

Framing Differences in Texas Border Immigration Coverage: A Comparative Analysis of CNN News and Fox News

Jiazheng Zhao

*University Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia
jiazhengzhao64@gmail.com*

Abstract: News is an important component for people to access information, understand factual truths, and influence public opinions. This study examines how the media frames of Fox and CNN news affect public viewpoints. By analyzing the different aspects portrayed by these two companies on social media. It demonstrates how different social media frames emphasize varying values, event perspectives, and other factors influencing public opinion. Fox News tends to adopt a conservative perspective, while CNN favors a more liberal view. This difference in framing is reflected not only in the choice of news content, but also in the way events are portrayed and interpreted. Additionally, we found that individuals tend to lean towards their own ideologies when choosing to watch FOX News or CNN. This paper discusses the attitudes of both news media towards border immigration, each of different political party leanings. It also compares the distinct media frames of the FOX and CNN news. Media frames play an important role in shaping public opinion and emphasize the importance of critical thinking and exposure to different viewpoints when watching the news. Because the issue of immigration across borders is so controversial and divides public opinion sharply, the research will focus on the separate number of frames used by Fox News and CNN.

Keywords: Framework, Media framing, public opinion

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

Texas took control and closed Shelby Park in Iglesias along the Rio Grande on the US-Mexico border in response to a surge in illegal immigration.

According to CNN, on January 10th. Texas authorities effectively confined officials from the U.S. Border Patrol to area within 2.5 miles of Eagle Pass. On January 12th, following the Texas military department's "occupation and control of Shelby Park," two children and a mother tragically drowned near the Rio Grande while crossing the border. The Biden administration blamed this tragedy on the Texas military department's obstruction of border patrol agents from entering the area [1]. On January 14th, the Department of Homeland Security issued a cease-and-desist letter to Ken Paxton, the Texas Attorney General, stating that the state's actions "impeded border operations" and violated the Constitution. The letter stated, "If Texas has not confirmed cessation of obstructing border patrol from entering Shelby Park and its surrounding areas and removed all barriers to entry to the U.S.-

Mexico border by January 17, 2024, we will refer this matter to the Department of Justice for appropriate action and consider all other available options to restore border patrol access to the border. Their state government has put up new barriers at the border under the requirement of the Texas National Guard. This “self-defense” action drew attention from the U.S. federal government significantly. The U.S. Border Patrol was sent to control Texas chaos which was denied access by the Texas National Guard. Following the closure of the park, three migrant personnel were found drowned in the Rio Grande.

1.2. Research significance

This paper also discusses the wider implications of these framing techniques to public debate. This paper explains how expanded media capacity through cable TV and the internet influences selective engagement causing the features on divisive social media debates. By and large, individuals picked media outlets which back their belief. One, therefore creates an echo chamber, enhancing such ideological divides. By comparing these unique frames of the media of the Fox News and CNN, this study therefore exposes the role of media expenditure on public opinion, and how important it is to have critical thinking and exposure to various views. This paper also tallies the societal effects of the media frames. The effects the media consumption patterns have on the political polarization and the formation of public opinion on critical issues like immigration. The findings as outlined in the report, assert those of the media-literate person who can make a critical reading of the various sources of news; that would lead to better and more balanced public debate. By creating awareness of the various media frames, the study calls for a deep understanding of the consumption of news and the way it bears upon public opinion.

1.3. Purpose and scope of the study

The purpose of this paper was to compare the coverage of these events from two different perspectives -- CNN News and Fox News. Although both media outlets target American readers, they represent different partisan positions. This paper explores how the two news-giant companies covered news related to border migration in Texas and analyses the framing mechanisms that contributed to these differences.

2. Framing

2.1. Framework

"Framing" refers to the way in which information is presented to shape how audiences perceive and interpret it. Framing has become a multidisciplinary paradigm that allows the holistic study of media effects on individuals and audiences [2]. The framing adopted by different media is different and therefore affects the perception of the population. The research of offer us basic definitions and multidisciplinary perspectives on framing research. According to the review and analysis of available literature, framing research stands at the heart of media studies. Through framing, news reports are constructed, and the cognition and attitudes at the public level are largely influenced. Different framing perspectives can lead audiences to interpret and respond to the same event differently, suggesting that the power of media to mold public opinion is extremely persuasive.

2.2. Sociologically based framework

Framing research that grew from sociological foundations refers to the “frames in communication” [3]. In general, this research tends to focus on the “words, images, phrases, and presentation styles”[4] that are used to construct news stories and the processes that shape this construction [5]. While Chong

and Druckman's and Druckman's stand on sociologically based framing research, Nelson et al [5]. By examining framing effects, researchers can better understand how the media influences public perceptions, attitudes and behaviors on various issues.

