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Abstract

The production and dissemination of statistical demographic information has increased significantly given advancements in information technology. As such, numbers have become more powerful and political than ever—more widely used, more frequently repeated and abused in the service of specific interests. For few subjects has this been more apparent than unauthorized migration. Using content analysis of mass media, internet sources, and a short survey of demographic professionals working on immigration, this paper tracks, analyzes and compares the use of estimates of unauthorized migrant populations issued in high profile British (2004/05) and American (2005/06) reports. Rather than assessing the validity of statistical techniques, the paper examines how numbers are framed within the public discourse, focusing on the relationship among quantitative information on unauthorized migration, the mass media, and politics in the United Kingdom and the United States. The paper finds that use of statistical referents increases at the release of a report, during election cycles and when immigration related events capture public interest or cause controversy. Overall, immigration statistics are more broadly reported in the United States than in the UK and more strongly shape public discourse. In both countries, estimates are used to monitor government and to gauge the success of immigration policies and frame immigration as a process of accounting between natives and immigrants.

Just the facts: official reports, mass media and the ‘politics’ of unauthorized migration estimates in the United Kingdom and United States

The whole chaotic constellation of the social revolves around that spongy reference, that opaque but equally translucent reality, that nothingness: the masses. A statistical crystal ball, the masses are 'swirling with currents and flows,' in the image of matter and the natural elements. So, at least, they are represented to us.

—Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*

On June 30, 2005 the United Kingdom (UK) Home Office issued its first official report on the numbers of unauthorized migrants in the country (Woodbridge 2005). The report created a sensation—not the least for what it told the British public about the numbers of ‘illegal immigrants’ in their midst. Rather, it generated a minor scandal because the government had withheld a similar document, commissioned in 2002, until a freedom of information request lodged by *The Guardian* prompted the release of the

updated 2005 report (Branigan 2005). The ensuing weeks were open season for the press, which focused not only on the government's perceived inability to control the borders but also on its willingness to suppress information on a politically sensitive subject. Criticism on the latter front centered around a widely publicized April 20th interview in which Prime Minister Tony Blair declined to answer—no less than 20 times according to news reports—questions from Jeremy Paxman of *Newsnight* on BBC2 as to the number of unauthorized migrants in Britain (Webster 2005). Refusing to speculate, the Prime Minister stated in the interview, 'I can't be sure of the numbers of people who are illegals in this country, for the same reason that the previous Government couldn't.' (Webster 2005) Following the release of the report two months later and attending to the allegations of suppression spurred by the existence of the earlier estimate, immigration minister Tony McNulty defended the government's actions: 'It was entirely appropriate in the context of debate at the election not to start any speculation about the figure.' (Branigan 2005)

In the United States, a country less circumspect about its relationship to immigration, figures on unauthorized migrants have long been a matter of public record and their dissemination aided by the not infrequent publication of government and private research reports. Untainted by the type of allegations surrounding the UK numbers, recent estimates of the unauthorized migrant population in the United States have nonetheless swept through the media like wildfire. 'Illegal immigration' is a hot topic in the United States if media salience is any guide and one of several policy objects that have come to define the contemporary political spectrum. As Minister McNulty's comment and the rancorous U.S. Congressional debate evidences, this state of affairs is only exacerbated by the recent/current election cycles in both countries. In and outside of election fever, however, estimations of the unauthorized migrant population have been used to validate the increasingly strident arguments on both sides of the immigration debate. Clearly, the issue touches many real and symbolic concerns about the economy, job security, crime, race, nationalism and culture. What do the numbers add to this equation? Prurient curiosity among train-spotting types aside, the release of a count changes little on the ground—the migrants were there before and they will be there after—even if it substantiates or dissuades opinion. Stumping for re-election in 2006, U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.) highlighted this and affirmed the popular faith in numbers, 'When you put the numbers out there, then it puts a reality onto it that bolsters what people feel in their gut and what they know is a problem. I'm a very logical person,' she said. 'I like to start with the facts.' (Galindo 2006)

