

Slanted Newspaper Coverage of Immigration: The Importance of Economics and Geography

Regina P. Branton and Johanna Dunaway

When compared to studies of media effects, relatively few studies of the media focus on factors that influence the behavior of media organizations. Specifically, there are few empirical studies of the attributes and incentives of news organizations that might lead to slanted coverage of particular policy issues. In this study, we identify factors that lead to negatively slanted coverage of a specific policy issue: immigration. Using content analysis, geographic information systems (GIS) data, and contextual data, we find that newspaper ownership and proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border are related to slant in news articles and opinion pieces regarding immigration.

KEY WORDS: immigration, media content, media bias, political news, geographic context

Introduction

The primary and most important function of the media in the United States is to provide the public with information sufficient for use in the evaluation of matters of policy and governance.¹ In their coverage of politics and policy issues, newspapers aim to conform to the professional “canons of journalism.” According to these guidelines, one responsibility of journalists is to remain politically neutral and present all sides of an issue (Bennett, 1988). However, recent research suggests that slant in news coverage does exist (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005), and that it can influence our thinking about political issues (Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Kahn & Kenney, 2002). Despite the broad implications for political attitudes and behavior, we still lack a precise understanding of factors that influence various types of slant (e.g., partisan, ideological, positive, or negative) found in political news coverage (Baron, 2006; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006; Milyo, 2007; Page, 1996a).

Extant research regarding media slant frequently focuses on coverage of political campaigns (e.g., Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Kahn & Kenney, 2002) or asks broader questions about the overall ideological leaning of media coverage, such as whether coverage is liberally or conservatively slanted (e.g., Bagdikian, 1997). Several other studies focus on media slant in coverage of specific issues of public policy, and investigate the resulting impact on public opinion (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Gilens, 1999; Iyengar, 1991; Zaller, 1996).

However, far fewer studies focus on the determinants of media coverage, that is, factors that influence the way news is covered (Arnold, 2004; Page, 1996a; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Specifically, there are few quantitative empirical studies of the factors within and surrounding news organizations that lead to slanted news coverage (Baron, 2006; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006; Milyo, 2007).² Even fewer focus specifically on factors that influence slant in news coverage of a particular policy issue. It is the aim of this research project to make such an effort by identifying factors that lead to slanted coverage of a specific policy issue: immigration. Specifically, we investigate the determinants of negatively slanted coverage of immigration.

Why immigration? Immigration policy is currently a salient and politically relevant issue in American politics. Although immigration has been a major concern to border communities for some time, recently it has reemerged in national headlines and at the top of the national policy agenda (Dunaway, Abrajano, & Branton, 2007). Case in point, a media firestorm was recently ignited by a Senate proposal calling for the most sweeping changes to U.S. immigration policy in over a decade. Heightened media coverage of immigration naturally raises questions about the resulting effect on public opinion regarding immigration policy. The manner in which the media covers a particular issue often has consequences for the way the public thinks about and evaluates issues (e.g., Hetherington, 1996; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Kahn & Kenney, 2002; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). With a contentious issue such as immigration, where the stakes are high for various groups, media depictions may be crucial in shaping the way the public forms policy preferences.

In this article, we examine the factors that influence media coverage of immigration. Specifically, we examine the importance of media ownership and spatial proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border. Building on a spatial-economic explanation of news, we investigate how economic incentives and spatial proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border operate to influence negative slant in news coverage of immigration and immigration-related issues.

Economic Incentives and Slanted News Coverage

The notion of an impartial press is well entrenched; and it is generally expected that professional journalists refrain from letting personal political beliefs influence their reporting of the news (Davis, 1996). However, the majority of the American public views the news media as slanted (Baron, 2006). Furthermore, media critics and political pundits offer a variety of claims about slant in the news. Most say one of two things: (i) that the news has a liberal slant because most journalists are liberal, or (ii) the news has a conservative slant because their corporate parent companies have conservative policy interests or for other reasons (Groseclose & Milyo, 2005). Those that place the blame of media slant in the hands of individual journalists in news organizations seem to fail to consider environmental and institutional constraints that also affect coverage.

News slant, or lack thereof, could have a variety of sources including: profit-making goals, political goals, and journalistic goals (Hamilton, 2004). Economic theories of news coverage suggest that among these goals, profit making is the key

determinant of news content (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005; Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994; Milyo, 2007; Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2005). This economic perspective of news making suggests that news is produced in the manner that is most pleasing to audiences (as opposed to journalists or owners) when news organizations want to maximize profits (Baron, 2006; Dunaway, 2008) suggests that because major news organizations are usually owned by corporations, market forces should govern news organizations rather than ideological or personal views. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) demonstrate that news firms respond strongly to consumer preferences and that consumer preferences often constitute a demand for ideologically slanted news. Mullainathan and Shleifer (2005) illustrate that the diversity of beliefs in a market determines the degree to which newspapers offer slanted news coverage. In sum, this research suggests that the profit-making objective and efforts to attract audiences are among the strongest influences on bias or slant in news coverage.

Influences on Immigration-Related News Coverage

Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests that the profit-making goals of news organizations often lead to particular trends in news coverage. Generally, we see one consistent trend in news coverage, which is the tendency to emphasize the sensational and the negative (Hetherington, 1996; Patterson, 1996). Numerous studies note the tendency for news organizations to emphasize sensational topics such as sex (Baum, 2002), violence (Hamilton, 1998), and crime (Alderman, 1994; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000) whenever possible. In general, a disproportionate emphasis on negative and sensational topics in the news is found to attract more audiences. Both television and newspapers capitalize on these topics in an effort to increase profits (Denton, 1999; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000).