2.3. Media framing

According to media framing influences public perceptions by emphasizing specific values, facts, and other factors. In addition, frames are an integral part of political arguments, journalistic norms, and social discourse [6]. For example, in the case of immigration, a news story framed from a humanitarian perspective may focus on the struggles and challenges faced by immigrants, eliciting empathy from the audience. John elaborately discuss the impact of media framing on public perception. Thus, taking these whole studies churns out an essential theoretical foundation for understanding media influence. Conversely, a story framed from a national security perspective may emphasize the potential threats posed by immigrants, leading to fear or support for stricter border control measures.

2.4. Summary

Framing research gives us a very essential theoretical tool for understanding how the media sways the public. Future research, thus, should carry out further investigation as to how different types of frames cause audiences' effects to help establish more clearly the precise role of media in modern society.

3. Analysis and discussion

3.1. Features and facts

Texas faces a prominent issue of illegal immigration due to its location along the US-Mexico border. Out of over 6.3 million illegal border crossings from 2021 to 2023, nearly 58% (approximately 4 million) occurred within Texas. Additionally, the US Department of Homeland Security estimates that around 1.6 to 1.8 million illegal immigrants, known as getaways have entered the US without being apprehended by border patrol agents. In response to the increasing influx of illegal immigrants, Governor Abbott of Texas launched a controversial state-led border security operation called Operation Lone Star in 2021. Under this initiative, Texas installed razor wire, floating barriers, and deployed thousands of Texas soldiers and National Guard troops to patrol the 1254 mile border with Mexico. As part of the operation, a "busing strategy" has been implemented, transporting tens of thousands of immigrants to six Democratic-led sanctuary cities: Washington, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver, and Los Angeles.

3.2. Analyse

3.2.1. Fox News

The Fox News Channel (FNC), commonly known as Fox News, is an American multinational conservative news and political commentary television channel and website based in New York City. FOX News and CNN News present contrasting perspectives on the Texas border situation [7]. FOX News highlights humanitarian concerns, criticizing President Biden's immigration policies and emphasizing terms like "immigration crisis" and "surge in illegal immigration." [8]. They argue that preventing migrants from crossing the border has unintended consequences, such as recent drownings in the Rio Grande. Additionally, they report Republican governors expressing support for Texas' actions.

3.2.2. CNN News

Cable News Network (CNN) [9] is a multinational news channel and website operating from Midtown Atlanta, Georgia, U.S. Founded in 1980 by American media proprietor Ted Turner and Reese Schonfeld as a 24-hour cable news channel, and presently owned by the Manhattan-based media conglomerate Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD). CNN News focuses on the national security aspects of closing the border. They questioned the legitimacy and extremity of Texas' actions and criticised the immigration bill for causing family separation and racial discrimination. CNN also questioned the seriousness of the situation at the border and highlighted incidents such as the drowning of three migrants in the Rio Grande River, where they said that the National Guard had failed to help them, but it is important to realise that blaming Texas for the incident is wrong and unfair [10].

3.2.3. Analyze the differences between FOX News and CNN News

The media's framing of these events influences public perception, with individuals likely choosing media outlets aligned with their ideological inclinations. This underscores the role of media in shaping public opinion on border issues, highlighting the importance of critical engagement with diverse perspectives.

The availability of media content from FOX News and CNN News has been greatly increased by cable television and the internet. This has led to various social media debates stemming from the possibility for individuals to selectively choose specific content [11]. For instance, on issues like border immigration, individuals tend to selectively engage with social media based on their ideological inclinations. Consequently, conservative Republicans are more likely to watch FOX News.

The public was informed through the different framing methods offered by the two media. Most of the articles reported by CNN tend to emphasize that this is an unconstitutional act. This type of reporting has helped to generate public interest and challenge the legal legitimacy of the state government's actions. This included the denial of access to law enforcement teams and the sealing of borders.

Fox News presents the issue from the angle of national security and law and order. It emphasizes the role of the government and law enforcement agencies in protecting border security, linking immigration issues to national security threats. Therefore, in the process, they attach the immigration issue with national medical security threats. For example, Fox News is more inclined towards using words like "illegal invasion" and "crime increase" to highlight the threats immigrants pose to society. Fox News presents this news on border issues from the beginning, which was the aspect of national security and law and order, stating that "immigrants pose a threat to national security."

On the other hand, there is CNN that starts to report from a human rights and social justice approach. For example, CNN takes the approach of getting prominence to personal stories of immigrants and the humanitarian crisis that shows a tough life and human rights violations of immigrants at the border. It mostly uses words like "humanitarian crisis" and "family separation" to elicit sympathy and anger from people. CNN reported the border issue from the point of human rights and social justice, which places emphasis on hardships and infringement of human rights. What Fox News does is grab the attention of the audience with fear and anxiety. It is generally concerned that the immigrants may potentially commit crimes and may make an economic burden; Therefore, through fear and anxiety, they make the public support the immigration policy. That way, Fox News often presents the immigrants as having a negative impact on local communities with the idea of inciting the audience to resist immigrants. Fox News leans the public to a bad attitude towards immigration policies by stimulation of fear and anxiety.