Political use of numbers is nothing new, yet the above examples prompt the question, when is the right time to bring up 'the figure'? Moreover they ask, what is meaningful about unauthorized migration statistics and, given the increasing complexity of statistical methodologies, to whom? What are 'the facts' and what difference do they make? Inspired by earlier efforts to think critically about the politics of demographic information (Alonso and Starr 1987; Best 2001) and by the self-evident changes in statistical methods and information dissemination through developments in information technology, this paper tracks, analyzes and compares discourse surrounding recent estimates of unauthorized migrant populations in the UK and United States following the release of high profile reports—the June 2005 Home Office report *Sizing the unauthorised (illegal) migrant population in the United Kingdom in*

2001 (29/05) as well as a preceding July 2004 report *Sizing the illegally resident population in the UK (58/04)* and the June 2005 Pew Hispanic Center (Pew) background briefing prepared for the Taskforce on Immigration and America's Future *Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics*, as well as an unconnected follow up report issued in March 2006 *The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the U.S.* The paper makes no attempt to assess the methodology used in attaining the respective estimates.¹ Rather, it follows the numbers presented in these reports through newspaper articles in each country, taking particular interest in the citation of estimates by political figures and of the context in which they are presented.

Note on terminology: The term unauthorized is used throughout the paper; however, in neither the United States or the UK is this the term favored by the press. In the UK, the terms 'illegal immigration,' 'illegal immigrants' or, simply, 'illegals' are the primary referent for this population; in the United States, these phrases are also common, as are 'undocumented' and the somewhat archaic 'illegal alien.' As Vitello (2006) observed in a *New York Times* article—ironically titled, 'Kiss Me, I'm Illegal'—'The most common label attached to the estimated 12 million foreign-born people living in the United States without visas may be 'illegal immigrants,' even though some grammarians argue that the adjective can modify actions and things (like left turns and hallucinogenic drugs) but not people.' With reservations, the terms 'illegal immigration' and 'illegal' are also used in reference to individuals. I am sensitive to the fact that these terms are pejorative and connote diminution and racism. As Ngai (2004) notes, all these words are legal definitions; they are also 'cue[s] for a whole train of ideas on which a vote of untold consequences may be based.'

Statistics as social constructs

Interest in the production, dissemination and effect of quantitative information on social structure has grown since the publication of *The Politics of Numbers* (1987) two decades ago (Emigh 2008; Best 2001; Desrosières 1998; Hacking 1990; Long 1990). However, despite its policy and media salience, migration has not figured strongly as a component of this research. Although media studies have shown considerable interest in the formation and function of representations of migrants on identity (Karim 1998; King and Wood 2001; Ogan 2001; Thompson 2002; Aparicio 2003) and public opinion (Simon and Alexander 1993; Espenshade and Calhoun 1993; Simon and Lynch 1999), none have looked specifically at the way in which numbers are used to typify immigration issues or at how statistical information shapes the immigration discourse. Critical discourse analyses have furthered these insights (van Dijk 1987; Preto Ramos 2004; Nash 2005)—particularly on racial representations—but largely ignored the use of statistics in framing immigration or as 'acceptable' proxies in racialized discourse. Rosello's (1998: 138) analysis of media coverage of *les clandestins* in France—a sit-in by unauthorized migrants in Paris in the summer of 1996—noted the extent to which naming by the media 'imposes a narrative of illegality which masks the arbitrariness' of the title 'illegal,' exposing 'the dangerous tautology between two

¹ In fact, the estimation methods in the reports are the same, adjusted for available data. The UK publication follows U.S. methodology in the use of the residual method. See also Costanzo, J., Davis, C., Irazi, C., Goodkind, D. and Ramirez, R. (2001). *Evaluating Components of International Migration: The Residual Foreign Born, 1990 and 2000*. US Bureau of the Census, Population Division Working Paper No. 61.

supposedly separate realms: that of representation and that of policy-making.’ Yet she, like Chavez (2001) in his study of immigration as represented on U.S. magazine covers, focuses on images rather than numbers. Given this omission and these findings, this analysis draws upon a diverse literature in an effort to understand the role of unauthorized migration estimates in the immigration discourse.

