



PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

News Coverage of Immigration 2007: A political story, not an issue, covered episodically

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

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

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

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

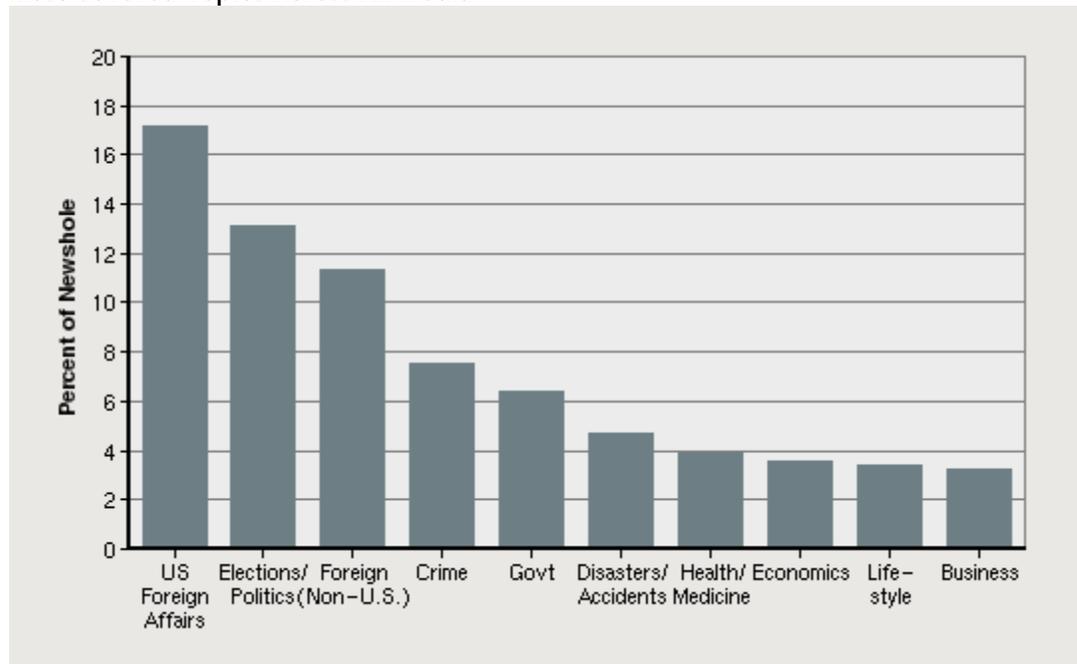
¹ Newshole is defined as the time or space available in an outlet for news content.

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

- A look into the breakdown of immigration stories in 2007 reiterates the political character of coverage. Fully 54.2% of the newshole of all immigration stories considered in this study were on legislation discussion. The second largest category (27% of the news space studied) was a miscellany of events: such as Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on illegal immigrants, and a variety of human interest stories, including one about Elvira Arellano, who took refuge in a church in Chicago.
- With the growing Latino population in the US, some forecast that immigration will become a larger part of presidential campaign debates. But in 2007, during which most of the presidential election coverage was dominated by horserace politics, immigration received only minimal coverage within the campaign. Out of 5,657 presidential campaign stories, only 75 of them related to immigration.
- As stated in PEJ’s State of the News Media 2008 report, overall, newspapers and network television -when compared to the more opinionated platforms of talk radio and cable television news- have a broader and more diverse news agenda. This was evident in the case of immigration coverage as well. While immigration policy coverage skyrocketed in May and June for talk radio and cable, immigration as a topic was consistently present within newspapers signaling an effort to track immigration as a subject that ebbed and flowed throughout the year.

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

Most Covered Topics Across All Media

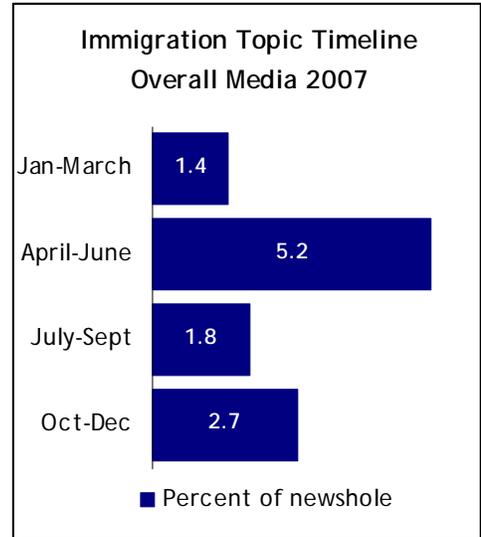


Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007

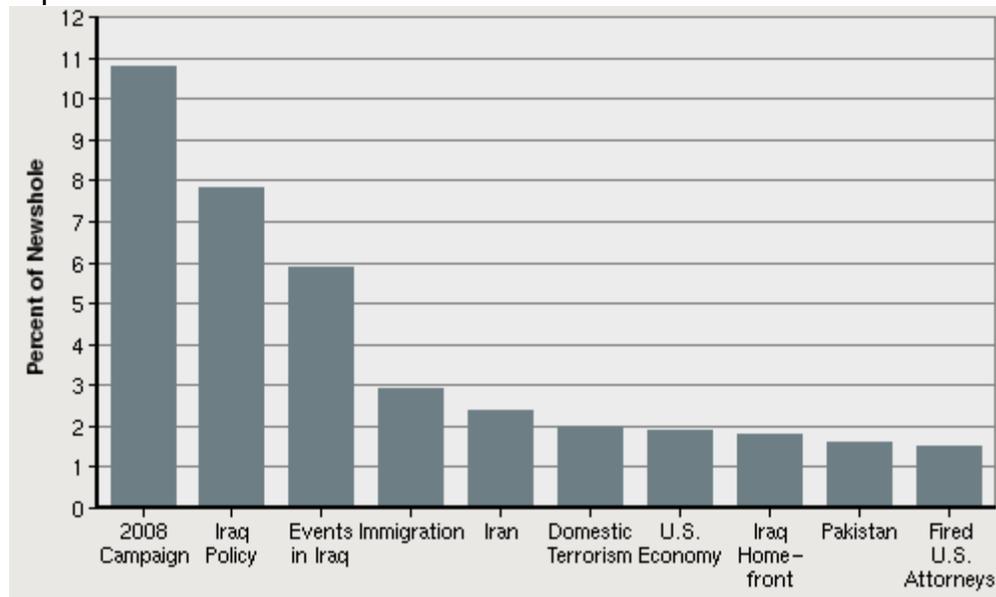
A closer look into the immigration coverage timeline across the year and media reveals how as a topic it was not only covered episodically but also in political terms. While coverage was pretty much low but steady throughout the year, the spike to 5.2% for the second quarter of 2007 shows how immigration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