In certain areas of politics and public policy, efforts at profit maximization can promote ideological slant in news coverage. Profit concerns may lead to what constitutes demand-driven partisan or ideological slant in the news. For example, if audiences have a demand for news stories that are consistent with their political viewpoints, this may give news organizations the incentive to slant news stories in order to cater to a particular clientele (Baron, 2006; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006; Hamilton, 2004; Milyo, 2007; Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2005). In the case of immigration, if news organizations perceive their audiences to be negatively oriented toward immigration, we may see negative slant in coverage of immigration.

Geography, Economics, and Negative Slant on the Issue of Immigration

To develop our expectations, we rely on research regarding attitudes toward immigration, economic theories of news, and research on media depictions of minorities. These areas of research, when considered together, lead to a series of testable hypotheses. Extant research (Alvarez & Butterfield, 2000; Branton, Dillingham, Dunaway, & Miller, 2007) and analysis of poll data suggests that Anglo attitudes regarding immigration have traditionally been quite different in areas close to the

border than in areas further removed from the border.³ Public opinion polls indicate that individuals residing closer to the U.S.–Mexico border have consistently been more likely to rate immigration as the “most important problem facing the country,” than their geographically distant counterparts (Branton & Dunaway, 2009). Further, empirical evidence suggests that attitudes toward immigration-related public policies vary with distance to the U.S.–Mexico border. For example, Alvarez and Butterfield (2000) and Branton et al. (2007) find that voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives is influenced by proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border. In sum, spatial proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border has been demonstrated to be negatively associated with attitudes and behavior toward immigration policy.

Research on media behavior demonstrates that economic concerns (i.e., the need to attract and retain audiences) prompt newspapers and television news to focus on the most sensational topics such as violence and crime (Hamilton, 1998, 2004). For example, local media outlets tend to rely on a “crime news script,” which focuses disproportionately on crime and nonwhite perpetrators of crime (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982).⁴ In general, the media portray nonwhite groups in the news differently than their white counterparts (Branton & Dunaway, 2009).⁵

Based on the aforementioned research, we argue that news organizations closer to the border perceive immigration to be a major policy concern to their audience and that their audience has a more negative orientation toward immigration and immigration-related issues. Trends in media behavior toward minorities and the audiences’ attitudes toward immigration may influence the way newspapers more proximate to the U.S.–Mexico border cover immigration.

Hypothesis 1: Newspapers more proximate to the border are more likely to offer negative coverage of immigration and immigration-related issues than newspapers further removed from the border.

Discussions of media slant typically refer to the pages of a newspaper that report the news as opposed to the editorial pages, which typically offer opinion. Editorial and opinion sections provide a venue for newspaper owners, editors, and audience members to express their political views. One of the primary defenses against impartiality in newspaper reporting is the divide between the editorial and opinion sections and the pages devoted to the news (Kahn & Kenney, 2002). This barrier is intended to prevent opinion coverage from influencing the objective reporting of the news (Kahn & Kenney, 2002).

However, previous work suggests that there can be other types of systematic bias in the material offered in the opinion pages. Specifically, this research suggests that the views expressed in opinion or editorial pages can systematically favor one policy viewpoint over another. This selection bias may reflect the newspaper’s policy preferences or their audience’s policy preferences (Page, 1996b). Existing research indicates that selection bias is one of the most common forms of bias found in the news (Bennett, 1988; Graber, 2002; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In editorial and opinion pages, newspapers may appear to offer varying viewpoints, while still omitting other viewpoints entirely, or favoring one viewpoint all together (Page, 1996b).

As discussed previously, newspapers more proximal to the U.S.–Mexico border may perceive their audience to hold more negative views of immigration, which is consistent with public opinion research. If newspapers perceive their audience to hold negative views toward immigration, it is also likely that the content offered in their opinion pages will reflect those views, offering more negatively slanted opinion pieces.

Hypothesis 2: Newspapers more proximate to the border are more likely to print negative opinion pieces on the issue of immigration than newspapers further removed from the border.

Finally, we argue that negative media slant regarding immigration may be associated with the ownership structure of a news outlet. The influence of ownership structure on organizational behavior is consistent with the literature on the economics of organization (e.g., Miller, 1992; Moe, 1988), which tells us that ownership structure can influence the goals and operation of organizations (Moe, 1988). Furthermore, corporate media ownership has consistently been cited as a source of news slant (Bagdikian, 1997; Baron, 2006; Croteau & Hoynes, 2001; Gilens & Hertzman, 2000; McChesney, 1995; McManus, 1994; Page, 1996a) and ownership structure generally has been cited as an influence on news content (An, Jin, & Simon, 2006; Martin, 2003; Milyo, 2007; Napoli & Yan, 2007; Price, 2003; Yan & Napoli, 2006). Other recent work on the media (e.g., Dunaway, 2008; Hamilton, 2004), the literature on corporate governance (e.g., Agrawal & Knoeber, 1996; Himmelberg, Hubbard, & Palia, 1999), and a broader literature on the economics of organization (e.g., Miller, 1992; Moe, 1988) also suggest that there are theoretical reasons to expect ownership structure to have an influence on the behavior of media organizations. Specifically, these works highlight potential differences between privately owned and controlled media organizations and media organizations that are governed by a large and diffuse group of public shareholders.

In a privately owned and controlled media organization, ideological or journalistic goals may govern owner(s) preferences for news content. This concentrated owner control allows direct interference with the management of the news (Hamilton, 2004).⁶ Alternatively, under publicly traded corporate ownership, owners are limited in their ability to direct and interfere with the management of the news (Agrawal & Knoeber, 1996; Himmelberg et al., 1999). Without other shared preferences among diffuse and diverse shareholders, public corporately owned news organizations should be primarily driven by profit-making objectives (Dunaway, 2008; Hamilton, 2004).

Recent research also demonstrates that profit-seeking by media organizations can lead to slanted news coverage. Baron (2006) argues that in the effort to make profit, news organizations may produce slanted news coverage to appeal to a certain clientele in the market. Additionally, Mullainathan and Shleifer (2005) suggest that competition between newspapers enhances profit-making efforts and the likelihood that newspapers will cater to the political predispositions of their readers.

