



Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical
Journalism
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

Moving Stories

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A group of children in a refugee camp, with one child in the foreground holding a piece of fabric.

FOREWORD

Beyond the headlines

» JAN EGELAND



For years, the Norwegian Refugee Council and other humanitarian actors have called out – too often in vain – to the international community, to the media, the decision makers and the public opinion about the sufferings of millions of civilians fleeing war in Syria.

As the conflict escalated, and the humanitarian disaster with it, creating the biggest refugee crisis in our generation, our appeals for wider media attention, with some notable exceptions, fell on deaf ears with an apparent lack of interest on the part of the vast majority of television and radio companies and major newspapers.

It was arguably only with the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi and the publication of pictures of his body on a beach in Turkey that Western public opinion and global media finally woke up. Immediately, media lenses focused sharply on the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and both politicians and ordinary people had to respond.

What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

But this incident only raised another question. What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? In war-torn South Sudan, for example. This country is rarely in the limelight. In 2011, it gained independence from Sudan ending a generation of war. Two years later, the civil war broke out resulting in massive forced displacement and today the country is one of the world's impoverished places. Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

A South Sudanese colleague told me it was strange to see how things can change from one day to the other only because of international media attention.

“In Europe, it was that boy on the beach. Maybe we need a picture of a boy like that in South Sudan,” she said while preparing to go on a new mission to one of the world's hardest-to-reach areas where dropping food from World Food Programme airplanes is the only way to provide hungry people with something to eat.

Too often not even stories about children dying of starvation are enough to make headlines on the nine o'clock news. Humanitarian disasters that deserve our attention often go uncovered because there is no photographer or journalist on the ground to tell the story. Only a couple of conflicts receive our attention at any given time, while most dramas get none at all. Why is that?

The reasons are complex. It is not just a lack of humanity on the news agenda or a matter of luck or a matter of caring more about some people at the expense of others. We need a broader lens to see what really is going on.

In the Norwegian Refugee Council we annually publish a list of the world's 10 most neglected displacement crises. This year the Rohingyas have topped the list. This minority Muslim community under pressure in Myanmar is also found in neighbouring Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands have sought protection.

One criterion to be on the neglected crises list is a lack of media attention. Other factors include lack of funding, little humanitarian presence and difficult access to the victims of the conflict. Often, there is a strong correlation between the different factors: access problems can lead to lack of media attention, which again can lead to lack of donor concern, which again leads to even bigger access issues. This completes a vicious circle that is not easily broken.

But there is an important truth in all of this – decision makers pay attention to the media, and independent journalists reporting with care, humanity and professionalism have enormous power to tell stories that create a new path.

But, as this report reveals, mainstream media is currently under pressure with news companies struggling to adapt to a new reality with plummeting revenues and competition from new media. Often media will simply say they cannot afford to cover these stories.

But this should not be an excuse for adopting a herd mentality – where media follow each other to cover a small cluster of the most obvious stories. Media around the world are now reporting on the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the civil war in Syria and the exodus to Europe and they are going beyond the numbers story which has dominated news coverage so far.

Yet as the poignant human tragedies from Syria takes centre stage, where is the coverage of the second largest humanitarian crisis and war on our watch: in Yemen? Here, around 21 million people are in urgent need of emergency relief. They suffer from external and internal bombardment, blockade and totally inadequate assistance and protection.

Also the journalists themselves need to be protected to be able to report on the atrocities. For journalists reporting from conflict and war 2015 is another deadly year. Like humanitarian workers, journalists are not only at risk of becoming so-called collateral damage during military operations, they are also increasingly targeted.

It is therefore essential that the international community focus on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts to allow for less casualties in the imminent future.

In Europe we talk about a sharing of responsibility in terms of coping with the growing influx of migration. Maybe it is time to talk about a media “burden sharing” where media institutions, rather than chasing the same stories, divide the coverage of the human suffering so that children in grave risk in South Sudan or Gaza do not continue to stay in life-threatening situations without the world knowing.

