organizations can be assumed. These groups and organizations include:

Al Qaeda
Hammas
Hezbollah

Topline
 News Coverage of Hispanics
 February 9 – August 9, 2009

	Number of stories	Percent of stories
Hispanic Presence	645	1.9%
African/ African-American Presence	478	1.4
Asian Presence*	548	1.6
Muslim Presence*	798	2.3

N=34452 stories

**Note: We started tracking Asians and Muslims from February 16, 2009.*

Demographic Groups' Representation in Newshole February 9 – August 9, 2009				
	Hispanics	Africans/African-Americans	Asians*	Muslims*
TOTAL	2.9%	2.2%	2.4%	3.7%
U.S. Local /Nation	2.2	1.9	0.3	0.5
U.S. International	4.7	3.0	5.7	12.9
Foreign	5.1	2.3	10.6	12.4

**Note: We started tracking Asians and Muslims from February 16, 2009.*

Top Lead Newsmakers Among Stories with a Significant Hispanic Presence	
Name	Percent of newshole
Sotomayor, Sonia	29.7%
Obama, Barack	7.0
Zelaya, Manuel	1.7
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Calderón, Felipe	1.1
Goldman, David	0.8
Guandique, Ingmar	0.8
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Stories	Percent of newshole
Sonia Sotomayor	39.4%
Mexican drug war	15.1
H1N1 Outbreak	13.0
Immigration	8.4
Economic crisis	3.7
Cuba	3.2
Coup in Honduras	2.1
Chandra Levy investigation	0.9
Education system	0.7
Obama administration	0.6

Hispanic Presence in Top Stories	
Stories	Percent of newshole
Sonia Sotomayor	41.6
Mexican drug war	42.9
H1N1 outbreak	18.2
Immigration debate	34.4
Economic crisis	0.6

Hispanic News Representation by Sector	
Sector	Percent of newshole
Overall	2.9%
Newspapers	4.3
Online	3.3
Network TV	2.2
Cable TV	1.9
Radio	2.3

Broad Topics in Stories with Significant Hispanic Presence	
Broad Story Topic	Percent of newshole
Court/ Legal System	32.8%
Foreign	16.7
U.S. Foreign Affairs	9.1
Crime	6.5
Immigration	6.3
Health/ Medicine	6.1
Additional Domestic Affairs	4.6
Race/Gender relations	5.3
Elections/ Politics/ Campaign	2.1
Government	2.0
Education	1.9
Economics	1.9
Lifestyle	1.8
Sports	1.4
Business	0.5
U.S. Miscellaneous	0.4
Religion	0.3
Environment	0.3
Disasters/ Accidents	<0.1

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