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

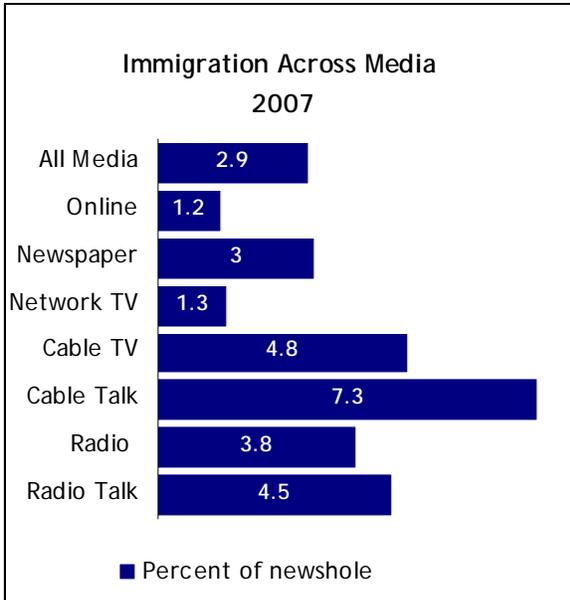
A month by month look into the trajectory of immigration as a big story revealed that coverage was marked by episodic spikes, rather than being continuous. A jump in May to 5.3% and in June to 8.4% of the overall newshole for all media demonstrated once again that immigration was not covered as a topic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



Top 10 Stories For All Media

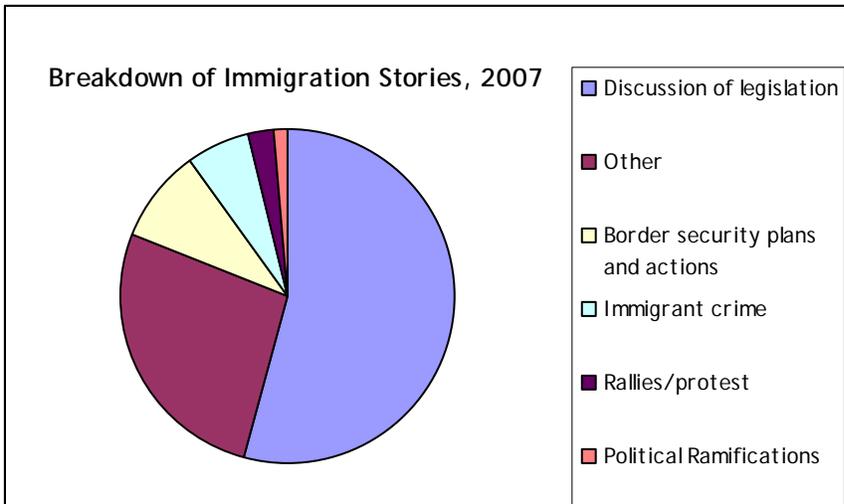
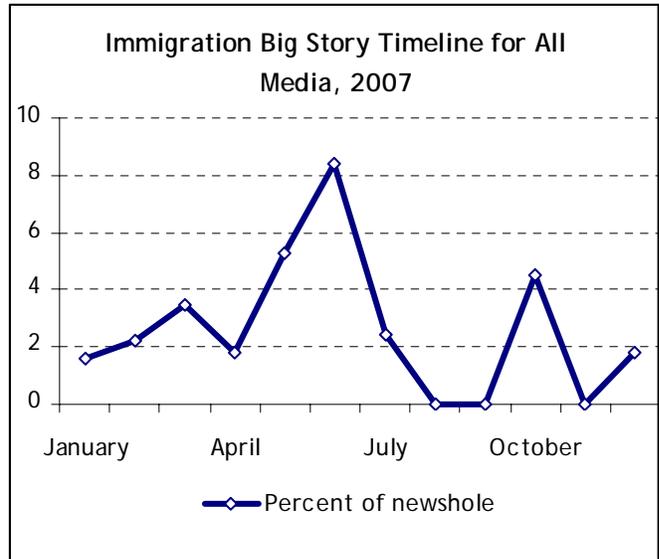


Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007



Coverage of immigration during that time increased dramatically in every sector. More specifically, coverage increased sharply between May 17 and June 28 coinciding with the time frame of the birth and death of the Immigration bill. Coverage of immigration across all media was the No.1 topic in the news. With 9.2% of the news space studied for that particular time period, immigration was able to secure first place ahead of the presidential campaign coverage at 8.9%. Let us consider this specific time period in more detail.