This EJN report *Moving Stories* is a welcome step to allow journalists get an overview of the problem areas as well as promoting best practices when it comes to reporting on the wider migration story.

Without media attention, humanitarian crises, with their horrifying impacts, will continue to be learned by the outside world way too late.

Jan Egeland is the Secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council



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INTRODUCTION

Moving stories

» KIERAN COOKE AND AIDAN WHITE

Migration is part of the human condition. Ever since humankind emerged out of East Africa it has been on the move – searching for a better climate, looking for supplies of food and water, finding security and safety.

Migration has suddenly jumped to the top of the news agenda. During 2015 journalists reported the biggest mass movement of people around the world in recent history.

Television screens and newspapers have been filled with stories about the appalling loss of life and suffering of thousands of people escaping war in the Middle East or oppression and poverty in Africa and elsewhere.

Every day in 2015 seemed to bring a new migration tragedy: Syrian child refugees perish in the Mediterranean; groups of Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar suffocate on boats in the South China Sea; children fleeing from gang warfare in Central America die of thirst in the desert as they try to enter the US.

In response to this crisis the Ethical Journalism Network commissioned *Moving Stories* – a review of how media in selected countries have reported on refugees and migrants in a tumultuous year. We asked writers and researchers to examine the quality of coverage and to highlight reporting problems as well as good work.



The conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants. But at the same time there have been inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims.

In most countries the story has been dominated by two themes – numbers and emotions. Most of the time coverage is politically led with media often following an agenda dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms. At other moments the story has been laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved.

What is unquestionable is that media everywhere play a vital role in bringing the world's attention to these events. This report, written by journalists from or in the countries concerned, relates how their media cover migration.

They tell very different stories. **Nepal** and the **Gambia** are exporters of labour. Thousands of migrants, mostly young men, flock from the mountain villages of Nepal to work in the heat of the Gulf and Malaysia: often the consequences are disastrous. People from the Gambia make the treacherous trip across the Sahara to Libya and then by boat to Europe: many have perished on the way – either in the desert or drowned in the Mediterranean.

In these countries reporting of the migration of large numbers of the young – in many ways the lifeblood of their nations – is limited and stories about the hardship migrants endure are rare. Censorship or a lack of resources – or a combination of both – are mainly to blame for the inadequacies of coverage. Self-censorship, where reporters do not want to offend either their media employer or the government, is also an issue.

The reports on migration in **China**, **India** and **Brazil** tell another story. Though large numbers of people migrate from each of these countries, the main focus is on internal migration, a global phenomenon often ignored by mainstream media that involves millions and dwarfs the international movement of people.

What's considered to be the biggest movement of people in history has taken place in China over the last 35 years. Cities are undergoing explosive growth, with several approaching 20 million inhabitants. Similar movements are happening in India and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil.

In Africa the headlines focus on people striving to leave the continent and heading north, but there is also migration between countries, with many people from the impoverished central regions heading for **South Africa** – a country where media also deal with problems of xenophobia and governmental pressure.

In Europe migration and refugee issues have shaken the tree of European unity with hundreds of thousands trekking by land and sea to escape war and poverty. The reports here reveal how for almost a year media have missed opportunities to sound the alarm to an imminent migration refugee crisis.

Media struggle to provide balanced coverage when political leaders respond with a mix of bigotry and panic – some announcing they will only take in Christian migrants while others plan to establish walls and razor wire fences. Much of the focus has been on countries in South Eastern Europe which has provide a key route for migrants and refugees on the march. In **Bulgaria**, as in much of the region, media have failed to play a responsible role and sensationalism has dominated news coverage.

In **Italy**, a frontline state where the Mediterranean refugee tragedy first unfolded, the threat of hate-speech is always present, though this is often counterbalanced by an ethical attachment of many in journalism to a purpose-built charter against discrimination. In **Britain** the story has also often been politically-driven and focused, sometimes without a sense of scale or balance: this has been particularly evident in reportage of the plight of refugees in Calais.