Others have noted that profit-seeking corporations are more likely to pursue market-driven strategies than privately owned or family owned news organizations.

While all news organizations are driven somewhat by the need to make profits, a public group of shareholders seek to *maximize* profits and consider that the primary goal (Dunaway, 2008; Hamilton, 2004). As noted earlier, profit-seeking behavior has been linked to media slant. Therefore, patterns in coverage most likely to increase profit (including coverage catering to a particular clientele) are even more likely under the corporate shareholder governance structure. In the case of coverage of immigration-related items, corporate outlets may frame their coverage of immigration in a more negative light.

Hypothesis 3: Generally speaking, corporately owned news organizations are more likely to print stories and opinion pieces with a negative tone toward immigration than are privately owned media organizations.

Data and Methods

To evaluate media coverage of immigration and immigration-related issues, we rely on a data set culled from content analysis of California newspapers.⁷ We utilized an online newspaper archive⁸ to construct the data set of newspaper coverage of immigration between March 1, 2004, and March 1, 2005. The completed data set includes comprehensive information on 1,227 news stories that focus on the issue of immigration.

We chose to focus on news coverage in California for three reasons: first, California shares an international border with Mexico; second, California has many newspapers archived online, making it easy to content analyze coverage of immigration; and third, California newspapers are geographically distributed throughout the state (i.e., there are multiple newspapers located close to the border and further removed from the border) making it possible to examine the impact of proximity to the Mexico border on newspaper coverage regarding immigration. Additionally, the project focuses singularly on English-language newspaper coverage, while omitting Spanish-language news coverage for substantive and practical reasons. From a substantive standpoint, given that media coverage of immigration is more likely to influence the audience that may feel threatened by an influx of immigrants, and not immigrants themselves, English-language newspapers are the appropriate focus of our analysis.⁹ From a practical standpoint, there are a limited number of Spanish-language newspapers in the state of California and an overwhelming majority of these newspapers are located in areas more proximal to the border; thus, making it difficult to determine if geography matters in the Spanish-language news coverage of immigration.¹⁰

As noted previously, this study seeks to examine two forms of slant in newspaper coverage of immigration related issues: negative slant in the general coverage of immigration and negative slant in the editorial and opinion pages. First, to examine the negative slant in newspaper coverage of immigration, we constructed a three-category dependent variable in which each article is coded as "1" if the story positive in tone, "2" if the story is neutral in tone, and "3" negative in tone. Next, based on content analysis of opinion and editorial pieces, we constructed a three-category

dependent variable coded in the same manner as the mentioned negative tone measure: “1” if positive, “2” if neutral, and “3” if negative.¹¹

A team of four paid trained research assistants performed the coding of the dependent variables. Each story was coded positive if the story was generally favorable toward immigration, neutral if neither positive nor negative in tone, and negative if the story was deemed less favorable toward immigration.¹² To test for consistency across coders, a sample of 10 percent of the total number of articles was drawn, and coded independently by two trained undergraduate coders. Cohen’s kappa statistic (see Stemler, 2001) was computed for the coding of each story as follows:

$$K = \frac{P_A - P_C}{1 - P_C}$$

P_A is the proportion of units on which coders agree, and P_C is the proportion of units for which agreement is expected by chance. Landis and Koch (1977) and Stemler (2001) suggest the following benchmarks for interpreting K : a score 0.61–0.80 indicates substantial agreement; while a K score of 0.81–1.00 is indicative of almost perfect agreement. Our coders’ range of agreement on story coding was between 0.67 (substantial agreement) and 0.88 (almost perfect agreement), depending on the coding unit in question.

In addition to the newspaper data, we also compiled spatially referenced data and demographic attributes for each county in California, which was generated using GIS software.¹³ The spatial data of particular interest is the county-level spatial proximity to the border of Mexico. The demographic data of interest includes the partisan makeup and the immigrant composition of each county in California. The content analysis data and the aggregate-level data are merged to account for the contextual environment in which a news organization operates.

One of the two independent variables of particular interest is spatial proximity to the Mexico border, *Distance*, which reflects the mileage from each county to the border of Mexico. We argue that immigration may be a more salient and negatively viewed policy among the public closer to the border. As such, newspaper organizations closer to the Mexico border will be more economically motivated to offer negative coverage of immigration than news organizations further removed from the border. To obtain estimates of this spatial distance, we used GIS to calculate the distance from the longitudinal and latitudinal center of each county to the U.S.–Mexico border.¹⁴

The model also includes two newspaper-level attributes: ownership and circulation size. Our second primary variable of interest is an indicator of the ownership of each newspaper. Recall, we propose that corporately owned news organizations are more likely to print immigration-related stories that are negative in tone than privately owned news outlets. This indicator, *Corporate*, is coded “1” if the newspaper is owned by a publicly traded corporation and “0” if the newspaper is privately owned. The second newspaper attribute is circulation size (*Circulation*), which is included in the model to control for potential variability in capability and resources of newspaper organizations.¹⁵

In an effort to account for the impact of perceived audience preferences on media coverage of immigration, the model also includes two additional aggregate-level indicators: foreign born population and partisan context. Previous research indicates that audience demographics are often indicators of audience preferences for news (Hamilton, 2004). Furthermore, public opinion research indicates that immigrant context and partisanship are associated with attitudes toward immigrants and immigration-related policy issues (Citrin, Reingold, & Green, 1990; Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997; Hood & Morris, 1997, 1998). Therefore, we include these two aggregate-level contextual attributes to account for variability in media coverage of immigration in response to differences in audience demographics. *Foreign Born* is a measure of the percentage of the foreign-born population within each county. The model also includes the quadratic of the foreign-born population (*foreign born sq.*) to control for a nonlinear relationship between the size of the foreign-born population and newspaper coverage on immigration. The quadratic is included to account for newspaper organizations' response to a growing consumer base.¹⁶ Partisan context is measured by the percent of the vote share within a county cast in support of the Republican presidential candidate in the 2004 election (*pres. vote*). Finally, the models include a series of month dummy variables with March 2004 serving as the baseline category. Year dummy variables are included to control for events within a given month that may influence media coverage of immigration (Beck, Katz, & Tucker, 1998).