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



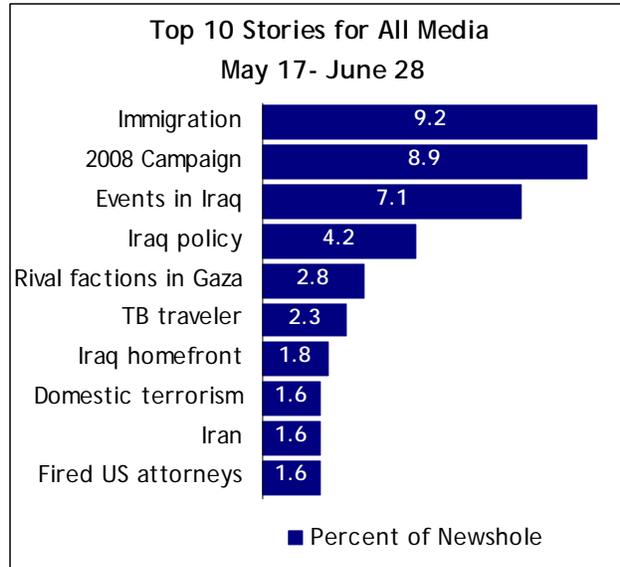
Immigration Bill Coverage

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

how talk radio personalities “put the issue on the front burner.”

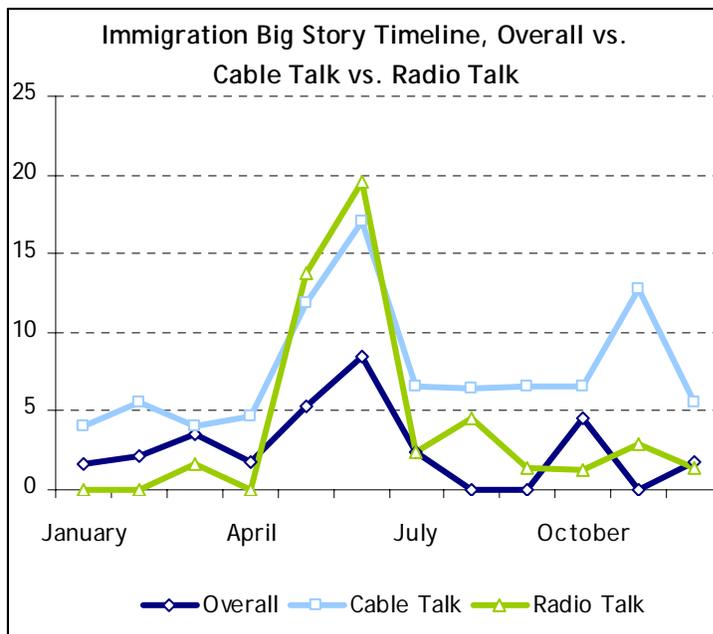
One of our Talk Index reports spotlighting immigration summarizes the timeline of the immigration bill in the following way:

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



As mentioned previously, during this time immigration was the top story followed closely by the presidential campaign coverage across all media. This was also the case in individual sectors. Coverage of immigration increased dramatically, finishing as the top story in newspapers (8%); at fourth place online (4.2%); the third biggest network story (6.1%), the second biggest cable story (11.9%) and the biggest radio story (17.4%) between May 17 and June 28.

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



Cable TV Talk

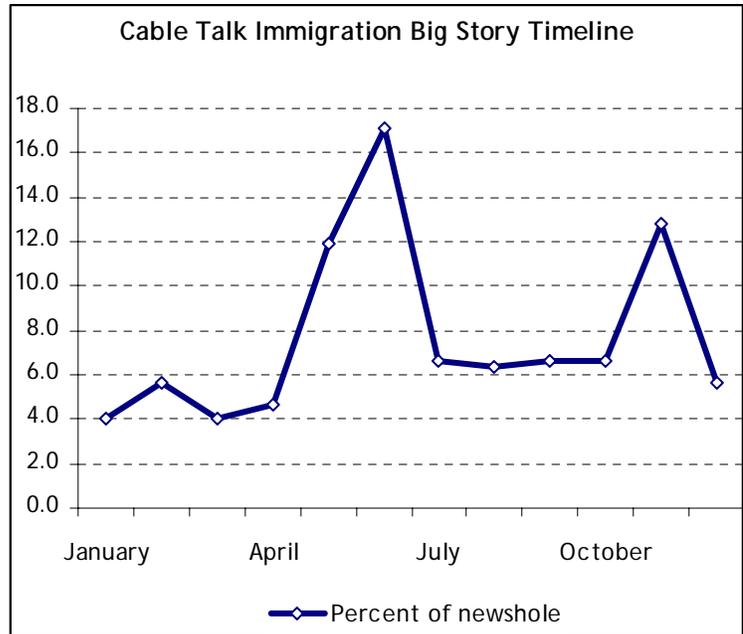
Our universe of cable talkers include the following: Lou Dobbs from CNN; Bill O’Reilly, Sean Hannity & Alan Colmes from FOX; Tucker Carlson, Keith Olbermann, Chris Matthews, Joe Scarborough for the first half of 2007 and Dan Abrams for the second half of 2007 from MSNBC.

Overall the cable news agenda is measurably different than other media. As stated in PEJ’s State of the News Media 2008 report, “the focus on prime time is talk, and tends

toward the political and the controversial. More than any other medium we have studied, the definition of news differs depending on the outlet.”

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

The news agenda on cable to some extent depends not only on the channel but also on the host of the program. Among all the cable talkers, the one who was most clearly devoted to the cause of immigration was CNN’s Lou Dobbs. While throughout the whole year immigration was the number one story at 22%, during this specific time it skyrocketed to 43.1% of the time studied on Dobbs. Besides offering a timeline of the immigration bill debates within the Senate, Dobbs openly criticized the bill as an amnesty bill for illegal aliens in the country, pointed out how the bill would cost taxpayers a lot of money, and emphasized the need for better border security, which according to him was not a part of the proposed bill. He also was critical of George Bush, Ted Kennedy, Michael Chertoff, Lindsay Graham, Trent Lott and their stance on immigration. The night the immigration bill failed, Dobbs began his program with these words: “Tonight the crushing defeat for President Bush and the Senate’s Democratic leadership on amnesty, a glorious victory for the American people.”