In **Turkey**, seen by many European politicians as a key country in stemming the onward rush of migrants, most media are under the thumb of a government that punishes dissident journalists, so the public debate is limited.

Like their Turkish colleagues, journalists in **Lebanon** live with the reality of millions of refugees from war-torn Syria within their borders which makes telling the story more complex and it is not helped by confused mixing of fact and opinion by many media.

At the same time in the **United States** media have helped make the migrant and refugee issue an explosive topic in debates between Republican Party candidates for the presidency. Media time has focused on heated and often racist exchanges. This has obscured much of the good reporting in some media that provides much-needed context. South of the border, in **Mexico** media also suffer from undue political pressure and self-censorship.



“Open the world more equitably so we all may walk freely. Or close the borders and let each one return to his house and see how much poorer and drearier and darker the world is when we all stay at home.” – Chibundu Onuzo

In **Australia** the media in a country built by migrants struggles to apply well-meaning codes of journalistic practice within a toxic political climate that has seen a rise in racism directed at new arrivals.

These reports cover only a handful of countries, but they are significant. The problems of scant and prejudicial coverage of migration issues exist everywhere. Even reporting of migration in the international media – with a few notable exceptions – tends to be overly simplistic.

Migrants are described as a threat. There is a tendency, both among many politicians and in sections of the mainstream media, to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way of life.

Such reporting is not only wrong; it is also dishonest. Migrants often bring enormous benefits to their adopted countries.

How would California’s agricultural industry or the Texan oil fields survive without the presence of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Central

American workers, often labouring on minimal wages? How could the health service in the UK continue without the thousands of migrant nurses and doctors from the developing world? How would cities like Dubai, Doha or Singapore have been built without labourers from Nepal or Bangladesh – or how would they function without the armies of maids and helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia?

These reports underscore why media need to explain and reinforce a wider understanding that migration is a natural process. No amount of razor wire or no matter how high walls are built, desperate migrants will find a way through. People will still flock to the cities, drawn by the hope of a better life.

The migrant crisis is not going to go away: the impact of widespread climate change and growing inequality is likely to exacerbate it in the years ahead.

The inescapable conclusion is that there has never been a greater need for useful and reliable intelligence on the complexities of migration and for media coverage to be informed, accurate and laced with humanity. But if that is to be achieved we must strengthen the craft of journalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

1. Ethical context

Migrants and refugees are a vulnerable minority who can quickly become scapegoats for the ills of society – social and economic decline, crime and unemployment, pressure on health and welfare services and lack of security.

Media can counter this threat and help people better understand the complex migration story by applying ethical principles, avoiding crude stereotypes, developing good newsroom practice and engaging with the audience. In particular, journalists should apply and respect the following five core principles of journalism in their work:

- ▷ Accuracy: fact-based reporting, analysis and commentary;
- ▷ Independence: journalism free from self-censorship and political pressure;
- ▷ Impartiality: fair reporting that tells all sides of the story;
- ▷ Humanity: sensitive and careful journalism that avoids doing undue harm;
- ▷ Accountability: media transparency and commitment to correct errors.

2. Newsroom practice

Media companies and journalists' unions and associations should prepare concise guides to best practices for the reporting on refugees and migrants. In addition, all media should examine their internal structures to make sure they are telling the story in the most effective way.

News organisations can:

- ▷ Appoint specialist reporters with good knowledge of the subject to the migration and refugee beat.
- ▷ Provide detailed information on the background of migrants and refugees and the consequences of migration. It is especially important to note that some major studies reveal how migration can strengthen national economies in the longer term, even where there are short-term challenges.
- ▷ Avoid political bias and challenge deceptive handling of the facts and incitement to hatred particularly by political, religious or other community leaders and public figures.
- ▷ Respect sources of information and grant anonymity to those who require it most, particularly

those who are vulnerable and most at risk.

