

Health care, Immigration, and the 2008 Presidential Elections: A
Comparison of Coverage in Corporate and Independent Latino-
Oriented Newspapers in Austin and San Antonio

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HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of

Texas State University-San Marcos

In Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements

For Graduation in the Mitte Honors Program

By

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San Marcos, Texas

December 2007

ABSTRACT

Central Texas is home to several Latino-oriented newspapers, which include Spanish-language and bilingual formats. Several topics of significant relevance to the Latino community made major headlines in traditional and Latino-oriented media this spring, particularly immigration, health care, and the 2008 presidential election. Four Central Texas newspapers were selected to examine their coverage of these three topics. A content analysis of these publication revealed corporate or independent ownership may not be in factor in the local or national angle in the stories on the issues of immigration, health care, and the presidential elections.

Introduction

Latino-oriented print media in Central Texas have seen considerable growth in just the past few years. Texas is becoming one of the most vibrant regions for daily newspapers in Spanish (Subervi & Eusebio, 2005). However, weeklies are the only type of Latino-oriented newspapers found in the Austin and San Antonio area. Several Latino-oriented publications have been active in the Central Texas region for decades. For example, *La Prensa de San Antonio* published from 1913 to 1963 and reemerged again in 1989 (Rios McMillan, 2001; La Prensa, 2005). It was not until 2004 that the major English-language dailies along the I-35 corridor, the *San Antonio Express-News* and *Austin American-Statesman* emerged with Latino-oriented publications, *Conexión* and *jahora si!*, respectively.

The increasing presence of Latinos in Central Texas means there will be a greater demand for this specific medium. The latest statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau (2006) show 51.8 percent of the population in Bexar County, which is where San Antonio is located, is of Latino origin, while Hispanics make up 31.7 percent of the population in Travis County, where Austin is found. Latinos currently make up 35.1 percent of the Texas population and 14.4 percent of the U.S. population, or 42.7 million, according to the Census Bureau (2006). Latino-print media serve the specific needs of this population by providing coverage of news specific to the Austin and San Antonio area and mother country and language preferences.

So far in 2007, national coverage of Latinos and Latino issues has made headlines in major news media largely because of the debate on comprehensive immigration reform in April and June. This tied into the platforms of the 2008 presidential candidates, many

of whom were involved in the debate via the House of Representatives, Senate, as governor of their respective states, or simply to announce their stance on the issue since it is an important policy subject, which will likely be addressed once a new president is elected. Another significant news topic has been health care reform, which is not specific to the Latino community such as immigration, but is of interest to Latinos as the research shows 30 percent of people uninsured in the U.S. are Hispanic (Barr, 2007). These issues are of particular significance to the state of Texas as it borders Mexico, has one of the largest Hispanic populations in the country, and according to the latest statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, has the highest rate of uninsured people in the U.S.

This research will examine through a content analysis the coverage of immigration, the 2008 presidential election, and health care in four Latino-oriented newspapers: *Conexión*, *jahora si!*, *La Prensa de San Antonio*, and *El Mundo*. I chose two newspapers from Austin, one corporate owned, *jahora si!*, and an independently-owned publication, *El Mundo*. Two newspapers from San Antonio were selected as well, which included *Conexión*, the corporate-owned newspaper, and *La Prensa*, the independently-owned newspaper. I will use the data to assess if there are differences in coverage from city to city, and if ownership is a factor in the localized or national angle of coverage for each of the three topics.

Literature Review

Published literature on Latino-oriented media is difficult to find. Most of the articles or books on Latino media focus on the history of Latino press and portrayals of Latinos in media. The coverage of Latinos and Latino issues in major daily newspapers have been studied, and the research has found the same general conclusions: Latinos are

underrepresented, the media showcase negative stereotypes, and Latinos are portrayed as objects of news rather than as authoritative subjects with valuable perspectives (Subervi, 2005; Vargas & Pyssler, 2000). However, there are fewer studies on the editorial content of Latino-oriented newspapers and their portrayals of issues important to the Latino community. Since this paper will focus on Latino print media, one can assume Latinos and Latino issues are better represented in these types of media rather than traditional media (Subervi, 2005).

