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Why Study Immigration News?

In recent years, immigration has become a hot-button political issue in virtually every major Western democracy, raising complex policy questions and prompting strong emotional responses. Globally, migration is on the rise, with positive and negative effects on the fabric of daily life in both sending and receiving nation-states. Immigration is reshaping our lives, yet much of what we know about immigration is limited by the information and analyses we receive from the news media. Are the media up to the task?

From this perspective, the ongoing debate about whether news coverage is pro-immigrant or anti-immigrant misses the point. Rather, the test for journalism is how well it helps citizens and policymakers understand the causes and consequences of immigration, as well as the backlash against it. My claim in this book is straightforward: we are more likely to get a clearer picture of this complex reality when the "journalistic field" is shaped more by civic-cultural ends than by commercial or instrumental political ends. This is a not a question of ethics, it is a question of social structure: the challenge is to find the best ways to institutionally secure "quality" journalism, in all senses of the term.

So, how have news media covered immigration? And how has this coverage varied in relation to journalistic ownership, funding, audiences, and professional practices? I try to answer these questions in two ways. First, I look at immigration coverage over time, from the early 1970s through 2006, and explore how changes in news treatment of immigration are related to structural transformations of the journalistic field. This is a period when commercial pressures inside the U.S. journalistic field increased considerably. Do we then see changes in news content that accord with the structural changes in the U.S. journalistic field? Second, I bring in a comparison with the French journalistic field and its immigration coverage during the same period. As I document in this book, the French journalistic field continues to be less market-driven than its American

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counterpart. A U.S.-French comparison allows us to see what difference in news coverage these and other structural variations make.

In fact, the U.S. and French media have both at various times successfully served as a democratic public forum for debating immigration. Over the past forty years, U.S. news coverage has often examined immigration in a serious, in-depth manner. American journalism at its best offers compelling close-up examinations of the immigrant experience and hard-hitting investigative reports about the agencies that administer immigration policy. Looking abroad, French media show another way of funding, regulating, and presenting the news. As I demonstrate throughout this book, this French approach has the virtue of making more room for multiple, often critical, perspectives, diverse civil society voices, and in-depth expert analyses. The French approach may or may not be replicable in the United States, but it reminds us that there are alternatives. In an ideal world, citizens in all democracies would benefit from some combination of these – and other – national models.

This book is a careful response to the many and varied criticisms of the American media's coverage of immigration. But it is more than that – because if there is room for improvement, that improvement is more than a matter of individual initiative. As with other cultural professions, journalists work under a series of institutional constraints. All knowledge is constructed. The question is, what are the social conditions underlying the production of *journalistic* knowledge? My aim is to use historical and international comparative analysis to fully describe these constraints and conditions and thus provide the first precondition for their potential transformation. Or, to put it another way, I explore the French case to illuminate the American experience, and vice versa, while at the same time drawing general lessons for the sociology of news and political communication.

Admittedly, any number of issues or sampling methods could be used to compare news media systems. Immigration, however, provides a number of advantages over other potential content samples. A case study focusing on a single issue allows for a focused and detailed analysis. Immigration is an especially multifaceted and complex social phenomenon; rhetorically, immigration can be (and has been) discussed in a range of ways, from thoughtful analyses to simplistic polemics. Describing the challenge and appeal of covering immigration, one journalist writes: "Immigration stories have everything – history, languages, economics, statistics, class conflict [and] picaresque narratives."[1] If such an array of "angles" makes the issue interesting for journalists, it also ensures that the media sociologist will have plenty of variation in the "dependent variable" to analyze and try to explain.

Although France and the United States have their own distinct immigration histories, the structural characteristics and politics of immigration in the two

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[1] Christopher Caldwell, "After Londonistan," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, June 25, 2006, p. 6.

countries are similar in many ways (see Appendix C: Immigration Context). France and the United States are among the top migrant-receiving countries worldwide, and, until 2000, France actually had a higher proportion of foreign-born residents than the United States. Research shows similar economic costs and benefits for the host society and similar struggles for immigrants. In both countries, a plethora of well-established immigrant rights associations and restrictionist groups vie for influence over immigration policy, and periodically the immigration issue has become an important stake in political party struggles for power. Thus, there are enough similarities that a comparison of media coverage of immigration can tell us something about the media in the two countries and not just about the particularities of their respective immigration experiences.