Foucault (1980) notes, ‘In a society such as ours...there are manifold relations of power that permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse.’ Numbers are generally used either to support the dominant paradigm or criticize its imposition (Chavez 2001); their logic and ‘irrefutability’ providing a powerful grammar for argument (Desrosières 1998). Demographic information functions powerfully in the immigration discourse because it is fundamentally oriented to and created by the marking of boundaries. Boundaries that delineate who belongs and who doesn’t; that define rights and restrictions; that subsume the individual’s needs in the nation. Simply, statistics—like borders—draw lines in the sand. Lines in which ‘illegal’ migrants are clearly on the ‘wrong’ side. Moreover, numbers offer a seemingly abstract way of establishing difference. This ability of statistics to both convey and conceal is primary to their appeal. Few objects are as flexible as the statistic; few convey so much with so little. As Easterbrook notes, ‘Torture numbers and they’ll confess to anything.’ Given the propensity of the general public to accept numbers as fact and overlook the requisite counterfactual—what is not being said—one need not lie to manipulate with statistics. Statistics can be constructed to conceal or deconstructed to reveal a host of assumptions and biases: ‘There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.’²

Yet what is an estimate (statistic)? More than mere aggregations of data, statistics are social constructs. Numbers were first symbols and symbols are representative. Formulating sociological method, Durkheim (1894) wrote, ‘The first and most fundamental rule is: Consider social facts as things.’ (Desrosières 1998: 2) Statistics are also—given efforts to ‘package’ information for public consumption by research institutes—social products.³ Given this, statistics as examined here are symbolic constructs produced by and for the polity. They simultaneously describe social order and manifest it through the creation of categories and in their central function as tools of public policy. As Scott (1998: 91) notes such constructions have left an indelible mark on the physical and social space of postmodern society.

The path from description to prescription was not so much an inadvertent result of a deep psychological tendency as a deliberate move. The point...was less to mirror the distinctive customs and practices of a people than to create a cultural community by codifying and generalizing the most rational of those customs and suppressing the more obscure and barbaric ones....an active utopian project. Simplification and rationalization previously applied to forests, weights and measures, taxation, and factories were applied to the design of society as a whole.

² Attributed to Mark Twain and/or Benjamin Disraeli.

³ Pers. comm. J. Passel and L. Lowell, 2008.

Statistics—in their first, foremost and enduring role as tools of social rationalization for the nation-state—remain central to social perception of specific ‘problems’ or groups, identities and conceptions of national order.

This relationship between statistics and the state is of particular importance to how numbers shape discourse around unauthorized migration. In their origin and operation, social and economic statistics have a specific relationship to state function—serving an interest in social coordination and control, aiding the allocation of money and power, setting norms and modifying policymaking and evaluation (Starr 1987). Statistical collection and dissemination systems, although similar in purpose, vary in their relationship to the public across groups and countries. Some, as in the United States, operate under a mandate for public knowledge, whereas others, as in the UK, are oriented toward government policymakers—a lateral (U.S.) versus a top down (UK) approach (Emigh 2002; 2008).⁴ Differences in the reception of statistical processes also speak volumes about the relationship of citizens to the collection of demographic information, particularly the level of trust between state and public. Taxes are an obvious point, yet earlier versions of the Census struggled to include questions on the number of children ever born to a woman or of bathroom facilities, denoting changing social mores in the collection of information (Conk 1987). Population registers are an uncontested norm in many European countries, yet close coordination of government data is anathema to Australians who consistently reject the government’s attempts to link tax and medical records. The debate over identity cards—prevalent in the UK media—offers another example of public misgivings over government data use, as does the debate over the prevalence of closed circuit television cameras in the country (Gerrard et. al 2007). In the United States, the ‘war on terror’ has renewed concerns over privacy and civil liberties, changing attitudes about data collection (Risen and Lichtblau 2005).