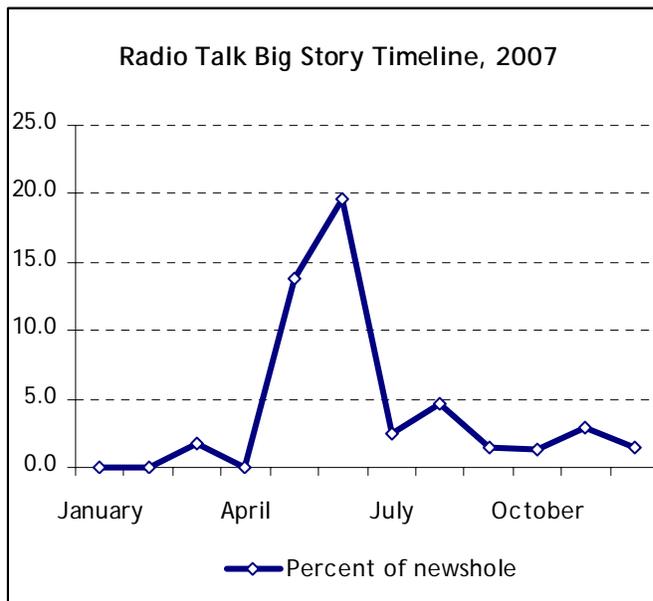


Immigration in 2007 was a bigger story for Bill O’Reilly on Fox than it was for Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes. While for the year it was the top story at 11.4% of the newshole for O’Reilly, immigration ranked 6th at 2.5% for Hannity & Colmes overall. During May 17-June 28 immigration continued to be the top story for O’Reilly at 19.4%. For Hannity & Colmes however, the increase was more significant. Immigration became the second biggest story during that time, occupying 16.5% of the newshole. During this time O’Reilly offered his opposition to the bill, but in comparison to the rest of the year did not go beyond his usual fare of immigration coverage, which mostly seems to focus on illegal immigration, immigrant crime, raids and rallies. Hannity & Colmes’ coverage on immigration during this time seemed to center more on outlines of the bill and interviews with experts and pundits on the provisions in the immigration bill.

Among cable channels, MSNBC is the one trying to position itself as the “place for politics.” This is to some degree evident in its programming. While Tucker Carlson and Chris Matthews devoted 43.8% and 40.9% of their newshole respectively to campaign coverage, Keith Olbermann was more concerned with Iraq war policy (23.8 % of the newshole) for 2007. This did not change for the period from May 17 to June 28 these same topics continued to dominate their agenda. Campaign coverage for Chris Matthews was at 48.5% (immigration was at fourth place with 5.1%). For Olbermann, immigration as an issue was not even in the top 10, he continued to devote his time to Iraq policy and campaign coverage. Tucker was the only MSNBC host studied that showed some interest in the bill. Immigration coverage was at number two at 18.8% after campaign coverage (39.9%).

Radio Talk

As we state in our State of the News Media 2008 report, “one of the most striking characteristics of talk radio is its tendency for hosts to seize on the news and amplify those events.” Immigration policy coverage accounted for 22 % of the newshole for Talk Radio during May 17-June 28. Analysis of this time period underlined the ideological differences between the conservative and liberal talk radio hosts. Conservative radio hosts devoted 31% of their newshole to the coverage of immigration, while their liberal counterparts paid little attention. Immigration ranked at 6th place with only 3.6% of the newshole for this period among liberals.



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

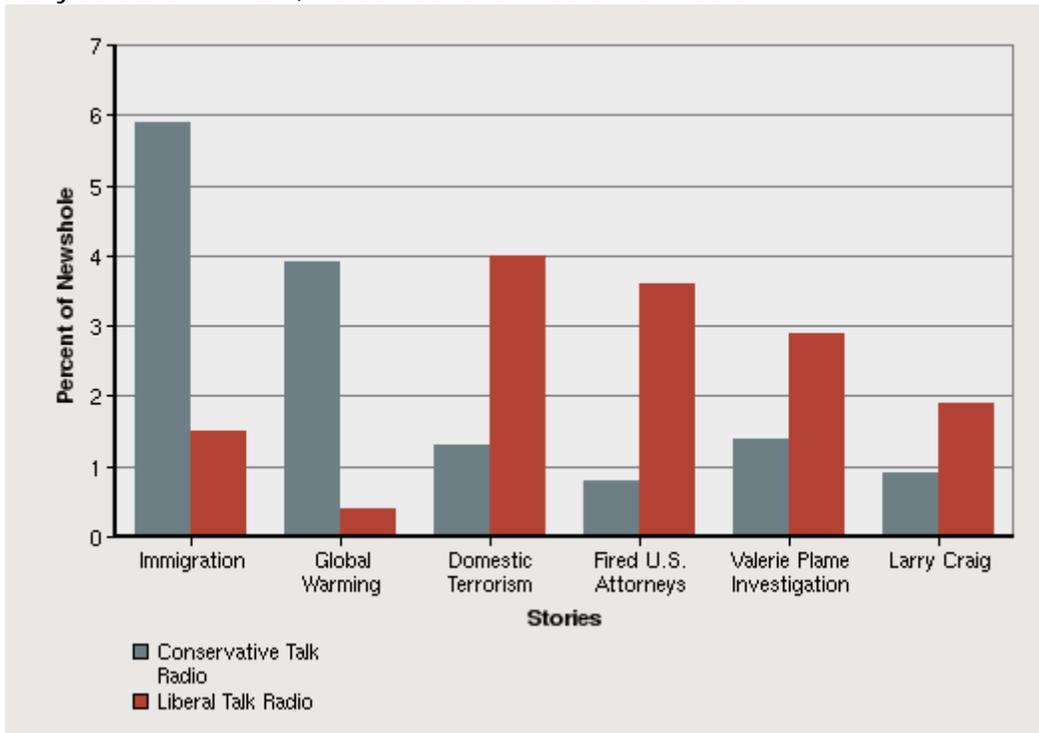
In his coverage of the immigration bill, Sean Hannity—like Limbaugh labeled the bill as an amnesty bill, and throughout the period continued his attack calling the bill “a disaster on many levels.” On June 7th he said the amnesty bill was not dead yet but was on its way, a victory for conservatism.