Likewise, immigration reporting occupies a similar location in the French and U.S. journalistic professional hierarchies: the issue generally concerns disadvantaged populations, but the "beat" carries a certain prestige because of its societal and political importance. Immigration reporting is no more specialized than most beats (Gans 1979/2005). At many newspapers, a few reporters have special, but not exclusive, responsibility for the immigration issue.[2] Most eventually move on to cover other issues. Immigration reporters tend not to have any expertise on the issue beyond that learned on the job. The majority of immigration reporters are men, but the number of women journalists has risen steadily in both countries since the 1970s[3]; they are not particularly ethnically diverse in either country (see Chapters 3 and 4). French and American immigration reporters tend to share similar social class and educational backgrounds. Compared to their colleagues, it may be that immigration reporters are more reflexive and internationally informed. Since the 1990s, numerous national and international conferences have been held on immigration reporting. Many of the reporters I interviewed for this book took part in such conferences or other international exchanges.[4] Thus, if this study finds ongoing cross-national differences, it will not be because French and U.S.

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[2] At the three agenda-setting newspapers in France (*Libération*, *Le Figaro*, and *Le Monde*) and the United States (*Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*) whose coverage I examine between the 1970s and 2000s, one-quarter or less of front-page immigration coverage from 2002–2006 can be attributed to specialized reporters (defined simply as the top three reporters whose bylines appear most often).

[3] My byline analysis shows that the proportion of female immigration reporters increased in the United States from 12 percent in the 1970s to 33 percent in the 2000s, and in France from 14 to 41 percent during the same period.

[4] For instance, I leaned from Diane Lindquist, a reporter for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, that she had met Philippe Bernard of *Le Monde* in the mid-1990s as part of a German Marshall Fund program on immigration. In 2009 and 2010, I participated in conferences (in Paris and Miami) on immigration reporting sponsored by the French-American Foundation; in April 2012, I participated in a similar multinational conference sponsored by the University of Minnesota. Numerous noninternational immigration reporting conferences have been held in both countries, beginning in the 1980s and increasingly in recent years.

immigration reporters have been insulated from global influences – in fact, quite the contrary.

For all these reasons, immigration reporting presents an excellent case study to describe, understand, and evaluate the democratic performance of news media in two leading democracies.

DESCRIBING IMMIGRATION NEWS

What are the dominant tendencies in news about immigration? There seems to be no consensus in either the scholarly or popular literature. For instance, political scientist Peter Skerry (1993, 320) has argued that U.S. news organizations, such as the *Los Angeles Times*, have adopted a "civil rights mindset" in the way that they cover Latino immigration, racializing the Mexican-American experience in a way that many Mexican Americans themselves reject. Journalist William McGowan (2002, 181) criticizes the media for being "all too ready to celebrate immigration's relationship to America's increasing cultural diversity . . . in the process, [leaving] important questions unanswered and dismiss[ing] legitimate concerns as 'nativism.'"

Coming from a completely different direction, linguist Otto Santa Ana (1999, 217) locates racist metaphors in *Los Angeles Times*'s coverage that contribute, even if unwittingly, to "demeaning and dehumanizing the immigrant worker." Similarly, anthropologist Leo Chavez (2008, 16) argues that U.S. news media have exaggerated a "Latino threat" narrative, according to which "Mexicans (and other Latin American immigrants) are unable or unwilling to integrate into U.S. society, preferring to remain linguistically and socially isolated, and in the narrative's more sinister renditions . . . [engaging in] a conspiracy to take over the southwestern United States." For Aviva Chomsky (2007), immigrants are wrongly accused by the media of taking jobs and driving down wages, whereas, for Kitty Calavita (1996), the dominant discourse beginning in the 1990s emphasized immigrants' abuse of welfare benefits.[5]