Three points from the literature on statistics as a state function illuminate how estimates of unauthorized migrants—which fundamentally provide a scope for policy concerning this population *and the national corpus*—operate in the public discourse. First, official statistics ‘powerfully affect social norms.’ (Starr 1987) Numbers are frameworks of normative judgment that both shape and are shaped by attitudes about race, religion, gender and age. This recalls Condorcet’s utopian belief in the moral as well as physical certainty of science (Scott 1998). It also rouses Gramsci’s views on hegemony and common sense, as noted by Chavez (2001: 45): ‘Civil society is permeated by a system of values, attitudes, morality, and other class interests that dominate it. [If] common sense is the largely unconscious and uncritical way of perceiving the world in any given historical epoch...then it incorporates within it the prevailing consciousness, or hegemony, that is largely internalized by members of society.’ By definition, unauthorized migrants fall outside conventional social norms (which are akin but not equal to common sense) and, despite the use of census in the estimations presented here, outside of the surety of official statistics. Indeed, discourse surrounding migration concentrates strongly on this outsider position, reaffirming the *illegal* immigrant in opposition to legal immigrants. As Downes (2007) wrote in a recent *New York Times* editorial,

⁴ Pers. comm., R. Emigh, 2008.

America has a big problem with illegal immigration, but a big part of it stems from the word 'illegal.' It pollutes the debate. It blocks solutions. Used dispassionately and technically, there is nothing wrong with it. Used as an irreducible modifier for a large and largely decent group of people, it is badly damaging...at least undocumented—and an even better word, unauthorized—contain the possibility of reparation and atonement, and allow for a sensible reaction proportional to the offense.

Second, citizenship demarcates who has rights to what. Unauthorized migrants not only fall outside the 'norm' by virtue of being 'criminal' outsiders, their questionable legal presence touches deeply held beliefs on entitlement. Ruhs and Martin (2006) identify this in their discussion of the numbers vs. rights tradeoff that has traditionally confounded immigration policymakers. Placing numbers and rights on a spectrum highlights a central and often overlooked conundrum of immigration policymaking in liberal democratic states—the reconciliation of the paradoxical demands of individual liberty and private property with the humanistic principles of democracy (Mouffe 2000). Simply, 'Politics has become how much for how many.' (Prewitt 1987) *Illegal* immigrants have broken the bonds of the social contract and are perceived as having, for the most part, *chosen* their 'rights' free status in a world composed of national orders. The 'agency' of migrants real and simultaneously a justification for their exclusion. Appadurai (2006: 59) observes that this creates systemic tensions: 'Numbers have an ambivalent place...the relationship between numbers and categories is today at the heart of some central tensions between liberal social theory and democratic norms.' This is not to negate the importance of statistical inquiry in establishing entitlement, merely to note its place. Bentham's maxim expresses perhaps the most democratic of statistical goals—making possible the greatest good for the greatest number.

Third, statistical systems are used for 'routinizing decisions'—as automatic formulas for distributing aid and for depersonalizing decision-making processes (Starr 1987). 'Unemployment, inflation, growth, poverty, fertility: these objective phenomena, and the statistics that measure them...are inscribed in routinized practices that, by providing a stable and widely accepted language to give voice to the debate, help establish the reality of the picture defined.' (Desrosières 1998: 1) Set in place such systems take on a life of their own—bureaucracy is almost defined by their application. Designed to check the abuse of power, the systematization of demographic information can increase the potential for a failure to consider extenuating circumstances, as evidenced by the deportation of 'illegal' parents with American-born children. Although it is a study unto itself if statistical representation is dehumanizing, the creation of routine or the routinizing of decision-making is fundamentally linked to pre-established social norms. Circumstantial evidence might hold in a court of law deliberating on the intricacies of behavior or fall upon a kind ear, but in societies increasingly subject to standardization those falling outside codified parameters may slip through the cracks in more ways than one. People are not just cogs in the machine, although unauthorized migrants more arguably so, and Orwellian 'fantasies' are not so far from the possible in a society is organized via its information collection systems.