In addition, CNN evokes sympathy and anger by focusing on the tragedies of immigrant families and human rights violations. It seeks to elicit empathy from the audience and even outrage over unfair situations by reporting the personal stories and struggles of immigrants. For example, CNN usually features the painful experiences that immigrant families have at the border in order to elicit attention and pity for immigration issues being faced. CNN leads the public in concern and sympathy for immigration issues because it calls empathy and even outrage over unfair situations through reporting personal stories and struggles of immigrants in society.

This type of media framework has been proven by research to influence public perceptions. It indicates that media is not only a provider of information, but also one of the ways to influence the public on the speed of catching border events status. As border issues have continued to rise, the prominent media nowadays play an important role in shaping public perceptions of border issues. To mitigate the impact of biased reporting and promote a more informed public, it is critical to develop media literacy and critical thinking skills. By increasing awareness of different media frameworks, individuals can gain a fuller understanding of issues such as border migration, contributing to a more nuanced and balanced public discourse. This approach will help bridge ideological divides and foster a more informed and engaged citizenry.

4. Conclusion

News media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and understanding major events. The framework of news reporting by different media can significantly influence the audience's perception and interpretation of information. Against the backdrop of the border situation in Texas, Fox News and CNN News offer vastly different perspectives, reflecting their respective conservative and liberal biases. This divergence in reporting highlights the broader issue of media bias and its impact on public opinion.

The aim of this study was to determine how the media frames from FOX News and CNN News influence the public in their view of the Texas border situation. Our analysis of the reported conflicting perspectives by both news organizations has shown media frames that highlight different values, event perspectives, and other factors that help shape the opinion of the public.

It reveals the way in which media shape public discourse and underscores the need for media literacy; one with which to critically engage in news from diverse sources. It encourages open-mindedness, realized through different media frames that result in public discourse being more informed and balanced with holistic understanding on border immigration issues.

The contrasting framing used by FOX News and CNN News on the Texas border situation underscores the significant impact of media framing on public opinion. Conservative views on Fox News emphasize humanitarian issues and criticism of federal immigration policy, while liberal views on CNN focus on national security and the moral implications of state action. This difference in framing reflects the broader ideological leanings of the two news organizations and, accordingly, influences the perceptions of their audiences.

Fox News and CNN News in their coverage of the border issue reflected the positions and views of the two different parties. It revealed how the media have used framing to influence the public generating different views on border issues, in other words, they emphasized the position of the media on the information transitioning process which caused different public perceptions. As the event continues to develop, more organizations constantly cover it because of its impact on society. The application of different media framing theories indirectly influences most voters' opinions in various regions regarding the country's governance orientation and the election of leaders. This ultimately leads to public strong support for different political parties, which can even impact the outcome of the 2024 general election.

References

- [1] Nerozzi, T. (2024, January 27). Biden promises to 'shut down' southern border if Congress passes Ukraine aid | Fox News. Fox News.
- [2] Ardèvol-Abreu, A. (2015, July 21). Framing theory in communication research. Origins, development and current situation in Spain. Retrieved June 05, 2024
- [3] Chong, D., & Druckman, J. (2007b). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10, 103–126.
- [4] Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007, March 01). A Theory of Framing and Opinion Formation in Competitive Elite Environments | Request PDF. Retrieved June 05, 2024
- [5] Borah, P. (2011, April 01). (PDF) Conceptual Issues in Framing Theory: A Systematic Examination of a Decade's Literature. Retrieved June 05, 2024
- [6] Claes H. de Vreese (2005) News framing: Theory and typology. (n.d.).
- [7] Fox News Channel | History, TV Shows, Hosts, & Facts | Britannica Money. (n.d.). Retrieved June 30, 2024
- [8] Wehner, G. (2024). Border battle lines: Dems call on Biden to seize control of Texas National Guard, as GOP allies back Abbott | Fox News. Fox News.
- [9] Alvarez, P. (2023). DOJ says it's assessing the situation along the Texas-Mexico border amid 'troubling reports' over migrant treatment | CNN Politics. CNN.
- [10] Flores, R., Weisfeldt, S., & Croft, J. (2024). US-Mexico border: Tensions rise as the number of migrant apprehensions drops significantly | CNN. CNN.
- [11] Zúñiga, H. G. D., Correa, T., & Valenzuela, S. (2012, October 01). (PDF) Selective Exposure to Cable News and Immigration in the U.S.: The Relationship Between FOX News, CNN, and Attitudes Toward Mexican Immigrants. Retrieved April 08, 2024.