Who is correct? Actually, all of them are, to a degree. As my research will show, most news items mention multiple "frames" rather than just one, although the dominant frames vary over time and across types of media outlets. Framing is about selective perception. Confronted with the world in all its buzzing complexity, all of us – not just journalists – must focus our attention to accomplish even the simplest tasks. A linguistic frame – like a window frame – focuses our attention on a particular vista to the exclusion of others. At its most basic, a frame defines the "problem" (or the "success"), and that is how I use the term.[6] The language of framing also reminds us that some element of truth is

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[5] Other recent content analyses of U.S. immigration coverage include Branton and Dunaway (2008; 2009), Suro (2008), and Kim, Carvalho, Davis, and Mullins (2011).

[6] Robert Entman (1993, 52) defines framing as consisting of four "functions," beginning with the selection and emphasis of "some aspects of a perceived reality . . . in such a way as to promote a

usually present in the different ways of looking at an issue or event. Rather than searching for "bias," this approach suggests new kinds of questions, such as: How many of the diverse ways of looking at an issue are presented? Which perspectives are emphasized or de-emphasized? And, how does this selection of a complex reality differ across time, types of news outlets, and countries?

As I will show, journalists have indeed called attention to the concerns of some that immigrants threaten national cohesion, take jobs, or abuse welfare benefits. Many newspaper articles and television news segments have decried racism against immigrants, and others have celebrated the virtues of cultural diversity. However, additional frames, not mentioned by these critics, have also risen and fallen in the mediated immigration debate. Again, it must be emphasized, no single frame has completely dominated the news.

If this is so obvious, why the sharply competing claims about immigration coverage? Some of the divergent findings may be chalked up to differences in time periods or media outlets studied. Arguments, in some cases, are based more on anecdotes than systematic evidence. Other scholars, such as Leo Chavez, employ subtle qualitative methods that nevertheless risk overinterpretation. For Chavez (2008, 3), the "Latino Threat Narrative is pervasive even when not explicitly mentioned. It is the cultural dark matter filling space with taken-for-granted 'truths' in [media] debates over immigration." Even if some researchers see this "dark matter," that doesn't mean that most audiences will see it or be influenced by it.

What we do know is that news media play an important role in setting the public agenda (McCombs 2004). In their choices of which events and trends to highlight and which to downplay or ignore, media do not simply reflect social reality but actively shape it. Experimental studies have shown that media frames shape audience frames (Iyengar 1991; Dunaway, Abrajano, and Branton 2007) and can even affect audience members' sense of civic empowerment (Chong and Druckman 2007; Porto 2007). Although latent frames may well exist, my approach is to analyze frames at the manifest level, where they exert their first and most uncontested level of influence. Manifest frames can be identified by the presence of particular words or phrases. With careful training and testing, coding can be conducted in a consistent way to help ensure that a finding is not simply one researcher's idiosyncratic interpretation.

particular *problem definition*" (my emphasis); in similar fashion, Snow and Benford (1988) refer to the most basic task of framing as "diagnostic." Such "problem definition," issue-specific frames are often used in media content analysis (see, e.g., Hallin [1994]; Jasperson and El-Kikhia [2003]), and this usage best suits the purposes of this study. My approach thus differs from attempts to identify fully developed, coherent frame "packages" that also incorporate causal claims, moral evaluations, and/or proposed solutions (e.g., Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Ferree et al., 2002); one rarely discovers such fully developed frames in news articles. For other discussions of framing methodology, see Gitlin (1980), Ryan (1991), Reese et al. (2003), and D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010).