Newspaper Coverage of Immigration

To estimate the models of newspaper coverage of immigration, we use ordered logit regression.¹⁷ The results are presented in Table 1. The first column presents the results regarding newspaper coverage of immigration in general and the second column presents the results regarding the content of opinion and editorial pieces.¹⁸

First, we consider the impact of spatial proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border on news coverage of immigration, which is presented in the first column of estimates. The significant and negative parameter estimate indicates that media outlets located spatially closer to the border are more likely to print negative news articles regarding immigration than media outlets farther removed from the border, which supports hypothesis 1. Second, the results also indicate that distance to the border is significantly related to the tone of the opinion pieces that California newspapers publish, which supports hypothesis 2. Substantively, the results indicate that newspapers further removed from the border are less likely to publish negative news and negative opinion pieces than newspapers more proximal to the U.S.–Mexico border. Finally, both sets of estimates indicate that corporate is significantly and positively related to the coverage of Latino immigration, which lends support to hypothesis 3. This suggests that corporately owned newspapers are more likely to print negative news regarding immigration and negative opinion pieces regarding immigration when compared to privately owned media organizations.

Given that ordered logit coefficients are difficult to directly interpret, Figure 1 offers graphs regarding the impact of spatial proximity to the border and the own-

Table 1. Print Media Slanted Coverage of Immigration and Immigration-Related Issues (Ordered Logit Estimates)

	Negative Tone	Negative Tone: Opinion Piece
Contextual factors		
Distance	-0.002 (0.000)***	-0.002 (0.001)*
Percent foreign born	-0.531 (0.105)***	-0.481 (0.111)***
Foreign born sq.	0.010 (0.002)***	0.009 (0.002)***
Pres. vote	0.025 (0.010)*	0.026 (0.019)
Paper attributes		
Corporate	0.345 (0.171)*	0.813 (0.308)**
Circulation	-0.105 (0.069)	-0.364 (0.127)**
Time variables		
April 4	-0.255 (0.180)	0.806 (0.482)
May 4	0.147 (0.166)	0.454 (0.351)
June 4	0.567 (0.229)	0.841 (0.286)**
July 4	0.035 (0.299)	0.178 (0.429)
August 4	1.23 (0.176)***	0.928 (0.289)***
September 4	2.01 (0.307)***	1.47 (0.370)***
October 4	1.51 (0.346)***	2.09 (0.407)***
November 4	1.45 (0.226)***	1.62 (0.419)***
December 4	0.424 (0.253)	0.961 (0.323)**
January 5	1.06 (0.264)***	2.11 (0.623)***
February 5	0.889 (0.237)***	1.64 (0.415)***
Cut-point 1	-7.33 (1.37)***	-8.94 (1.71)***
Cut-point 2	-5.18 (1.39)***	-7.97 (1.69)***
Wald	601.05***	308.98***
Cases (<i>n</i>)	1,227	460

Note: The estimates are order logit coefficients with Huber-White standard errors clustered on newspaper outlet references.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

ership structure on media coverage of immigration. The top graph plots the probability that a newspaper publishes negatively slanted news articles as a function of distance to the border for privately owned news organizations and corporately owned news organizations.¹⁹ This figure illustrates that, irrespective of newspaper ownership, newspapers more proximal to the border are more likely to publish negative articles dealing with immigration than news organizations further removed from the border. For example, the probability that a corporately owned newspaper prints negatively slanted news stories on immigration drops from 0.76 to 0.51 across the range of distance to the border. Additionally, the top graph illustrates that corporately owned news organizations are more likely to publish negative articles regarding immigration than are privately owned newspapers. Among newspapers most proximate to the border, a corporately owned newspaper has a 0.51 probability of printing negative news stories on immigration, while a privately owned newspaper has a 0.42 probability.

The bottom graph in Figure 1 depicts the probability that a newspaper publishes negatively slanted opinion pieces as a function of proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border for privately owned and corporately owned news organizations. This figure also demonstrates, regardless of newspaper ownership, that newspapers spatially closer to the border are more likely to publish opinion pieces on immigration that are negative in tone than news organizations further removed from the border. The