- ▷ Establish transparent and accessible internal systems for dealing with complaints from the audience over coverage of migrant and refugee issues.
- ▷ Review employment policies to ensure newsroom diversity with reporters and editors from minority communities.
- ▷ Provide training for journalists and editors covering everything from international conventions and law to refugee rights and what terms to use while covering refugee stories.
- ▷ Monitor coverage regularly. Organise internal discussions on how to develop and improve the scope of migration coverage.
- ▷ Manage online comments and engage with the audience to ensure that migration stories are not used as a platform for abuse or intolerance.

Media associations and journalists' unions can also support national structures for independent regulation or self-regulation of journalism, such as press councils. Where there are industry-wide codes of conduct and guidelines dealing with non-discrimination these should cover reporting migration.

3. Engage with the media audience and connect with migrants

Refugee groups, activists and NGOs, many of which provide vital information for media, can be briefed on how best to communicate with journalists and media can explain to the audience their policies and editorial approach which may encourage readers, viewers and listeners to contribute useful additional information.

4. Challenge hate-speech

Hate-speech is widespread in the media. Often it can't be prevented when it comes out of the mouths of prominent public figures, but journalists should always remember that just because someone says something outrageous doesn't make it newsworthy. The Ethical Journalism Network has developed a 5-point text for hate-speech as a useful tool for newsrooms. (See below).

5. Demand access to information

Media cannot report without access to reliable information and facts. When access to information is restricted, such as not being allowed to enter

refugee camps, media and civil society groups should press the government both nationally and internationally to be more transparent. Media and journalists' unions should meet regularly with police and state authorities and agencies to ensure journalists have safe conditions in which to work and access to the information they need.

Some Useful Links

Glossaries

International Organization for Migration (IOM Key migration terms)

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Media Friendly Glossary for Migration

Statistics

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistics and Operational Data

International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Global Estimates 2015

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Resources Publications

Sources

International Refugee Law – Everything you need to know from the UNHCR

Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)

Refugee Studies Centre (RSC)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Council of Europe (COE)

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

Forced Migration Online

The Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)

The Global Migration Centre (GMC)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Red Cross Global Campaign on Migration

Middle East Migration Issues (Migration Policy Institute)

Resources for journalists

Accountable Journalism Database

Africa's Media Silence over Migration Crisis

BBC: Migration in Figures

Climate News Network

Dart Centre Covering Migration Tips for Journalists

Ethical Journalism Network: Migrants or Refugees?

Ethical Journalism Network Five-Point Test for Hate-speech

Europe: The Migrant Files

Jean Paul Marthoz: "How to cover migration"

Getting the Facts Right: Ethnicity and Religion (ARTICLE 19)

Media Diversity Institute

Statewatch

UK NUJ Migration Reporting Guide for Journalists

Data-Based Study into Characteristics of Migration Coverage in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States – Summary report and Full presentation

Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean Migrants

David Cameron: "Swarm" of Migrants crossing Mediterranean

Ten myths about migration

Guardian Special Report:

Hardline Australia, confused Scandinavia and tense Russia: The global immigration picture

Generation E – Data Driven Project Report on Youth Migration from Southern Europe

The Med: One final danger in a migrant's odyssey

The Arduous Journey of Colombian Migrants Headed for Chile

What crime have I committed to be held like this? Inside Yarl's Wood

Risking their lives to cross the border: Europe or Die

Jimmy Breslin: "The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez"

Giovanna dell'Orto/Vicki Birchfield: "Reporting at the Southern Borders Journalism and Public Debates on Immigration in the U.S. and the E.U."

Peter Andreas/Kelly Greenhill: "Sex, Drugs and Body Counts"

Fabrizio Gatti: "Bilal"





UNITED STATES

The Trump Card: How US news media dealt with a migrant hate manifesto

» BILL ORME

In the United States, as in Europe, migration was a dominant topic of mainstream news coverage throughout the summer of 2015.

In Europe, the story was a humanitarian crisis of historic proportions, with millions fleeing violence and repression. The migration focus in US media, by contrast, was an utterly domestic debate about the legal status of millions of immigrants who have been peaceably settled in the country for years.