Michael Savage, the wildcard among conservative talkers, was more explosive in his coverage of the immigration bill. On May 17, he called Bush a traitor and a sellout for his stance

on immigration and he likened the wave of immigration to the Alamo proclaiming “We are not giving away the sovereignty of America.” On June 28th, he opened his program with bells tolling for the death of the immigration bill.

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

Story Selection in 2007, Conservative vs. Liberal Talk Radio

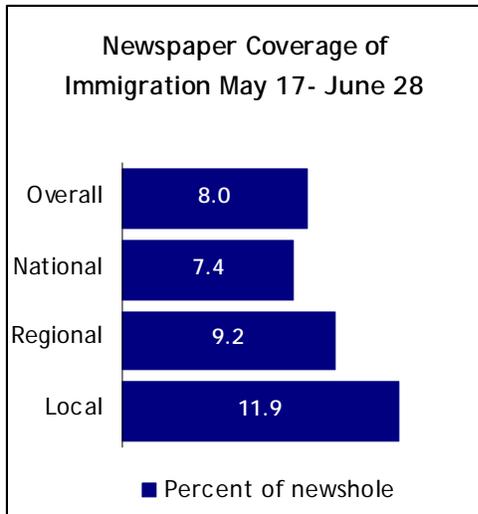


Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007

Newspapers

The immigration debate was the biggest story for newspapers in May 17-June 28, filling 8% of the front page newshole studied, closely followed by campaign coverage at 7.5% and events in Iraq at 7.1%. The emphasis in print is greater than it first seems, considering our analysis includes only the front page articles of national, regional and local papers.³

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



What was most striking about newspapers’ coverage during this specific period was that, besides offering the timeline for the immigration bill within the Senate, they also highlighted some aspects that other forms of media seemed to overlook. For example, the New York Times on May 20 offered the immigrants’ point of view on the bill in an article entitled “Illegal Migrants Dissect Details Of Senate Deal;” on June 25 the Washington Post spotlighted how individual states were cracking down on illegal immigration as a response to the stalled immigration bill with an article entitled “Illegal Immigrants Targeted By States; Impasse on Hill Spurs New Laws.” The Los Angeles Times on May 27 actually provided details of the proposed immigration legislation and explained how the bill was pulling the

GOP in two directions in “Immigration Debate Puts Up a Wall in the GOP; Pursue Latino Voters or Please the Party’s Base? The Senate Overhaul Bill Reveals a Split on What Political Road is Best for Republicans.”

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

The Boston Globe article dated June 5 drew attention to the fact that if the bill passed, newly legalized immigrants would be contributing \$26 billion to the US economy over a decade. The Albuquerque Journal spotlighted the labor shortage in New Mexico and immigration law limitations with “Finding a Way to Solve State’s Shortage of Workers” on June 10. On June 29 after the bill failed, the Bakersfield Californian ran an article on local reaction to Senate’s rejection of the immigration reform. The Chattanooga Times Free Press had an array of articles: spotlighting lack of local support for the bill once on May 29 with “Immigration Bill Draws Opposition from Area Lawmakers” and then on June 26 with “Immigration Bill Lacks Area Support in Senate”; local employers’ cautious approval of the guestworker program in the immigration deal on May 25; and on June 24 localizing the context of the bill with “Bush’s Immigration Zeal Has Texas Roots.”

Immigration Bill Coverage: Spanish vs. English Language Media, A Brief Comparison

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

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

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

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

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

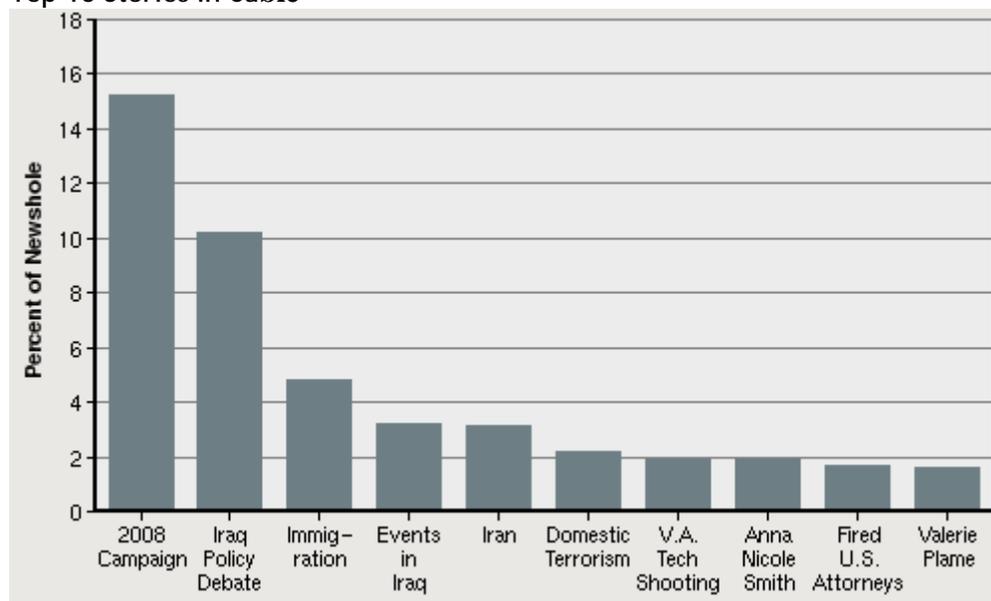
Now that we have considered the specific case of the Immigration Bill coverage, let us look into how much coverage immigration received across media sectors in general.