Geography—or more accurately the population-territory matrix—is also problematic and central to demographic collection. An example is debate over the districting of de facto census counts that allocate congressional representatives (Branigin 1998). The *San Jose Mercury News* (Weigant 2007) noted, 'With

the nation's population of unauthorized immigrants growing by about 500,000 a year...illegal immigration is concentrating the power of voters in states such as California, Texas and Arizona, which have more seats in Congress per legal resident than many states where the number of illegal immigrants is much smaller.' A Phoenix paper argued, 'Of course, we all know why everybody wanted illegals to be counted: A larger population would earn the Southwest more federal funds and more seats in Congress.' (Greene 1990) Responding to the question as to whether unauthorized migrants should be counted by the census and in representational allocations⁵, Weigant (2007) notes, 'Maybe we'll wind up counting illegal immigrants as the framers of the Constitution may have intended: as three-fifths of a person. Much like the first time it was written into the Constitution, this would be a compromise almost nobody would like, over how to count the labor class in American society.' Gerrymandering has a long history where legal residents are concerned, should it take legally defined lack of entitlement to quash legal loopholes that maintain inequalities in the distribution of power?

At the center of these ongoing debates sits the press—the 'public sphere' defined by Habermas (1989) which 'mediates between society and state.' 'The Press does many things and serves many functions, but its major role, its irreducible responsibility is to continually recreate a view of reality supportive of existing social and economic class power.' (Parenti 1986: 10 in Chavez 2001). Examining the reporting of estimates is also examines a powerful trope in American and British life: the right of the public to information. This idea is not exclusive to these two countries or their shared ideological history, although the peculiarities of that history argue that interactions between media and polity are more widely recognized as rights than in other contexts. In the United States, the First Amendment of the Constitution is significant of the equation of freedom of expression to general liberty and quality of life; in the UK, as Thomas Carlyle (1901) described, the media has long been an anointed power. It is also more suspect, given that the BBC is an arm of government as well as a significant force of cultural currency.

Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important than they all. It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact...Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making, in all acts of authority. It matters not what rank he has, what revenues or garnitures: the requisite thing is that he have a tongue which others will listen to; this and nothing more is requisite.

Statistics have become as powerful a rhetorical tool as logic and as important a weapon as wit in the press, in politics and at the backyard barbeque alike—'by virtue of its objects, nomenclatures, graphs, and models, a conventional language of reference.' (Desrosières 1998: 337)

⁵ Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment states: 'Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed.'

Numbers as frames

In his study on immigration discourse through U.S. magazine covers, Chavez (2001: 40) outlines a schema for understanding the communication process through which statistical estimates enter the immigration discourse. Quoting Barthes (1977: 15-6), he notes that ‘messages are formed by a ‘source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception.’” In the case of unauthorized migration statistics, social scientists—through private research organizations or the government—are the source of emission. They plan studies, parse and analyze data, and report findings. They are involved with the specific intentions of the organization through which their information is produced. For example, in the case of the U.S. reports, the Pew Hispanic Center is a non-partisan organization that seeks to report information gleaned from own surveys and census data whereas the Center for Immigration Studies, while also producing and disseminating unauthorized migration estimates (using similar data), actively lobbies on behalf of particular immigration policies. Although more broadly these reports can be seen as the channel of transmission, the statistics within reports—which form the ‘meat’ of this type of production—also transmit information. The public who engages with the estimates—either through the report directly or through the mass media’s digestive system—are the targeted point of reception. However, the apprehension of statistics by the wider public as produced in these reports is generally secondary. That is, the reports are parsed and re-reported by journalists. When information is passed through news wires, often—and particularly in the case of small, local papers—the public are fourth on the list.

This relationship among government, research, media and public has been characterized as agenda setting in regard to the salience with which events or issues arise in public media (McCombs and Shaw 1972). While clearly the government and the media function as two distinct ‘estates,’ a glance at recent electoral politics throws their separation into sharp relief. Scholars have also questioned the extent to which press ownership and media consolidation have made questionable the concept of a ‘free’ press (Starr 2004; Gilens and Hertzmen 2000; Mindich 1998; Snider and Page 1997). Unauthorized migration estimates are used by pundits and politicians alike influence public attitudes about the magnitude and immediacy of social problems. Packaging structure and magnitude in a concise form, statistics are a powerful tool for setting political agendas and framing social issues. By attempting to determine how particular estimates gain traction in the mass media, this study clearly engages with the agenda setting concept. However, although the frequency with which estimates are used reinforce their effect and provide a model for testing the relationship between media salience and public opinion, it is how quantitative information is used to *frame* debate that is my interest here. As McCombs and Shaw note (1972: 177), ‘[The media] are constantly presenting *objects* suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about.’ While the high or low-balling of statistics illuminates the agendas of particular organizations and speaks to its prominence in the media (more equals a bigger problem in this case), how do estimates help construct or problematize unauthorized migration?