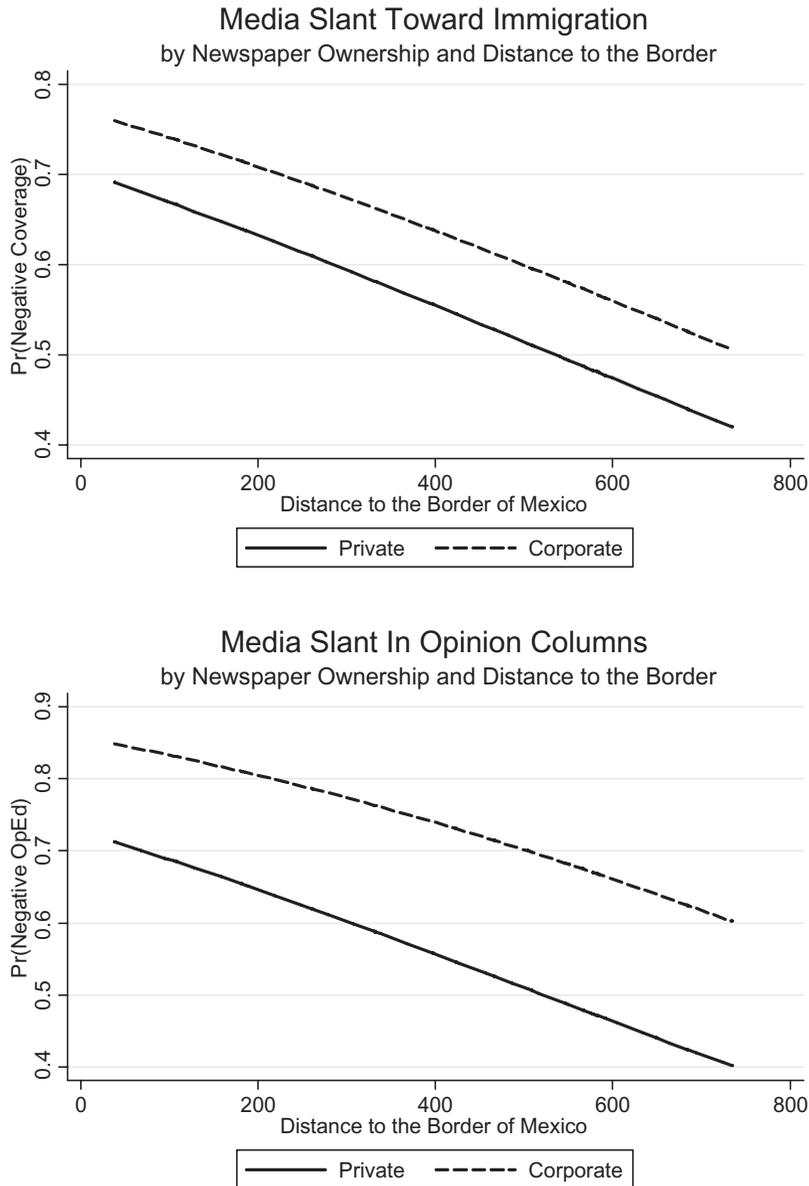


Figure 1. Media Slant Toward Immigration.

probability that a corporately owned newspaper most proximate to the border publishes negatively slanted public opinion pieces is 0.85, while the probability for a corporately owned newspaper most removed from the border is 0.60. Additionally, this graph indicates that corporately owned news organizations are more likely to publish negative opinion pieces regarding immigration than are privately owned newspapers. At a mean distance to the border, the probability that a corporately owned newspaper prints a negative opinion piece is 0.79, while probability for a privately owned newspaper is 0.62.

Conclusion

Previous research suggests that slant in news coverage does exist, and that it can in fact influence the public's thinking about political issues (Kahn & Kenney, 2002). However, few studies have focused on how attributes of media organizations and environmental factors might influence the probability of slant in news coverage. Despite the attitudinal and behavioral implications of exogenous influences on the news, we still lack a clear understanding of factors that contribute to slant in news coverage (Arnold, 2004; Kahn & Kenney, 2002; Page, 1996a).

This study focuses on news coverage of a specific policy issue: immigration. Immigration was chosen because it is an area of public policy that is both timeless and timely. Immigration is a timeless area of public policy in the sense that historically it is one of the most pervasive areas of U.S. domestic public policy. It is timely in that immigration has recently reemerged in the media headlines over proposed sweeping changes to national immigration policy. Building on a spatial economic explanation of news (i.e., Hamilton, 2004), we investigate how news organizations' economic incentives and geographic proximity to the border influence coverage of immigration and immigration-related issues. Given the current salience of immigration policy, we believe it is important to focus on the factors that influence news coverage of this particular issue. We focus on understanding the news product of media organizations because of the effect their messages have on the attitudes of those to whom they cater.

Public opinion regarding immigration is not only influenced by political rhetoric used by figures such as Lou Dobbs, Bill O'Reilly, and Glenn Beck, but also by slanted media coverage of immigration in the mainstream media. Indeed, a recent study of media outlets throughout the United States demonstrates that the public's perceived importance of the issue of immigration ebbs and flows with shifts in media coverage on immigration (Dunaway et al., 2007). The public's concern over the issue of immigration and border security has placed the issue of immigration policy reform at the center of national debate. For instance, in the time period leading up to the 2008 national elections there were more than 20 pieces of legislation under consideration in the House and Senate that dealt with some aspect of immigration.

As such, we argue that in the particularly contentious issue of immigration (where the political stakes are high for various groups) news organizations might have the incentive to slant coverage in accordance with their perceptions about the preferences of their clientele (Baron, 2006). When news organizations perceive their audiences to hold a negative view toward immigration, they may be more likely to print stories with a negative tone toward immigration (Hamilton, 2004). Specifically we suggest that due to the pressure to please audiences—news organizations proximate to the border are more likely to offer negative news coverage of immigration. Additionally, we contend that this pattern of slant is reflected in the opinion pages of the newspapers as well. Furthermore, because the bulk of our argument rests on economic incentives, we argue that corporately owned news organizations (known to be more profit-oriented) are more likely to print negative news stories and opinion pieces than their privately owned counterparts.

Our findings produce substantial evidence that this is the case. Using extensive content analysis, GIS data, and contextual data, we find that newspapers located proximate to the border are more likely to print negative news coverage of immigration and negative opinion pieces about immigration than newspapers further removed from the border. In keeping with anecdotal accounts from journalists regarding the benefits of private ownership, we find that with both types of newspaper articles (news and opinion), corporately owned newspapers are more likely to mirror this trend than privately owned media organizations.

Because media messages have known implications for public opinion, it is valuable to understand influences on news coverage of immigration. Previous intergroup relations research demonstrates that the presence of a minority group has both attitudinal and behavioral consequences among the majority (e.g., Bobo, 1988; Branton & Jones, 2005; Glaser, 1994). Negative news coverage on immigration could be both a consequence of these attitudes and a cause of these attitudes. Stated simply, if news organizations assume their audience holds a negative view toward immigration, they may slant their coverage to keep in line with the preferences of their clientele (negative attitudes of the audience influence news coverage of immigration). Furthermore, continual exposure to negative news coverage of immigration may enhance perceptions of threat or competition (negative news coverage causes or reinforces negative attitudes about immigrants and immigration). In areas proximate to the U.S.–Mexico border, where there is a continual influx of immigrants, this pattern in media coverage of immigration may have especially dire consequences for intergroup attitudes and behaviors.