Immigration Coverage on Cable TV

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

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

Top 10 Stories in Cable



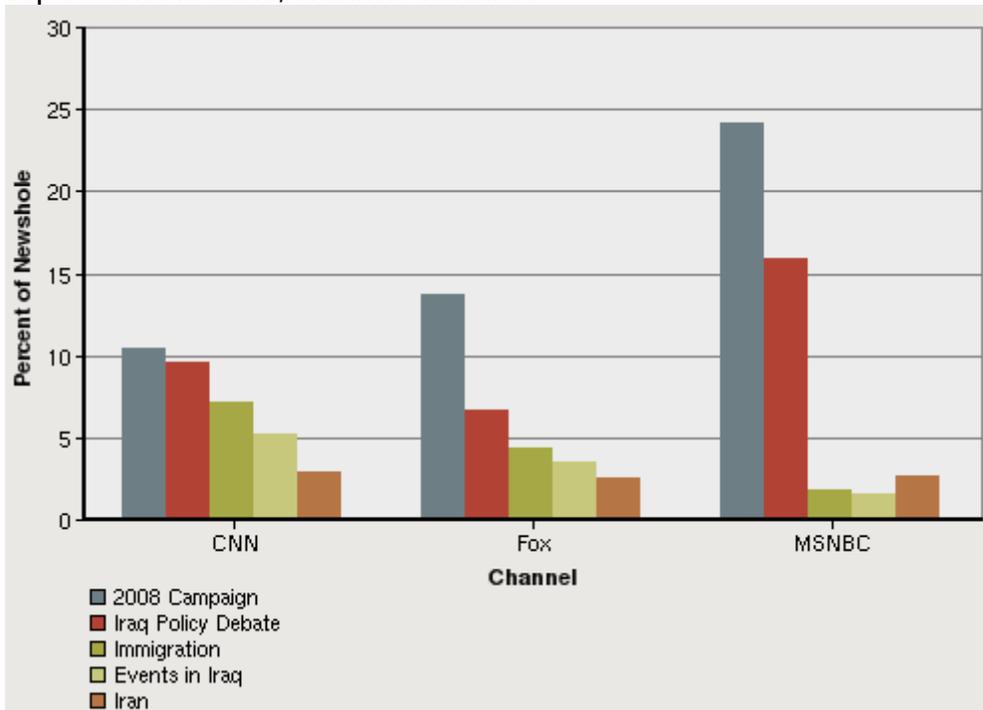
Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007

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

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

The somewhat similar evening newscasts of Fox—Special Report with Brit Hume and Fox Report with Shepard Smith—differ in their rundown of the day’s news. While Smith’s is somewhat more oriented toward a mix of crime, disaster, accidents, with a marked dose of celebrity and entertainment, Hume’s program is focused on politics and government. This was reflected in their coverage of immigration as well. While for Smith, immigration was not a part of the top 10 stories of the year, for Hume it was at No. 5, filling 4.2% of the newshole studied overall. Besides the failed immigration bill coverage, stories on Hume’s nightly news were mostly on state-level immigration legislation news and immigrant crime.

Top 5 Stories in Cable, Channels Combined



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007

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

Radio

The role of talk radio in immigration policy discussion was largely covered in our section devoted to the Immigration Bill. Here we will briefly consider what radio news headlines had to offer on immigration in 2007. Almost all stations offered some summary of the news. For this we analyzed ABC and CBS headline news every day of the week at 9 AM and 5 PM: four headline segments each day which roughly made 20 minutes of radio headline news.