After reading through dozens of policy papers, activist manifestos, and academic studies,[7] as well as numerous news articles and editorials in a range of alternative and mainstream media outlets in both France and the United States, I arrived at a list of ten broad immigration frames. Each immigration frame suggests a distinct answer to the question: What kind of problem (or positive phenomenon) is being attributed to immigration or immigrants?[8] These frames are "culturally available" (Beckett 1996) for use by policy advocates, ordinary citizens, and media alike in both France and the United States, and thus provide a common ground for comparative analysis. Here, I build on the work of comparative cultural sociologists Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot (2000) who conceive of national cultural differences within the Western world – including those between France and the United States – largely as divergences in the hierarchical ordering and emphasis of shared sets of ideas (or repertoires) rather than fundamentally different worldviews.[9]

Three broad frames portray immigrants as victims. Of these, the "global economy" frame emphasizes problems of global poverty, underdevelopment, and inequality, of which migration from the Global South to North is only one symptom. The "humanitarian" frame highlights the economic, social, and political suffering and hardships of immigrants in their everyday lives. The "racism/xenophobia" frame brings attention to individual assaults or systematic discrimination against immigrants on the basis of their ethnicity, culture, or religion.

Three additional frames portray immigrants as heroes. The "cultural diversity" frame emphasizes positive aspects of the differences that immigrants bring to society. The "integration" frame puts a positive spin on immigrants adapting and fitting into their host society, either civically or culturally. The "good worker" frame refers to the claim that immigrants "perform work that others won't do" (without acknowledging the low wages or poor working conditions that can dissuade nonimmigrants).

Finally, there are four frames that portray immigrants or immigration as a threat. These are the "jobs" frame, which accuses immigrants of taking jobs from or lowering the wages of domestic workers; the "public order" frame, which emphasizes law-breaking of any kind by immigrants, as well as the health

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[7] In addition to those already mentioned, see Benoît (1980), Craig (1981), Bilderback (1989), Bonnafous (1991), Crawford (1992), Silverman (1992), Battegay and Boubeker (1993), Noiriel (1996; 2007), Sassen (1999), Fetzer (2000a), Gastaut (2000), and Lamont (2000; 2004).

[8] In the coding, a frame would be indicated by any empirical (or normative) reference to relevant aspects, whether made by a journalist or named or unnamed source. All newspaper page-one or television evening newscast "news packages" were coded for presence or absence of each type of frame. A package includes all closely related news items from a sample day's coverage. Any given newspaper/TV package may include more than one frame type and usually does; thus, the total percentage scores of frame mentions (presence in a package) will far exceed 100.

[9] Of course, some cultural differences are qualitative. However, enough of the important French-American differences are of degree rather than fundamental type that quantitative analysis is useful and appropriate.

or environmental threats posed by unlimited immigration; the "fiscal" frame, which is concerned with the costs to taxpayers of public health and educational services offered to immigrants; and finally, the "national cohesion" frame, which portrays immigrant cultural differences (customs, religion, language) as a threat to national unity and social harmony.

The six victim and hero frames correlate roughly with pro-immigration advocacy, whereas the four threat frames correlate with anti-immigration advocacy. Some scholars have grouped victim and threat frames together as both contributing to a "negative" image of immigrants and immigration (e.g., Branton and Dunaway 2008, 1011), although, if this is true, one could say the same for coverage of virtually any other social group commonly in the news. Most news coverage focuses on conflicts and problems (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1979; Shoemaker and Cohen 2006). Certainly, the immigration lawyers who promote "victim" coverage and the reporters who follow these leads do not perceive themselves as promoting anti-immigration attitudes, although it is possible that some readers predisposed to such attitudes will find evidence in such coverage to reinforce their worldviews.

It is also important to note the ways that typical categories of left and right are scrambled in immigration politics, producing a number of "strange bedfellows" alliances (Teitelbaum 2006; Zolberg 2006). On the pro-immigration side are left progressives (global economy), civil libertarians (humanitarian), and laissez-faire capitalists (good worker)[10]; on the anti-immigration side are some labor unions and African-American groups (jobs), as well as various tribes of conservatives, sometimes (but not always) overlapping, concerned with balanced budgets (fiscal threat), cultural unity (national cohesion), or law and order (public order) (see Table 1.1).