The ownership of a newspaper is a factor in the type of content that publication will provide its readers. The conglomeration of newspapers has been justified as way for media to increase profit in a medium that is losing readership and circulation, particularly after the Internet revolutionized how people receive information (Perrault, 2000; Demers, 1996). Some critics of media mergers say there is growing evidence a significant number of communities are provided less local coverage as well as they would under independent ownership (Roberts, 1997). However, others contend strong empirical evidence is lacking to point out that corporate-owned newspapers have placed less emphasis on local or community news (Demers, 1996).

Immigration

Immigration was a major national issue in 2007 that was placed at the forefront when talks of comprehensive immigration reform escalated. Debates over the usage of “illegal alien” over “undocumented immigrant or worker” circulated throughout media circles, which prompted the National Association of Hispanic Journalists to release a statement in March 2006 in favor of the term undocumented worker or immigrant. Latino-oriented media were more likely to follow the style change if it was not already

implemented, as the statement was targeted more toward mainstream media. The aftermath of the failure of comprehensive immigration reform continues to be an important subject of Latino-oriented media as coverage of raids, changes to the naturalization process and the failure of the DREAM Act — which would have given minors brought into the country illegally by their parents citizenship — make headlines. Immigration reform will continue to be a prominent issue in the 2008 election and afterward, as the topic will likely be revisited once a new administration is in office.

Historically, coverage of immigration by the media has been framed negatively. In the U.S., the most common news stereotype about migration is that immigration policy is ‘out of control,’ with an overwhelming focus on the uncontrolled movement of illegal immigrants from Mexico (Law, 2002). Sentiments about immigration have changed according to economic conditions in the U.S. and the need for cheap labor. In the past two decades, policies such as the Immigration Control and Reform Act of 1986 and economic recession produced new attitudes. As unemployment rose and wages stagnated, public sentiment turned sharply against immigrants and culminated with anti-immigrant movements such as California’s Proposition 187 in 1994 (Durand, Massey, & Capoferro, 2005). In the past two years, the figure 12 million, which is the estimated number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., was one of the major foci of immigration reform. Initial analysis on the failure of immigration reform pointed to the conservative media and talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, who was able to mobilize listeners to call senators and the White House in protest of the Senate bill.

2008 Presidential Election

The 2008 presidential election campaigns began earlier than in previous years,

which can be attributed to the search for a candidate in the Democratic and Republican parties. With Latinos becoming a larger portion of the population, both parties are making attempts to attract Latinos. In 2000, Democrats and Republicans sought identification from Latinos because their numbers have the ability to tip the outcome of national, state, and local elections in 10 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, Michigan, New Mexico, New York, and Texas (Connaughton, 2004). Those elections showcased the strides the Republican Party had made in attracting Latino voters by appealing to views on moral issues and family. Analysis of Republican Party ads shows they emphasized satisfied citizenship and the importance of families, but did not address traditional political issues (Subervi-Vélez, 2008; Connaughton & Jarvis, 2004). Questions have arisen regarding the Republican's ability to keep the Latino voters it had gained, particularly after the failure of immigration reform.

The war in Iraq and immigration reform are at the heart of campaign advertisements and speeches directed toward the Latino population by the 2008 presidential candidates. Many of the candidates have material directed at Latino voters in the form of Spanish-language content, while others have included press secretaries that deal solely with Latino media as well. How effective and influential Latino media will be in this election remains to be seen. Relatively little research has tracked ethnic groups over time and none of the research focusing on ethnic political behaviors has measured ethnic media use or ethnic communication (Subervi-Vélez, 2008; Jeffres, 1999).