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

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

Top Stories: News Radio Headlines vs. Talk Radio vs. Media Overall

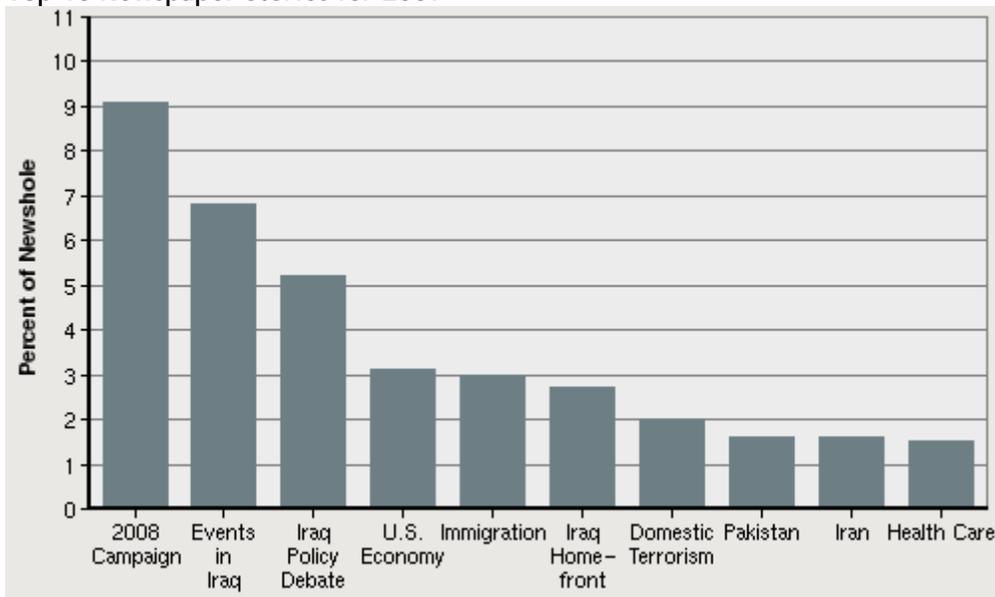
Rank	News Radio Headlines Only		All Talk		Media Overall	
1	Iraq Policy Debate	7%	2008 Campaign	17%	2008 Campaign	11%
2	Events in Iraq	5	Iraq Policy Debate	12	Iraq Policy Debate	8
3	U.S. Economy	3	Immigration	4	Events in Iraq	6
4	2008 Campaign	2	Global Warming	3	Immigration	3
5	U.S. Domestic Terrorism	2	Iran	3	Iran	2
6	Iran	2	Domestic Terrorism	2	U.S. Domestic Terrorism	2
7	Fired U.S. Attorneys	2	New Democratic Congress	2	U.S. Economy	2
8	Iraq Homefront	1	Valerie Plame Investigation	2	Iraq Homefront	2
9	VA Tech Shooting	1	Fired U.S. Attorneys	2	Pakistan	2
10	Gas/Oil Prices	1	Events in Iraq	1	Fired U.S. Attorneys	1

Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007

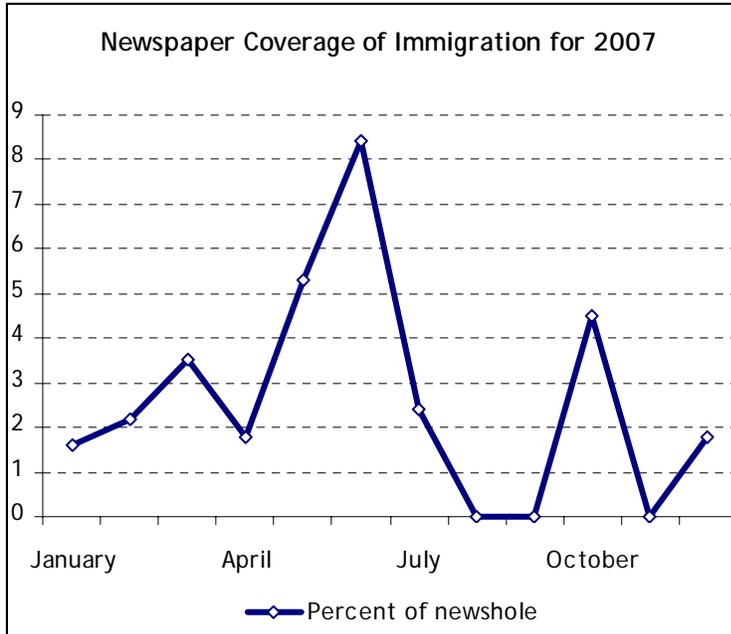
Newspapers

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

Top 10 Newspaper Stories for 2007

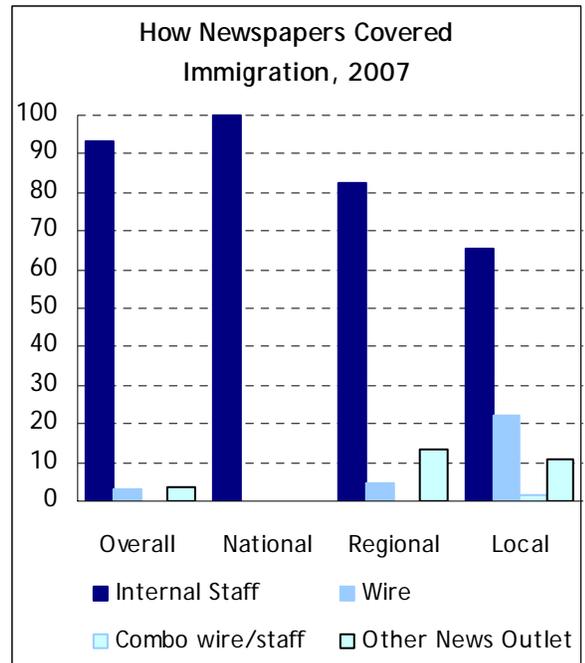


Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007



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

An important sign of the local nature of immigration was that smaller newspapers devoted their own staff to covering this issue. As we noted in our yearly report, “for major national news stories, local and metropolitan papers tend to rely on the wires, especially the front pages.” But this was not the case in the coverage of immigration in 2007. At the mid-level, 82.3% of coverage on immigration was from staff reporters versus about 51.7% of Iraq stories and 78.9% US economy stories. At the most local level, 65.3% were written by internal staff compared to 47.6% of presidential campaign, 29.3% Iraq, and 53.5 % of US economy.