Some of these frames concern immigration in general; others emphasize to a greater extent the problem of illegal or undocumented immigration. Because it is a matter of ongoing debate whether legal and illegal immigration should be distinguished – immigrant advocates generally do not want to differentiate them, whereas restrictionists do – I do not sort them out in advance. I generally use the term "restrictionist" or "anti-immigration" rather than "anti-immigrant" by design. Although some restrictionist activists may be nativist or racist, I try to avoid these and other labels that can unfairly presume "guilt" in advance of adequate evidence.

[10] Sometimes, the affinity between civil libertarian and laissez-faire capitalist positions is not directly made but is obvious from the lack of critical interrogation of the economic system. See, e.g., Leo Chavez's list of recommended policies (2008, 185), including "a comprehensive approach to labor market needs and immigration policy" in order to "reduce the tendency to blame Latino immigrants as 'the problem' when they come to the United States to satisfy its labor needs." My point is not that immigrants should, in fact, be blamed, but rather that Chavez takes "labor needs" as given by the neo-liberal capitalist system, without critiquing this system's race to the bottom in wages and social benefits, both domestically and globally.

TABLE 1.1. *Immigration frames*

Frames (10)	Discursive Indicators
Victim Frames	
Global economy	Immigration is a subset of the larger problem of laissez-faire economic globalization and unjust North-South relations; problems of economic insecurity affect domestic workers as well as immigrants
Humanitarian	Immigrants are victims of unjust government policies (violations of human rights, fair legal process) or business practices; they suffer from poverty, lack of access to health care, dangers related to border crossing, etc.; or they have difficulties in adapting to their host society
Racism/ Xenophobia	Immigrants are victims of racist or xenophobic slurs or hate crimes, or discrimination based on national origin, race/ethnicity, religion, or culture
Hero Frames	
Cultural diversity	Immigrants bring positive differences to a society, from new cuisines to the unique contributions of immigrant artists, musicians, and writers
Integration	Immigrants enthusiastically adopt mainstream cultural mores or civic obligations
Good worker	Immigrants work hard, take jobs that citizens or legal residents will not or cannot do, or contribute to economic prosperity and growth
Threat Frames	
Jobs	Immigrants take nonimmigrants' jobs or depress wages
Public order	Illegal immigrants break the law in coming into this country; once here, immigrants – legal or illegal – are more likely than others to commit crimes, use drugs, and carry diseases; immigrants are coming in such numbers that they threaten overcrowding and environmental degradation
Fiscal	Immigrants (especially illegal) abuse government social services programs (health, education, etc.), imposing an unfair burden on taxpayers
National cohesion	Immigrants bring foreign customs and values that threaten to undermine the host country's culture or national identity; immigrants are inassimilable

To assess who "speaks" in news media coverage of immigration, articles and television transcripts were also coded for individuals or organizations quoted or paraphrased. In total, forty-two specific categories were used, distinguishing groups according to both political leaning, when appropriate, and institutional affiliation (e.g., center left political party vs. center right political party). For purposes of analysis, the categories are sometimes compressed; for example, "center legislative" includes legislators from both center left and center right parties. Table 1.2 presents the sixteen broad speaker categories used in Chapter 6 to capture the institutional diversity of voices in the news. Depending on the purposes of my analyses, at other points I disaggregate or combine these categories in other ways. For instance, I sometimes group