However, national and Latino-oriented media garnered more attention than usual toward the naturalization and voter registration drives this summer because of the changes in the naturalization rates and immigration reform failure. The war in Iraq continues to be in

headlines and stories of Latino soldiers such as Army Specialist Alex Jimenez, who has been missing since May 2007, make national news.

Health care

The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates 46.5 million American do not have health insurance (2007). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2007), Texas has the highest percentage of uninsured people in the nation at 24.1 percent. Health care is yet another major topic on the national agenda affecting Latinos. According to the Kaiser study, 36 percent of Hispanics are uninsured and 23 percent have some form of public health care assistance. Latino-oriented media can be powerful tools in informing the public on health care policy. However, Latino-oriented media, and newspapers in particular, are not realizing their potential as community media as effectively as they might and are not making the information relevant to Latinos (Subervi-Vélez, 1999; Vargas & Pyssler, 1999). With changes such as prescription drug coverage for the elderly in the past few years and children's health insurance recently, Latinos are in need of media interpretation of the policy changes, particularly in Spanish. Latino-oriented newspapers tend to cover specific health issues clinically and provide little coverage in the frame of public policy, legislative debate, or sociopolitical coverage (Vargas & Pyssler, 1999).

News coverage of health conditions affecting a greater portion of the Latino population versus other ethnic groups by Latino newspapers is another significant issue. An analysis of major daily newspapers showed people of color overall, and African American and Latinos specifically, did not receive a great deal of coverage in AIDS/HIV stories in terms of using them as sources, though media outlets would include statistics on

the groups (Walker, Rios, & Kiwanuka-Tondo, 2003). Where traditional media have failed to cover health issues concerning Latinos, Latino-oriented media have been more successful. Their coverage provided information on diseases, symptoms, treatments, and the like, but they fail to adequately provide news and analysis of political, socioeconomic, and public policy developments relevant to health care (Vargas & Pyssler, 1999).

Profiles of Newspapers

Conexión

Conexión is a weekly publication with a circulation around 50,000 (Echo Media, 2005). It is produced by the *San Antonio Express-News*, a major daily newspaper in San Antonio. The publication features articles in English and Spanish. It is tabloid format, costs 25 cents an issue, and can be subscribed to as well. Issues of *Conexión* used in this analysis ranged from 32 to 40 pages. *Conexión* was first published in May 2004 and is owned by the Hearst Corporation, according to the company's Web site.

jahora si!

The tabloid *jahora si!* is a weekly publication produced by the *Austin American-Statesman*, a daily in Austin. It is entirely in Spanish, free of charge, and has a circulation of about 30,000 to 35,000 (Hudson, 2005). The issues used for this analysis had either 32 or 36 pages. The publication is owned by Cox Enterprises.

La Prensa de San Antonio

Amelia and Tino Duran reestablished the broadsheet publication *La Prensa de San Antonio* July 1989 in San Antonio, which had originally published from 1913 to 1967. *La Prensa de San Antonio* is a bilingual biweekly distributed free of charge

throughout the city of San Antonio. It is comprised of three sections, including sports and a culture section. The standard number of pages for each issue was 26 pages. For the purpose of this study, only Wednesday editions published in June were used.

El Mundo

El Mundo was launched February 26, 1990 in Austin by Roberto and Lucia Angulo. The broadsheet publication is Spanish-language, free of charge, and has a distribution throughout Austin, surrounding communities, and San Antonio as well. It is made up of three sections, including sports and a San Antonio section. The issues used in this study were 30 to 32 pages long. The publication has a circulation of about 35,000 (*El Mundo*, 2007).

Research Questions

The most important question concerning this research is whether there are differences between independent and corporate newspapers and how they cover topics of importance to the Latino community. In order to evaluate this, answers to the following questions were sought: (1) What are the average story lengths of the articles? (2) Where were stories on the three topics typically placed in each of the newspapers? (3) How much of the content on the three topics was written by the editorial staff and how much was from a wire service?