And it was prompted largely by one candidate in the early stages of a US presidential campaign, rather than reflecting an actual change in migration patterns or any other precipitating event. The refugee crisis across the Atlantic and in more distant parts were distant sideshows.

In serious news organisations in the US and Europe alike, migration has been covered as a multifaceted story of human tragedy and perseverance, of domestic resistance and acceptance, of multicultural diversity and geopolitical complexity, and, above all, as one of potentially permanent and profound demographic change.

Yet this coverage has long been strikingly different in the United States, where political refugees have not been a factor in debates over immigration in decades, while “economic” immigration has been a constant throughout its history – and a recurring topic of divisive partisan debate. The continuing desperate exodus of Syrian and other refugees was seen as a “foreign” story, with little initial reporting on the US role or responsibility in the origins of the crisis, or as a potential safe haven for those fleeing turmoil and often savage cruelty. By extension, ethical issues in migration coverage are also perceived quite distinctly in American media.

Ethical questions confronting news media in recent months included difficult decisions about the of shocking images of human suffering, and ground rules for the direct interaction of journalists with people in desperate need of food, shelter and medical aid. In the United States journalism during 2015, to judge by debate within the profession, the most pressing ethical question was how much newsprint and air time to devote to a single presidential candidate whose campaign strategy was the use of virulent attacks on immigrants as a device to secure more

Trump's anti-immigrant bombast defied normal fact-checking practices because it seemed devoid of factual foundation... as he repeated his charges polls showed that many potential voters accepted them as facts.



of this media coverage. The answer to the question was clear – as much as the market would bear.

The unexpected early dominance of the Republican presidential nomination contest by real-estate billionaire and reality-TV star Donald Trump was directly propelled by his caustic criticism of “illegal” immigration generally, and of Mexican immigrants in particular. His coarse language, once considered outside the bounds of US political discourse, and his incendiary pronouncements produced front-page headlines, hours of television news coverage, sharp denunciations by Latino leaders and Democratic candidates – and a swift upward spike in his standing in the Republican primary polls.

In August, the first televised Republican campaign debate broke ratings records for these primary-election forums, due mainly to Trump's reputation for inflammatory, unscripted candour.

Trump was a very good news story. Over the course of the summer, the three US cable news networks devoted nearly twice as much air time to Trump as to any other of the 16 Republican candidates – and most of this coverage focused on his unapologetically xenophobic anti-immigration rhetoric. He boasted that he had singlehandedly put immigration at the center of US political debate and media coverage for the first time in years – one of his few objectively accurate claims.

Trump's anti-immigrant bombast defied normal journalistic fact-checking practices because it seemed to many to be deliberately, almost tauntingly devoid of any factual foundation. But as he repeated his charges on the campaign trail – and as they were then

replayed hourly on television news – polls showed that many potential voters accepted them as established facts. Among Trump's most-repeated claims:

- ▷ The Mexican government has a policy of systematically “exporting criminals” to the United States – “rapists” and drug traffickers most prominently among them
- ▷ American cities on and near the southern border are suffering from a record crime wave directly attributable to the influx of these lawless Mexican immigrants
- ▷ Though the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution has long been held by US courts to confer automatic US citizenship on all children born in the United States, “the best legal scholars” disagree with that interpretation and say US-born children of “undocumented aliens” should not be considered US citizens
- ▷ As President, he would quickly end any further unauthorized Mexican immigration by building an impregnable wall along the entire 3000-kilometer border – and he “would make the Mexican government pay for it”
- ▷ Most radically, he would also as President order the immediate deportation of all people in the country without official residency permits – some 11 million of them, from children to the elderly – “so fast that it will make your head spin”

Did news organisations challenge these assertions?

At first, not much, in part because Trump's claims seemed to many to be patently absurd, intended not as serious policy statements but as showboat-

ing rhetoric, with little need for factual refutation. But as Trump climbed in the polls, establishing himself as the leading choice of likely Republican primary voters, journalists began stating for the record that net Mexican immigration to the United States had slowed to a halt more than five years earlier, due to demographic and economic factors on both sides of the border.