This project focuses on media coverage of immigration provided by newspaper outlets in California. While we do think these findings will prove to be generalizable to other border states, future research should expand the focus to determine whether the patterns revealed in California emerge in media coverage of immigration in other border states. Furthermore, future research should examine other geographic patterns in media coverage of immigration. Are there differences in media coverage of immigration between border and nonborder states? Does media coverage of immigration vary across states as a function of the growth of a state's immigrant population?

Finally, although the focus of this project is on the issue of immigration, we propose that the findings may be extended to other areas of public policy with geographically based implications such as environmental and land use issues. For example, offshore drilling in Alaska is often at the forefront of local media coverage in Alaska, but rarely receives attention from the national media. Further, media coverage of the federal government's call for tighter fuel economy standards may be markedly more negative in areas such as Detroit than media coverage in other geographic areas. In sum, we believe the arguments in this project can be extended to media coverage of other areas of public policy.

Regina P. Branton is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Rice University, Houston, Texas.

Johanna Dunaway is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and Mass Communication at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Notes

1. The Project for Excellence in Journalism describes the essential mission of journalism as being “a public service for democracy.”
2. But see Baron (2006), Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006), Gilens and Hertzman (2000), Milyo (2007), and Mullainathan and Shleifer (2005) as notable exceptions. Also see An et al. (2006), Martin (2003), Napoli and Yan (2007), Price (2003), and Yan and Napoli (2006) as a selection of studies examining the attributes of news organizations that influence news content more generally.
3. For example: A March 2006 Lake Research and Terrance Group national poll found that illegal immigration ranked sixth, with 8 percent of respondents calling it the most worrisome. Iraq was first with 17 percent of respondents identifying it as most worrisome (<http://www.nationaljournal.com>). However, in a December 2005 poll of Arizona residents, 48 percent of voters say that immigration is a more important issue than Iraq (<http://rasmussenreports.com>).
4. It is not the case that television alone employs this strategy, newspapers also rely on the “crime news script.” As noted by Denton (1999): “Crime coverage is tailor made for newspapers. It is an excellent example of the definition of news—something that just happened that the public doesn’t know about. It is still the exception: Most of us don’t rob banks, so when somebody does, we call that news. Crime coverage is relatively easy. There are lots of documents in a central location and public employees to use as sources. And many of the documents are privileged, allowing us to report on them without fear of lawsuit. The best crime stories have what every reporter looks for when he or she sits down to write—drama, conflict, good, and evil.”
5. The American Society of Newspaper Editors reports that 29 percent of Americans believe that media slant is promulgated by favoritism toward a particular group in news coverage (Baron, 2006). The NAHJ (2005) reports that Latinos and Latino immigrants are often depicted in the media as a problem people on the fringes of society.
6. According to accounts from journalists, private owners are more likely to have some interest in maintaining a level of journalistic quality. This issue was often discussed in the reporting about the sale of the Knight-Ridder Corporation (for an account see <http://www.nytimes.com>). Hamilton (2004) makes this point as well. To be clear, private ownership includes any ownership in which one individual or family retains controlling interest of the stock, regardless of whether some proportion of the stock is publicly traded.
7. Ideally, we would also include local television news content; however, television news is not included due to the fact that it is very difficult to obtain (Arnold, 2004). Furthermore, acquiring transcripts or news clips for numerous local television outlets in the state of California is almost impossible, which would be necessary given the focus of this study. Not only is it extremely expensive, but many local television stations have no practice of retaining news clips or transcripts beyond a couple of weeks.
8. We utilized the America’s Newspapers database provided by NewsBank, Inc. This resource provides the most extensive full-text archive of California newspapers currently available.
9. Given that Spanish-language newspapers have a different audience than mainstream English language newspapers, they generally cover immigration issues more favorably (Rodriguez, 1999).
10. Additionally, only one Spanish-language newspaper is archived online, *La Opinión*. We contacted each Spanish-language news outlet in California requesting back issues. Many of these newspapers do not retain back issues. Further, the fees for available back issues were extremely expensive. For example, one Spanish language news outlet we contacted quoted a \$5,000 fee for one year of back issues. In fact, the calculated cost of compiling the data is approximately \$18,000.
11. The text of each editorial and opinion piece was analyzed and scored 1 if it was favorable toward immigration and immigration-related issues, 2 if it was deemed neutral, and 3 if it was opposed to immigration. The Appendix contains descriptive statistics on each of the dependent and independent variables included in the analysis.
12. These measures of “bias” or “slant” build on previous works (e.g., Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Kahn & Kenney, 2002), and on the more general literature on media bias. First, following Druckman and Parkin (2005), Kahn and Kenney (2002), and others, the measures are intended to delineate between negative, neutral, and positive coverage. Second, the measures are used to capture relative slant in coverage, meaning the analysis compares coverage across media outlets and media markets. The measures were created using a coding scheme that provided instructions on how to code each