TABLE 1.2. *Speaker categories*

Institutional fields (16)	Description
Executive/Bureaucratic	Elected executives (president, governor, mayor), appointed officials (cabinet ministers, etc.), civil service bureaucrats, military, and police
Judicial	Court decisions, judges, lawyers (advocates for individual clients)
Center legislative	Elected legislators from dominant left or right political parties
Center political parties	Dominant left or right political parties (Democratic and Republican in the United States; Socialist and centrist Right parties in France)
Peripheral political party and legislative	Peripheral left or right political parties and/or elected legislators (Communist, Green, Libertarian, National Front, etc.)
Trade unions	Specific labor unions and broad labor federations
Religious	Churches, synagogues, mosques, and religiously oriented associations
University/Research	Universities, "think tanks," and other research centers
Associations	Humanitarian, antiracist, pro-immigration, anti-immigration, and diverse other voluntary associations
Journalistic	News and commentary-oriented media, whether newspapers, magazines, television, radio, or websites (coded if presenting new information or promoting a viewpoint, not when serving as a venue for other institutional field voices)
Arts and entertainment	Musicians, singers, actors, comedians, writers, artists
Business	Publicly traded and privately owned businesses, and business lobbying organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce)
Foreign and international	Foreign governments, foreign political or civil society organizations, international regulatory or governmental bodies (United Nations, European Commission, World Trade Organization, etc.)
Immigrant individuals	Immigrants or their direct descendants, of both European and non-European origin
Nonimmigrant individuals	Long-term residents or citizens, of both European and non-European origin
Public opinion	Polling agencies or categories of poll respondents (male vs. female, racial-ethnic, age, educational or income level, regional location, etc.)

together labor unions, university/research, nonprofit associations, religious organizations, arts/entertainment, and news media into a single "civil society" category; I also create a category of "unaffiliated individuals and polls" to capture efforts by reporters to represent nonorganized public opinion either anecdotally or by statistical aggregations (e.g., men, women, Latinos,

Democrats, Republicans).[11] Each speaker category is meant to capture the particular logic of a field or subfield, although there may be important differences within as well as across these speaker fields, whether they are government agencies, political parties, or differentially socially located individuals. Nevertheless, these sixteen speaker categories provide one measure of the diversity of voices in the public sphere.

As will be detailed later in the book, other aspects of coverage were also coded, such as indicators of rational-critical discourse and news generation (from the initiative of the political, civil society, or journalistic fields). A multi-step process was used to assure that the sampling method provided a fair indicator of news coverage. First, based on searches of electronic databases, as well as on data provided by other news content studies, I identified peak years of media attention to immigration – roughly adjacent in France and the United States – during the 1970s (1973 in France, 1974–75 in the United States), the 1980s (1983 in France, 1986 in the United States), the 1990s (1991 in France, 1994 in the United States), and the post-9/11 period (2002, 2004, and the first half of 2006 in both France and the United States). During such critical discourse moments (Gamson 1992, 26), public debate is likely to be especially intense and wide-ranging, thus providing roughly equivalent news content samples for comparison. Second, only prominent immigration news packages, defined as a given day's page-one articles and related inside articles (including editorials and op-eds) or closely related news segments on the main evening news broadcasts, were selected. Research has shown that the front section of the newspaper plays a key role in attracting audiences and is the most read (Graber 1988; Bogart 1989; Weldon 2008; Hubé 2008). The samples only included domestic immigration-focused coverage (migration to France in French media, migration to the United States in U.S. media).

To control for the bias of any particular media outlet, a range of media outlets in both countries was included in the sample. For the entire 1970s–2000s period, I analyze texts or transcripts of national agenda-setting newspapers and national television news: for the United States, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the main evening news programs for the national commercial networks ABC, CBS, and NBC; for France, *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, and the main evening news programs for the two leading national channels France 2 (public) and TF1 (the most-watched private channel, public until 1987). Throughout the book, I refer to this as my "core" media

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[11] Critics of survey methodologies have also called attention to the ways in which polls do not represent authentic public opinion but rather often superimpose onto the surveyed public the concerns of media or policy-making elites (Bourdieu 1979; Ginsberg 1986; Champagne 1990). For this reason, I count immigrants, nonimmigrants, and poll respondents as separate categories for purposes of creating an index of institutional (speaker) diversity (see Chapter 6). As a broad measure of populist tendencies to highlight nonorganized public opinion, however, it makes sense to group individuals and poll respondents together. In any case, mentions of public opinion polls make up only a very small percentage of citations in both France and the United States.