In contrast to agenda setting, frames provide a ‘schemata of interpretation’ which enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify and label’ occurrences or information (Goffman 1974: 21; Zhou and Moy

2007). Often the frame is the central organizing principal within a broader discourse or political argument that helps readers/listeners make sense of the events described and to relate them to ongoing issues (Tankard et. al 1991: 3; Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Essentially frames elaborate specific aspects of a perceived reality by making them more salient in a text in an effort to clarify key facts related to the problem; identify underlying forces of the problem; evaluate judgments made of parties implicated in the problem; and recommend treatment, propose solutions or discuss possible results. (Entman 1993; Zhou and Moy 2007) As McCombs et. al argue (1997: 37) 'framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed.' While devices such as 'metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual images, roots, consequences, and appeals to principle' often fulfill these functions (Gamson and Lasch 1983; Tankard 2001), statistical information is increasingly used for such a purpose and alongside 'metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, etc.'—creating a powerful shorthand. Moreover, statistics are not only condensed but opaque—they reveal little of their origins or the often complex methodologies that go into their creation. The use of numbers and quantitative information more generally to convey the import or magnitude of political and social issues corresponds to Gamson's (1992) idea of framing as a 'signature matrix' using condensing signals. In this sense, statistical information—often rendered on top of less abstract geographical information—creates an architecture for opinion.

An important aspect of the framing approach is that it is concerned with ways of thinking rather than necessarily on objects of thought (Weaver 2007). Although their ostensible purpose is to convey the measurement of phenomena, through repeated use social statistics become objects irrespective of whether they are dynamic or static in actuality. In the immigration debate this process is a cause for concern—migration is movement and any estimate produced reflects a moment in time rather than a continuum. The relative paucity of time series data on unauthorized migrants accentuates the 'moment in time' quality of estimates on the subject. This does not necessarily discount the validity of current estimates; it does compel consideration of information aging and of the relationship between information and time. Moreover, the reporting of information alters that information. As in the children's game of Telephone or Chinese Whispers—where each successive participant whispers a phrase to the next—cumulative error strips meaning from information. This process of distortion, frequently summoned to describe gossip, has two parts. The first is in the loss of transparency as numbers become objects in the public discourse. Simply, the process of objectification divests statistics of political purpose, methodological manipulations and context—a source of mystique and power. Numbers, with their concision and veneer of scientific objectivity, communicate with less apparent barrage than their often more florid textual companions. They are powerful as much because they are subtle as because they are factual. They reveal little of what lies behind them to the casual reader.

Second, out of context, the same statistic can be used to support entirely different purposes—a process noted as 'cherry-picking.'⁶ In the case examined here, the estimate of 12 million illegal migrants is used by both expansionist and restrictionist pundits to decry the 'problem' of unauthorized migration. This

⁶ Wayne Cornelius, pers. comm..

indicates consensus around the estimate; it also illustrates the difficulty of attaching meaning to numbers and the use of statistics to problematize social and political issues. Statistics are a mapping process, neither good nor bad, that create a landscape that can be used to a number of different ends. As Price and Tewksbury (1997: 197) suggest framing works by ‘activating certain constructs which then have an increased likelihood of use in evaluations made in response to the message.’ Statistics work as frames in part by establishing relational constructs—which may indeed be factual—between the reader’s perceived reality and an ‘actual’ reality. By nature of the need for a literal frame—rather than merely a rhetorical or metaphoric one—population numbers are generated within geographic boundaries or political boundaries. The ability to mesh statistical and geographic data serves this function well, as the interplay of local and national information on unauthorized immigration suggest. Experience is tantamount and works with framing as Simon and Jerit (2007) note in their study on language and public opinion in the partial birth abortion debate, ‘Media did not fully determine respondents judgments, rather something within the respondents combined with this stimulus to make a determination.’