- individual news story according to its content. Coders were instructed to code each story as negative, neutral, or positive based on the tone in which it portrayed the issue of immigration. The second dependent variable is constructed in the same manner, but examines opinion and editorial pieces.
13. County is the geographic unit sharing the most overlap with newspaper markets, except in major metro areas that include multiple counties. To account for differences in perceived audience preferences for newspapers that do target more than one country, each model was also estimated without large newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Diego Tribune*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and each model was also estimated incorporating a dummy variable indicating “metropolitan” newspapers. The results of this specification are consistent with the results presented in Table 1.
 14. Distance to the border was calculated for four prevalent crossing points from west to east along the Mexico–U.S. border: Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali, and Vicente. The shortest distance to the border among these four calculations is used to create the measure of distance.
 15. Circulation, measured as the log of circulation of each newspaper, is included to control for the size of the newspaper (i.e., to differentiate between small, medium, and large publications). More specifically, we included this measure to ensure that our findings are not driven by the presence of large newspapers closer to the border. Furthermore, we ran each model both with and without the three largest newspapers: the *Orange County Register*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *San Diego Tribune*. In each instance, the findings are significant and consistent.
 16. We suspect that as the foreign-born population approaches a sizable proportion of the potential consumer market, newspapers may not want to risk alienating this growing consumer base.
 17. The multilevel nature of data can present problems due to serial dependence within clusters and heteroscedasticity across clusters. Thus, we utilize the Huber/White sandwich estimation (Huber, 1967), clustered on the newspaper outlet, which adjusts the variance-covariance matrix to correct for heteroscedasticity and serial dependency.
 18. Several diagnostic tests were performed to ensure the results are robust and stable. To account for potential problems posed by the inclusion of *LA Times* in the data set, all the models were run with a dummy variable controlling for the *LA Times* and without the *LA Times* articles included. The results for each model hold under all conditions. Additionally, to control for possible regional effects, the models were estimated including a series of dummy variables for San Diego County, Orange County, and Los Angeles County. This exercise revealed no substantive or statistical impact on the relationships of interest.
 19. The predicted probabilities are generated for the following scenario: percent foreign born, foreign born squared, pres. vote, and circulation size all set to their mean value; Sept-04 set to one and all other time variables set to zero.

References

- Agrawal, Anup, and Charles Knoeber. 1996. “Firm Performance and Mechanisms to Control Agency Problems between Managers and Shareholders.” *Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis* 31: 377–98.
- Alderman, Jeffrey D. 1994. “Leading the Public: The Media’s Focus on Crime Shaped Sentiment.” *Public Perspective* 5: 26–27.
- Alvarez, Michael, and Tara Butterfield. 2000. “The Resurgence of Nativism in California? The Case of Proposition 187 and Illegal Immigration.” *Social Science Quarterly* 81: 167–79.
- An, Soontae, Hyun Seung Jin, and Todd Simon. 2006. “Ownership Structure of Publicly Traded Newspaper Companies and Their Financial Performance.” *Journal of Media Economics* 19: 119–36.
- Arnold, R. Douglas. 2004. *Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation and Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Bagdikian, Ben H. 1997. *The Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Baron, David P. 2006. “Persistent Media Bias.” *Journal of Public Economics* 90: 1–36.
- Baum, Matthew A. 2002. “Sex, Lies, and War: How Soft News Brings Foreign Policy to the Inattentive Public.” *American Political Science Review* 96 (1): 91–109.
- Baumgartner, Frank, and Bryan Jones. 1993. *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Beck, Nathaniel, Jonathan Katz, and Richard Tucker. 1998. "Taking Time Seriously: Time-Series-Cross-Section Analysis with a Binary Dependent Variable" *American Journal of Political Science* 42: 1260-88.
- Bennett, Lance W. 1988. *News: The Politics of Illusion*. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Bobo, Lawrence. 1988. "Group Conflict, Prejudice, and the Paradox of Contemporary Racial Attitudes." In *Eliminating Racism: Profiles in Controversy*, ed. Phyllis A. Katz and Dalmas A. Taylor. New York: Plenum Press, 85-114.
- Branton, Regina P., Gavin Dillingham, Johanna Dunaway, and Beth Miller. 2007. "Anglo Voting on Nativist Ballot Initiatives The Impact of Spatial Proximity to the US-Mexico Border." *Social Science Quarterly* 88: 868-81.
- Branton, Regina P., and Johanna Dunaway. 2009. "Spatial Proximity to the US-Mexico Border and Newspaper Coverage of Immigration Issues." To appear in *Political Research Quarterly*.
- Branton, Regina P., and Bradford Jones. 2005. "Reexamining Racial Attitudes: The Conditional Relationship between Diversity and the Socio-Economic Environment." *American Journal of Political Science* 49: 359-72.
- Citrin, Jack, Donald Green, Christopher Muste, and Cara Wong. 1997. "Public Opinion Towards Immigration Reform: The Role of Economic Motivations." *The Journal of Politics* 59 (3): 858-81.
- Citrin, Jack, Beth Reingold, and Donald Green. 1990. "American Identity and the Politics of Ethnic Change." *The Journal of Politics* 52 (4): 1124-54.
- Croteau, David, and William Hoynes. 2001. *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Davis, Richard. 1996. *The Press and American Politics: The New Mediator*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Denton, Frank. 1999. "Crime Coverage is Tailor Made for Newspapers." In *The Local News Handbook Reston, Virginia: The American Society of Newspaper Editors*. <http://www.ASNE.org>. Accessed November 19, 2007.
- Druckman, James N., and Michael Parkin. 2005. "The Impact of Media Bias: How Editorial Slant Affects Voters." *The Journal of Politics* 67 (4): 1030-49.
- Dunaway, Johanna. 2008. "Markets, Ownership and the Quality of Campaign News Coverage." *Journal of Politics* 70 (4): 1193-1202.
- Dunaway, Johanna, Marisa Abrajano, and Regina Branton. 2007. "Different Agendas and Different Opinions? Local versus National News Coverage of Immigration." Presented at the 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, August 29-September 2.
- Gentzkow, Matthew, and Jesse M. Shapiro. 2006. "What Drives Media Slant? Evidence from U.S. Daily Newspapers." NBER Working Paper No. 12707 Issued in November 2006.
- Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Gilens, Martin, and Craig Hertzman. 2000. "Corporate Ownership and News Bias: Newspaper Coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act." *Journal of Politics* 62: 369-86.
- Gilliam, Frank, Jr., and Shanto Iyengar. 2000. "Prime Suspects: The Impact of Local Television News on Attitudes about Crime and Race." *American Journal of Political Science* 44: 560-73.
- Glaser, James. 1994. "Back to the Black Belt: Racial Environment and White Racial Attitudes in the South." *Journal of Politics* 56: 21-41.
- Graber, Doris. 2002. *Mass Media and American Politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Groseclose, Tim, and Jeffrey Milyo. 2005. "A Measure of Media Bias." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* CXX: 1191-237.
- Hamilton, James T. 1998. *Channeling Violence: The Economic Market for Violent Television Programming*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 2004. *All the News That's Fit to Sell: How the Market Transforms Information into News*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 1996. "The Media's Role in Forming Voters' National Economic Evaluations in 1992." *American Journal of Political Science* 40: 372-95.