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: When it comes to the content of these stories, the story length and placement of stories on the three topics will be related to the corporate or independent status of each newspaper. The corporate-owned newspapers will publish longer stories and feature articles on the three topics as the lead or top stories from a national angle

because they have more resources in terms of employees and money. On the other hand, the independent newspapers will have shorter stories, but like the corporate newspapers, place stories on the three topics on page one. However, news coverage on the three topics will be more localized.

Hypothesis 2: The corporate-owned newspapers in comparison to independent newspapers will have more stories from wire services on the three topics. Wire services are expensive and not affordable for weekly independent publications with smaller circulations.

Methodology

Sample

I examined the editorial content of *Conexión*, *jahora si!*, *El Mundo*, and *La Prensa de San Antonio* published in June 2007. Only stories on health care, immigration, and the 2008 presidential election were coded. Since these publications are released on Wednesdays, this study includes content from May 31 and July 1 to 4. These publications were selected because of several factors including: two represent corporate ownership — *Conexión* and *jahora si!* — while the other two — *El Mundo* and *La Prensa de San Antonio* — are family-owned; *jahora si!* and *El Mundo* are both Spanish-language publications based in Austin, while *Conexión* and *La Prensa* are based in San Antonio and are bilingual.

Analysis and Coding

This paper will evaluate news stories determined to fall under the categories of immigration, health care, and the 2008 presidential elections. News stories include hard news stories, features, columns, editorials, and briefs. The three categories will include

any news story providing information that is mostly about the respective subject. Health care will include stories relating to health care services, providers, preventive care and diseases, legislation, and government agencies. The presidential election category will include stories about individual candidates, Latino issues, voting patterns, and general campaign coverage.

The content was coded to examine several variables: name of the publication, date of publication, story title, length of the story, placement, type of news item, language, byline, topic, and relevance to the Latino community.

Results

Conexión

The analysis of *Conexión* found 10 stories were published relating to the topics of immigration health care and the 2008 elections. It should also be noted that in the issue published for the week of June 14 through 20, no stories on the three topics were published. The majority of the stories, six to be precise, were on immigration. Three of the stories focused on the immigration reform debate and border security, while one concentrated on the economic contribution of immigrants, two on documentation, and one on immigrants as victims. *Conexión* staff members wrote all but one of the stories. The sole wire story was from the Associated Press, which was about a San Antonio-based organization called Mexican Americans Thinking Together or MATT that was placing ads in major national dailies and network television about comprehensive immigration reform. Only one story on immigration was placed in the first five pages of the publication. Most of the stories on immigration began on page six or later in the local or

national section. Two articles were an opinion piece, two were features, and two were news stories.

Table 1: Placement of stories

| | Immigration | | Health care | | 2008 election | | Totals | |
|-------------------|-------------|------|-------------|------|---------------|------|--------|-----|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| <i>Conexión</i> | 6 | 60 | 3 | 30 | 1 | 10 | 10 | 100 |
| <i>¡ahora sí!</i> | 23 | 85.2 | 3 | 11.1 | 1 | 3.7 | 27 | 100 |
| <i>La Prensa</i> | 7 | 36.8 | 11 | 57.9 | 1 | 5.2 | 19 | 100 |
| <i>El Mundo</i> | 43 | 79.6 | 6 | 11.1 | 6 | 11.1 | 54 | ** |

**The results from *El Mundo* included a story categorized under immigration and 2008 election.

Three of the remaining stories centered on health care and one on the 2008 presidential elections. The stories on health care provided statistics on diseases and preventive care as it pertained to Latinos. The three articles on health care were news stories and identified staff wrote each one. Meanwhile, the article relating to the 2008 presidential election was an opinion piece written by *Conexión* columnist Victor Landa. The column was about the effort of candidates to engage Latino voters by providing campaign information in Spanish.