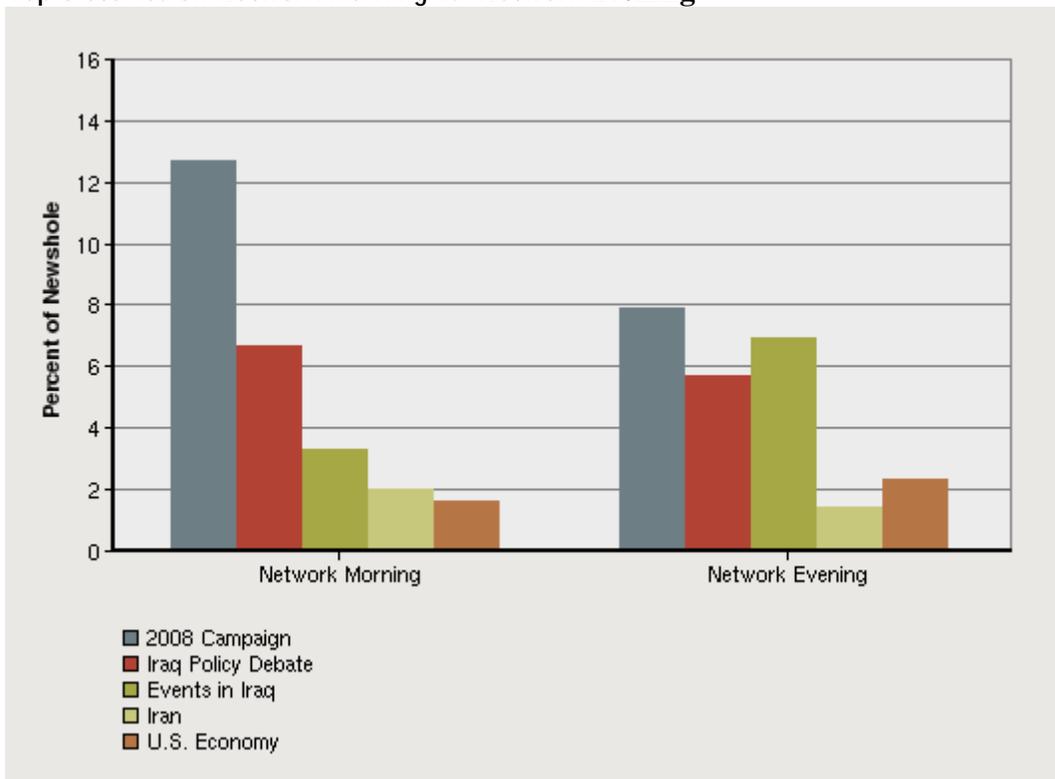


Network TV

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

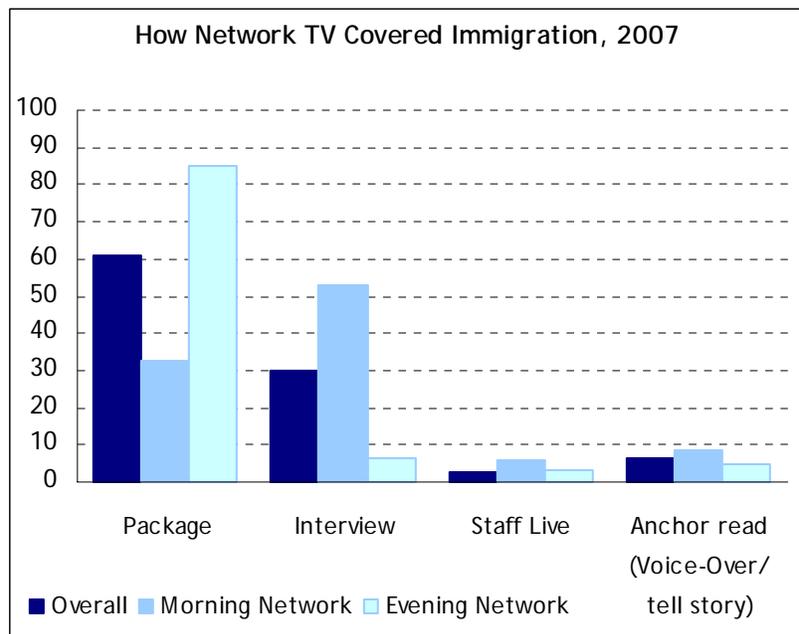
The most striking finding is that, overall in 2007, immigration was not among the top 10 stories for any of the networks except during May and June, which coincides with the immigration legislation discussion in the Senate. In May it was the fourth biggest story (with 4.4% of the newshole), and in June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

Top 5 Stories on Network Morning vs. Network Evening



Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007

Network nightly news compared to cable and network morning, is “where viewers can see stories that have been checked and edited, where the words from the correspondents have been carefully written rather than spoken from quick notes, where producers and correspondents have discussed the content of the stories, and the pictures and the words have been carefully matched in an editing room.” Our yearly content analysis of news showed that for 2007, correspondent packages made up 82% of the time on the nightly newscasts. This was the case for immigration stories as well: 85.2% of the time immigration stories on nightly news were correspondent packages, and 6.5% of the time they were interviews. Immigration stories on the morning network news were interviews more than half of the time (52.9%) as opposed to packages (32.5%).



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Online

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

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

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

Therefore, it was no surprise to see that some domestic topic areas and specific news got less prominence online. A monthly look at online coverage for immigration found that, it was part of the top 10 list only in May and June, and was absent for the rest of the year. In May it was the sixth biggest story with 2.6% of the newshole, and in June it was 5th biggest story with 4.7%. Overall, immigration was the 12th story of the year at 1% of the online newshole.

Top Stories for Online Sites in 2007

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

Source: PEJ, A Year in the News, 2007

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

As we mentioned in our State of the News Media 2008 report, “both AOL and Yahoo use wire services for more than 90% of their lead news coverage on their sites, most of it coming from the Associated Press. Google News, on the other hand—a site that produces no original content—had 17% of wire stories and 82% of the coverage was original reporting by the cited news organization.” For CNN.com most of the stories were by internal staff reporting (61%) and wire reports (32%). For MSNBC.com 54% of the lead stories came from the wires. Overall the same pattern was evident for immigration stories across these news websites. Most of immigration stories online were wire stories (44.3%) while 27.4% of the lead stories on immigration were internal staff reporting and original reporting by the cited news organization (also at 27.4% of the online newshole).

Conclusions

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

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

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