- Himmelberg, Charles P., R. Glenn Hubbard, and Darius Palia. 1999. "Understanding the Determinants of Managerial Ownership and the Link between Ownership and Performance." *Journal of Financial Economics* 53 (3): 353–84.
- Hood III, M. V., and Irwin L. Morris. 1997. "Amigos o Enemigos? Racial Context, Racial Attitudes, and White Public Opinion Towards Immigration." *Social Science Quarterly* 78 (2): 309–23.
- Hood III, M. V., and Irwin L. Morris. 1998. "Give Us Your Tired, Your Poor, . . . But Make Sure They Have a Green Card: The Effects of Documented and Undocumented Migrant Context on Anglo Opinions Toward Immigration." *Political Behavior* 21 (1): 1–15.
- Huber, Paul. 1967. "The Behavior of Maximum Likelihood Estimates Under Non-Standard Conditions." *Proceedings of the Fifth Berkeley Symposium on Mathematical Statistics and Probability* 1: 221–33.
- Iyengar, Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Iyengar, Shanto, and Donald R. Kinder. 1987. *The News That Matters: Television and American Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Iyengar, Shanto, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. 1982. "Experimental Demonstrations of the Not-So-Minimal Consequences of Television News Programs." *American Political Science Review* 76 (4): 848–58.
- Kahn, Kim F., and Patrick J. Kenney. 2002. "The Slant of the News: How Editorial Endorsements Influence Campaign Coverage and Citizens' Views of Candidates." *American Political Science Review* 96: 381–94.
- Landis, J. Richard, and G. G. Koch. 1977. "The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data." *Biometrics* 33: 159–74.
- Martin, Hugh J. 2003. "Clustered Newspapers Operate More Efficiently." *Newspaper Research Journal* 24: 6–21.
- McChesney, Robert W. 1995. "Off Limits: An Inquiry into the Lack of Debate Over the Ownership, Structure and Control of the Mass Media in U.S. Political Life." In *The Political Economy of the Media*, ed. Peter Golding and Graham Murdock. London: Edward Elgar.
- McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36: 176–87.
- McManus, John H. 1994. *Market Driven Journalism: Let the Citizens Beware?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Miller, Gary J. 1992. *Managerial Dilemmas: The Political Economy of Hierarchy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Milyo, Jeffrey. 2007. "The Effects of Cross-Ownership on the Local Content and Political Slant of Local Television News." FCC Report 07000029.
- Moe, Terry. 1988. "The New Economics of Organization." *American Journal of Political Science* 28: 739–77.
- Mullainathan, Sendhil, and Andrei Shleifer. 2005. "The Market for News." *American Economic Review* 95: 1031–53.
- NAHJ (National Association of Hispanic Journalists). 2005. "Network Brownout Report 2005 The Portrayal of Latinos and Latino Issues on Network Television News, 2004 With a Retrospect to 1995." [Online]. <http://www.nahj.org/nahjnews/Brownout%20Report%202005.pdf>. Accessed August 26, 2008.
- Napoli, Philip M., and Michael Zhaoxu Yan. 2007. "Media Ownership Regulations and Local News Programming on Broadcast Television: An Empirical Analysis." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 51: 39–57.
- Page, Benjamin I. 1996a. "The Mass Media as Political Actors." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 29 (1): 20–4.
- . 1996b. *Who Deliberates? Mass Media in Modern Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Patterson, Thomas E. 1996. "Bad News, Period." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 29 (1): 17–20.
- Price, Cindy J. 2003. "Interfering Owners or Meddling Advertisers: How Network Television News Correspondents Feel About Ownership and Advertiser Influence on News Stories." *Journal of Media Economics* 16: 175–88.
- Rodriguez, America. 1999. *Making Latino News: Race, Language Class*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Shoemaker, Pamela J., and Stephen D. Reese. 1996. *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Stemler, Steve. 2001. "An Overview of Content Analysis." *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation* 7 (17). <http://edresearch.org/pare/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>. Accessed August 26, 2008.
- Yan, Michael Zhaoxu, and Philip M. Napoli. 2006. "Market Competition, Station Ownership, and Local Public Affairs Programming on Broadcast Television." *Journal of Communication* 56: 795–812.
- Zaller, John. 1996. "The Myth of Massive Media Impact Revisited." In *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*, eds. Diana C. Mutz, Paul M. Sniderman, & Richard A. Brody. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Appendix. Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variables

Negative Tone

1. Favorable	25.4%
2. Neutral	41.9%
3. Opposed	32.7%

Negative Tone-Opinion Piece

1. Favorable	25.9%
2. Neutral	17.6%
3. Opposed	56.5%

Independent Variables

Distance (in Miles)

Minimum	38
Mean	208
Maximum	734

Corporate

0 Private	46.0%
1 Corporate	54.0%

Percent Foreign Born

Minimum	6.6
Mean	27.6
Maximum	36.8

Percent Republican Presidential Vote

Minimum	15.3
Mean	42.4
Maximum	66.6

Circulation Size (Logged)

Minimum	7.4
Mean	11.5
Maximum	13.8