Reporters covering Trump campaign visits to the border also dutifully pointed out that US border cities like El Paso had some of the lowest crime rates in the country, as well as the highest proportions of Mexican immigrant residents in the country. Many noted that much of the border is already fortified with heavily patrolled wall-like barriers. And some stories stressed further that the 14th Amendment guarantee of full citizenship rights to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States” has been accepted and enforced without serious dispute since its adoption in 1868.

Other Trump claims were a bit harder to subject to empirical tests, such as assertions about the legal, political and logistical feasibility of the mass expulsion of millions of tax-paying residents of communities that depend on them as a work force – and nearly half of whom have children or other immediate relatives who are US citizens.

The most prominent US journalist to publicly and directly challenge Trump on these immigration claims was Jorge Ramos of *Univision*, the best-known reporter on the country’s leading Spanish-language television network, who has on behalf of his large national audience questioned US politicians about immigration policy for years.

At a Trump press conference in Iowa, Ramos stood and tried to ask the candidate a question about his immigration charges. Trump ordered Ramos to “sit down,” as he had not been called upon. When Ramos persisted in his questioning, he was forcibly escorted out of the press conference by Trump’s security guards. “Go back to Univision!” Trump called out to the Mexican-born Ramos – a remark that became quickly infamous among Latinos, who heard it as a thinly veiled anti-Mexican insult and deportation threat. After other reporters protested over Ramos’s expulsion, Trump invited him back for a long testy exchange on border wall construction, the 14th Amendment, and mass deportation plans.

The Trump-Ramos encounter quickly became the single most widely viewed and reported immigration discussion in US media history, with many news media prompted by the incident to examine Trump’s assertions in detail for the first time.

The immigration beat

There are now an estimated 41 million foreign-born residents of the United States, or about 13 per cent of the total population of 316 million. That is the highest share since the previous peak US immigration period a century ago – and far higher than the average eight per cent of the population in the European Union’s largest countries who were born outside the EU (Spain, 8.5 per cent; France, 8.3 per cent; UK, 8.1 per cent; Germany, 7.4 per cent).

The biggest group of foreign-born US residents, in terms of national origin, emigrated from neighbouring Mexico – more than 13 million – followed by China (2.3 million), India (2.1 million) and the Philippines (2 million). Almost five million were born in Europe, with the largest numbers coming from the UK and Germany. Yet British and German immigrants rarely figure into US news coverage. Nor do the nearly one million Canadian immigrants in the United States.

The political and media focus has been largely been Spanish-speaking immigrants, even after immigration from Latin America has dramatically slowed. Net new US immigration peaked in 2007, when the number of undocumented immigrants reached an estimated 12 million, including about 7 million from Mexico. Since then, net immigration from Mexico has dropped almost to zero, and the overall population of undocumented US immigrants has stabilized at about 11 million – most of whom have lived in the country for a decade or longer.

The political, cultural and economic complexities of this large and diverse immigrant population are covered closely by many US news organisations, both locally and nationally. *BusinessWire*, a press-release distribution service, lists more than 90 US immigration reporters in its database for corporate clients. Most work for daily newspapers in cities with large and growing immigration populations – which is to say, most US cities.

Many of these beat reporters have distinguished themselves with insightful, empathetic coverage of issues ranging from assimilation challenges to the legal netherworld of US immigration courts to the systematic deportation of long-term residents for minor criminal offenses. Yet when immigration becomes a headline issue in a presidential campaign, the topic is often assigned to political reporters, rather than beat specialists, reflecting in some ways the accurate news judgment that this political story has little to do with demographic realities. The focus of that coverage is on the potential electoral consequences of the immigration debate, and on the political personalities who are most promi-



nently focused on the issue, rather than on the substance of the issue itself.

