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How Conservative Media Influences Views on Illegal Immigration

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Introduction

Abstract

Conservative media sources tend to amplify anti-immigrant rhetoric on their news platforms. Relying on the 2021 Chapman Survey of American Fears, I examine how conservative media sources like FOX News may influence how likely one is to fear illegal immigration in comparison to someone who watches CNN. Data is sourced from questions that ask subjects how afraid they are of illegal immigration, where they get their news from, what their racial attitudes are, and their political affiliation. The topic of illegal immigration has been studied for years, however there is not much literature published on how media consumption can directly impact one's fears and views on public policy. The analysis of the survey responses show there is correlation between people who consume FOX News or have a fear of whites no longer being the majority, and fearing illegal immigration. My research also shows that watching CNN has no significant correlation with fearing illegal immigration. Political party identification is another significant factor in whether or not one fears of illegal immigration.

Framing theory & Agenda-setting theory

The framing theory suggests that the way something is presented directly influences the choices people make about how to understand that information and structure message meaning. Frames in the context of news and media are said to influence the perception of news by the audiences. Sociologist Erving Goffman put forth this theory (Goffman, 1974). Journalists and media organizations tend to conscientiously decide how to present ideas, events, and topics they cover to best inform or meet their audience's demands (Dietram, 1999). Benton and Frazier's study of the agenda-setting theory revealed that news media did affect the public's knowledge of proposed solutions and policy proposals. Through Haynes, Merolla, Ramakrishnan's study, conservative news sources were less likely than mainstream outlets to provide human-interest coverage when it comes to pro-integration policies, but more likely to do so with restrictionist policies.

Racial attitudes

White Americans are likely to see the demographic shift of the U.S. becoming a "majority-minority" country as a threat to their position as the dominant racial group (Krosch, Park, Walker, & Lisner 2022).

- A 2019 MTurk study of 465 white adults showed that Hispanic resentment and white nationalism were consistently related to perceptions of immigrants as criminogenic (Kulig, Graham, Cullen, Piquero, & Haner, 2021).

Hypotheses

H1: The more an individual watches FOX News, the more likely they are to be fearful of illegal immigration.

H2: The more an individual watches CNN, the less likely they are to be fearful of illegal immigration.

H3: People who fear whites will no longer be the majority are more likely to be fearful of illegal immigration.

Data:

Question	Standard Coefficient	Significance
Fox News	0.147	0.000
CNN	-0.054	0.071
Talk Radio	0.243	0.000
Political Party	0.123	0.000
Racial Attitudes	0.349	0.000
Intercept		0.010

Table Interpretation:

I ran a multiple regression test with all the media usage, racial attitudes, and party identification variables as independent variables and fear of illegal immigration as the dependent variable. We can see which variables are statistically significant by looking at each of their significance values. If it is less than or equal to 0.05, it is significant. The most statistically significant variables were watching FOX News (0.00), listening to talk radio (0.00), party identification (0.00), and racial attitudes (0.00). Watching CNN (0.071) was not statistically significant. We can also see how the independent variables compare to each other by looking at the "standard coefficients" or "Beta" to see which one has the strongest impact on fear of illegal immigration. The variable with the biggest absolute value are racial attitudes (0.349). Listening to talk radio (0.243) has the second largest impact, followed by party identification (0.123), and watching FOX News (0.147). The variable with no to very little impact is watching CNN (-0.054).

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Results

Hypothesis 1

Fox News & Illegal Immigration		Fox News	Illegal Immigration
Fox News	Pearson Correlation	1	0.299
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	1034	1034
Illegal Immigration	Pearson Correlation	0.299	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	1034	1035

Hypothesis 2

CNN & Illegal Immigration		CNN	Illegal Immigration
CNN	Pearson Correlation	1	0.161
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	1034	1034
Illegal Immigration	Pearson Correlation	-0.161	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	1034	1035

Hypothesis 3

Racial Attitudes & Illegal Immigration		Racial Attitudes	Illegal Immigration
Racial Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	1	0.458
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
	N	1034	1034
Illegal Immigration	Pearson Correlation	0.458	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	
	N	1034	1035

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Findings

Hypothesis 1:

Hypothesis 1's correlation test shows that the independent variable is how often one watches FOX News, and the dependent variable is fear of illegal immigration. The Pearson correlation, or "r", will tell us the strength of the linear relationship between the two variables. In this case, the r is 0.299. My hypothesis is supported as there is a modest statistically significant correlation between people who watch FOX News fearing illegal immigration, where p=0.000.

Hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2's correlation test shows that the r=0.161. My hypothesis is not supported as there is a weak and not statistically significant correlation between people who watch CNN and fear illegal immigration.

Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3's correlation test shows that the r=0.458. My hypothesis is supported as there is a moderate statistically significant correlation between people who fear that whites will no longer be the majority and fear illegal immigration.

Conclusions:

My findings conclude that the fear of illegal immigration is much stronger among those who consume FOX News and talk radio, which tends to lean conservative. One's political affiliation also has basis for determining their views on illegal immigrants as well. Those who consume more left-leaning media sources like CNN have no correlation to fearing illegal immigration. This can be explained by the framing and agenda-setting theories, in which previous studies have shown that conservative outlets tend to discuss legalization using impersonal statistics and invoking the rule of law. Aside from media consumption, racial attitudes have a surprisingly strong correlation with the fear of illegal immigration. Those who engage in white nationalist sentiments are more likely to fear illegal immigration and undocumented immigrants.