¡ahora sí!

This publication produced far more content related to the three topics than *Conexión*. Of the 27 stories on the topics, 23 were about immigration. Staff wrote three of those stories, but two of those did not have a byline and instead had a line indicating a named reporter had contributed to the story. Four stories had no byline and 15 were wire from the Associated Press. The majority of articles on immigration were news stories and four were briefs. The most of the stories focused on deportation, documentation of immigrants, immigrants as victim, or border policy.

When it came to the topics of health care and the 2008 presidential elections, three stories pertained to health care and one to the elections. The staff wrote two of stories on health care and one was written by a news wire agency. The two stories written by the staff were on preventive care and the wire story was on the poor health care services in Texas. The story on the 2008 presidential elections was from the Associated Press and concerned New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson’s acceptance to appear in the debate on Univision.

Table 2: Placement of stories on topics of immigration, health care, and the 2008 presidential election

| Publication | Topic | Page 1 | | Inside | |
|-------------------|---------------|--------|------|--------|------|
| | | # | % | # | % |
| <i>Conexión</i> | Immigration | 0 | 0 | 6 | 60 |
| | Health care | 0 | 0 | 3 | 30 |
| | 2008 election | 0 | 0 | 1 | 10 |
| | Total | 0 | 0 | 10 | 100 |
| <i>jahora sí!</i> | Immigration | 0 | 0 | 23 | 85.2 |
| | Health care | 0 | 0 | 3 | 11.1 |
| | 2008 election | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.7 |
| | Total | 0 | 0 | 27 | 100 |
| <i>La Prensa</i> | Immigration | 2 | 10.5 | 5 | 26.3 |
| | Health care | 3 | 15.8 | 8 | 42.1 |
| | 2008 election | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5.3 |
| | Total | 5 | 26.3 | 14 | 73.7 |
| <i>El Mundo</i> | Immigration | 15 | 27.8 | 28 | 51.9 |
| | Health care | 2 | 3.7 | 4 | 7.4 |
| | 2008 election | 2 | 3.7 | 4 | 7.4 |
| | Total* | 19 | 35.2 | 36 | 66.7 |

* The results from *El Mundo* included a story categorized under immigration and 2008 election.

La Prensa de San Antonio

La Prensa had the least coverage of immigration compared to the rest of the newspapers analyzed in this study. Seven of 19 stories were about immigration, while 11 were on health care and one was on the 2008 presidential elections. Three of the immigration articles were opinion pieces and two of those were from wire services. The three of the articles about immigration were written by staff, two of which were news articles and one a brief, and the other article was a news stories from the wire service EFE, which is based in Spain.

The *La Prensa* staff wrote eight of the articles on health care and the remaining three were wire stories. The vast majority of stories concerned diseases and preventive care, while only provided information on legislation, two on health care services, and three on health care providers. The only story about the presidential elections was an opinion column from Hispanic Link News Service, a wire service based in Washington, D.C. The column was about Bill Richardson and the emphasis placed on him for being the only Hispanic candidate running for office.

El Mundo

El Mundo had the most coverage of immigration of any of the four publications. Of the 54 articles analyzed, 43 were about immigration, one of which also concerned the 2008 presidential elections. One of the major reasons the newspaper had so much coverage on the topic was because it had a section dedicated solely to news about immigration, titled “Inmigración.” Although much of the coverage on the issue went in that section, the publication included seventeen stories about immigration on its front page as well. *El Mundo* included some of the most comprehensive coverage on this topic,

but only four of the stories had bylines naming members of the newspaper's staff. Three specified they were compiled from staff reports, while 16 stories were labeled as a wire report, but did not state from what service. Twenty stories did not indicate whether they were retrieved from a wire service or written by staff member.

Six stories about health care were found in the analysis and it is not known who wrote five of those. Only one story indicated it was compiled from staff reports. Three of the stories solely discussed disease, while the other three included discussion a combination of disease, legislation, or paying for health care.