A still-simmering melting pot

For all mainstream US media, whether in English or in Spanish, immigration stories are implicitly rooted in a proud self-image of the United States as one “nation of immigrants” – albeit a still-simmering “melting pot” where many people self-identify as ethnically “hyphenated” Americans generations after their ancestors arrived in the country. Yet that inclusive national narrative has been cyclically interrupted by periods of fierce nativist backlash, whether against Irish, Italian and Jewish newcomers in the 19th century, or against the 21st-century migrants from Latin America and the Middle East.

Is the US public – and, by extension, the US media – on balance in favour of immigration, as the country’s ethnic diversity and people’s own family histories would suggest? It’s not clear, and reporting and opinion surveys in US media are often contradictory.

In May 2008, with the immigration debate again rekindled by presidential primary debates, a CBS/*New York Times* poll reported that 69 per cent of Americans favoured the prosecution and expulsion of undocumented immigrants. A month later, in June 2008, an NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll showed 85 per cent of Americans opposing proposals for the deportation of more than 10 million immigrants.

Seven years later, in a Pew Research Center survey conducted in May 2015, a solid majority (72 per cent) of Americans – including 80 per cent of Democrats, 76 per cent of independents and 56 per cent of Republicans – said undocumented immigrants in the US should be allowed to stay if they met certain legal requirements. Yet surveys of Republican voters a few months afterwards showed most agreeing with Trump’s hardline position on the issue.

The 17 per cent of the US population that the Census Bureau identifies as “Hispanic” or Latino includes millions of recent arrivals as well as many communities that have been an integral part of the United States since it became an independent republic.

Why the difference? In good part, as is often the case in opinion polls, it had to do with how the questions are posed. If you asked if immigrants who break the law should be punished and deported, a large majority said yes; if you asked if it were either feasible or desirable to forcibly expel millions of foreign-born workers and their families, most said no.

Selective citation of these polling numbers by media commentators has helped create parallel and mutually incompatible political beliefs about immigration, with most self-described Democrats not only favouring immigration but believing that most Americans agree with that view, and most self-described Republicans believing precisely the opposite. This ideological divide over the supposedly factual has been exacerbated by the increasing ideological polarisation of US media, especially in broadcasting. Republican voters – especially older, white, male Republicans, as polls show – watch the Fox News cable network more than any other US television news service, and listen while driving to the conservative talk-radio hosts who now dominate the AM airwaves. Democratic voters, by contrast, are more likely to watch the avowedly liberal cable news shows on MSNBC and current-affairs comedy programmes such as “The Daily Show” that routinely satirise right-wing political commentators.

Spanish-language media, and Spanish-language voters

As Trump’s rise highlighted, the fundamental difference between the migration stories in the United States and the European Union is that US debate centres on the continuing growth of what is already the largest and fastest-growing U.S. minority group, who mostly come from just a few countries immediately south of the US border.

All those countries – Mexico, most importantly, but also the smaller nearby nations of Central America

and the Caribbean – have always been intimately interconnected with the United States, economically, politically and culturally. The 17 per cent of the US population that the Census Bureau identifies as “Hispanic” or Latino includes millions of recent arrivals as well as many communities that have been an integral part of the United States since it became an independent republic. Though still under-represented politically, its leaders today include state governors, big-city mayors, presidential cabinet secretaries, and 32 of the 535 members of the US Congress. Even more distinctive, arguably, when compared to Europe, is the scale and influence of the Spanish-language media serving that community, especially in broadcasting.

Even in the age of on-line, on-demand Internet resources, and even among households with daily newspaper subscriptions, television news remains the most important source of current-affairs information for most Americans, surveys consistently confirm. Television news is proportionately even more important in Latino households, polls show.

The nightly national news programmes of Univision, the leading US Spanish-language television network, are often the highest-rated news shows in the country’s biggest television markets, including New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. *Telemundo*, Univision’s Spanish-language rival, isn’t far behind. In addition, the more than 160 local television stations owned or controlled by Univision and *Telemundo* air their own popular nightly Spanish-language local news programmes.