El Mundo had the most coverage of the 2008 presidential elections compared to the other newspapers as well. One story showed it was from compiled from wire reports and five of the six stories on this topic had no byline indicating whether it was from a wire service or written by the staff. One story concerned both the topics of immigration and the 2008 elections as it detailed how the presidential candidates' stance on immigration would affect Latinos' voting patterns in the upcoming election.

Conclusions

The question of whether there are differences in coverage of immigration, health care, or the 2008 presidential elections between corporate or independent Latino-oriented newspapers could not be determined definitively in this study. The two San Antonio publications provide more localized coverage of these issues in comparison to the Austin newspapers.

In the evaluation of these four publications, three of the newspapers covered immigration more than any other topic. Only *La Prensa de San Antonio* covered the topic of health care more than immigration. *El Mundo* provided the most coverage on

immigration and the 2008 presidential elections, while *La Prensa* had the most stories on health care. None of the stories evaluated in *Conexión* or *La Prensa* were briefs. *El Mundo* had six briefs on the topics and *¡ahora sí!* had four briefs.

El Mundo had the most stories on the front cover about immigration. *La Prensa* had three stories on health care on its front cover and two on immigration. Since *Conexión* and *¡ahora sí!* are tabloids and use their first page as a cover page, none had any of the topics on their front cover, but several of the stories featured in these publications were the dominant story on the page. In evaluating Hypothesis 1, it can be acknowledged corporate-owned newspapers publish longer stories on the three topics versus the independent-owned newspapers. However, only part of the hypothesis can be supported. Differences in the type of coverage were found between the publications from each city. *Conexión* tended to provide more localized coverage of the topics as nearly all the stories were written by the newspaper staff. On the other hand, *¡ahora sí!* published more articles on the three topics, but the majority of the content was from the Associated Press, which provided more of a national angle. *La Prensa*, which also had more stories written by staff, had localized coverage of the topics. *El Mundo* provided mostly national coverage of the three topics.

The second hypothesis could not be totally supported as the content analysis showed *El Mundo* and *¡ahora sí!* had the most wire content of the four newspapers. However, the wire content from *El Mundo* did not indicate what wire service was used to collect the information, which leads one to question if the publication has actually subscribed to a wire service at all. Instead, information maybe collected from other news

sources and compiled for publication. Finding out whether this is the case would require a personal interview with the editors of *El Mundo*.

Further Research and Limitations

Further research that should be investigated is on the use of wire services by these publications, particularly those that are independently owned. The framing of issues by these wire services is likely related to what agencies are producing the content, where they originate from, and what editorial policies these news organizations have. The analysis results from this study show different angles are taken by different wire services.

The lack of bylines and stories labeled as staff reports is another topic worthy of further research. Many of the stories published in *El Mundo* do not include the name of the author of the story or the news wire the article is derived. It is unknown how or where the information in these stories is collected. Concerns of plagiarism may arise when sources are not identified, particularly in news stories. The possibility of an ethical breach could be large blow to an independent newspaper such as *El Mundo*, which has been in circulation for almost 20 years and has gained an extensive readership.

One of the limitations of the study included the short time frame selected to evaluate these publications. A study over a longer range time, perhaps at least three months, on each of the publications should be performed to have more data, which could make this analysis more valid. For example, on the topic of immigration, a content analysis could evaluate publications' coverage from the beginning of the year through mid-July, when the debate over comprehensive immigration reform began to die down. Each of the topics could be studied individually as well to determine what messages are being sent by Latino-oriented media to Latino audiences.

Another limitation in this study was the lack of research found on Latino-oriented media. This field continues to be understudied, but more research is beginning to be published. It is important to include as much information on the topic nevertheless, and this study included material on ethnic press as well as research on more mainstream mass media and their relationship to the Latino community.

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