Though news programming on Univision and Telemundo features regular coverage of events in Latin America, most of its reporting is domestic in content, reflecting the interests of its US resident audience. International reporting is almost as often focused on news in Europe or the Middle East, as with the English-language networks. Yet immigration – or more precisely, the US political debate about immigration – is covered completely differently in Spanish-language media than it is by the other major US network news broadcasts. As Ramos has said: “For us, this is personal.”

Following his celebrated confrontation with Trump, Ramos was chastised in some US media outlets for a purported lack of journalistic ethics, for both the perceived if minor offence of asking a question before he was called upon, and for the allegedly more grave error of expressing opinions rather than simply posing questions.

The sternest criticism of these alleged breaches of journalism protocols was heard on Fox News, famed

for its own unabashedly opinionated commentary. One Fox News panelist, the former CNN host Tucker Carlson, charged that Ramos was not really a journalist – “He’s not a reporter, he’s an editorialist, he’s an activist” – and hence unworthy of legal protection under the press freedom guarantees of the US Constitution. Bill O’Reilly argued in his nightly programme that as a network “anchorman” Ramos should not express opinions, but confine himself to dispassionately narrating the day’s news. “If Jorge Ramos wants to be a commentator like me, that’s fine,” but that’s different from being a “journalist,” asserted O’Reilly, who has long identified himself as a journalist.

Ramos responded the next day, noting that for his Spanish-speaking audience – and for his network’s own employees and their families – immigration was not an abstract policy matter but an issue directly affecting their daily lives. For *Univision*, a feigned neutrality on the subject would be dishonest and a disservice to its viewers, Ramos argued.

Sympathetic media observers also likened his stance to an older and still-revered US broadcast tradition of crusading journalism, perhaps best exemplified by the famously critical coverage by CBS anchormen of US Congressional investigations of allegedly pro-Soviet Americans in the 1950s and of the Vietnam War in the 1960s.

“I think the best journalism happens when you take a stand when it comes to racism, discrimination, corruption, public life, dictatorship or human rights,” Ramos told *ABC News*. “As journalists, we are not only required but we are forced to take a stand, and clearly, when Mr. Trump is talking about immigration in an extreme way. We have to confront him, and I think that’s what I did yesterday.”

As television ratings rose for both Trump and Ramos in the aftermath of their Iowa encounter, both sides could claim victory, with US media coverage driving the story. Trump increased his lead as the Republican front-runner, while Democratic Party activists reported a Trump-fueled surge in Latino voter registration, aimed squarely against whoever is the eventual 2016 Republican presidential nominee.

Yet somewhat lost in the coverage of this US political saga was the daily reality of the millions of immigrants who still lack clear legal status, and whose future prospects are unlikely to be clarified further in the continuing presidential campaign. Nor is their eventual eligibility for residency likely to be advanced by US media coverage of their precarious legal circumstances, unless the English-language television journalists from whom most Americans get their news also cross the line with Ramos and take a stand.



Migration: It's the same old story

'The enormous change in human conditions to which nearly all our present stresses are due, the abolition of distance and the stupendous increase in power, have flung together the population of the world so that a new way of living has become imperative ...

'The elaboration of methods and material has necessitated a vast development and refinement of espionage, and in addition the increasing difficulty of understanding what the warfare is really about has produced new submersive and demoralising activities of rumour-spreading, propaganda and the like, that complicate and lose contact at last with any rational objective ...

'The uprooting of millions of people who are driven into exile among strangers, who are forced to seek new homes, produces a peculiar exacerbation of the mental strain. Never have there been such crowds of migrating depressing people.

'They talk languages we do not understand ... they stimulate xenophobia without intention ... Their necessary discordance with the new populations they invade releases and intensifies the natural distrust and hostility of man for man – which it is the aim of all moral and social training to eliminate ...

'For the restoration and modernisation of human civilisation, this exaggerated outlawing of the fellow citizen who we see fit to suspect as a traitor or revolutionary and also of the stranger within our gates, has to be restrained and brought back within the scheme of human rights.

– H. G. Wells, *The Rights of Man* (1940)



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