Iversen (2003: 26) notes that although statistics are presented as the result of ‘pure logic’ and free from ideology, ‘the same data and methods construct two very different realities of the world.’ Likewise the same data can convey contradictory evidence. One example of this comes by way of the U.S. Immigration And Naturalization Service (INS), who must simultaneously use high unauthorized migration estimates in an effort to get more funding (‘We don’t have enough resources to do our job.’) and high apprehension rates to show how effective they are at catching those who try to cross the border, which might limit or stabilized funding.⁷ As frames then, statistics occupy a contradictory position, simultaneously an ‘objectively analyzed’ reality free from ideology and as a tool for propaganda to be distrusted and deconstructed. As Desrosières (1998: 336) concludes in his study on statistical reasoning ,

The political and administrative language of action and social debate either uses or denounces statistics. It derives support from one or another of the scientific rhetorics—principally, realist or relativist—but is distinguished by its normativeness. In its objective version, it takes up the real objects described and analyzed in scientific language and makes the action bear upon them. *We must* have things that hold up well, independently of political interests, in order to be able to act upon them. The language used is pragmatic: means toward and end. In the relativist version , the political language...can be polemical or accusatory. *We must* open up the black boxes to show what they conceal. Statistical production results from power relationships.

It is this dichotomy between the realist and the relativist that operates powerfully in immigration discourse where it is refitted, often taking on the stronger appellations of fact and myth.

I argue that in the public discourse reported estimates become signifiers rather than containers of factual information by virtue of grouping with other issues. For *illegal* immigration, the link to criminality is clearly the strongest, but no less important are ethnicity and class. These relational constructs are where the objectivity for which statistics are prized and the ‘truth’ they convey becomes murky and

⁷ Pers. comm., P. Brownell, 2008.

ideological bias enters the picture. This effort is not intended to identify propagandizing by media interests. Simply, that statistics are constructed as facts—the media and consumers expect their objectivity, whether it exists or not. Although quantitative constructions may be falsifiable by scientific convention, the language with which they are conveyed rarely is. This is to say that the sheen of truth can be lost through context, which is where frames leverage ‘reality’ and personal experience. Numbers need not be correct to infer this ‘logic’ or basis in fact—particularly given the inexactness of ‘guesstimates.’ Rather, the use of an exact figure sends a point about the failure of government policy or the imminence of disaster or the horror of so many lives affected, rather than a desire to be correct. Although the numbers reflect a reality that corresponds to an actual problem, the use of metaphors that convey mass as well as threat (common in discussions of unauthorized migration) are verified by large numbers. Estimates then are both portal and symbol, identifying the magnitude of unauthorized migration and equally its socially unacceptable associates. Moreover, they provide a glimpse at public perspectives—fears and hopes—on the present versus the future with difficult ‘if now, what then’ logic. The politics of these numbers then, by virtue of their framing, is not only allocational but tied to their role as abstracted markers of specific social contexts. They are ready to serve ‘purpose.’

Methodology and data

The paper pursues the systematic and objective analysis of message characteristics on unauthorized migration and the dissemination of official estimates on the subject as its primary course of interest. As a content analysis it focuses on rhetorical analysis, which emphasizes ‘not so much *what* the message says but *how* the message is presented’ and discourse analysis, which ‘engages in characteristics of manifest language and word use, description of topics in media texts, the establishment of central terms, and aims at typifying media representation (e.g. communicator motives, ideology).’ (Neuendorf 2002: 5) It differs from other studies of message content in that it takes as a guide the use of numbers, rather than words, in public discourse. In practice, this means that while a search of documents from select sources containing the words ‘illegal immigration’ or ‘unauthorized migration’ yielded thousands of results over the two year period, only about two thirds of those proved to directly concern unauthorized immigration and fewer still cited figures of any kind. Following this discrimination, but in light of the recurrent themes in the broader volume of texts viewed, the conclusions of the paper can be viewed in two parts—the discrete, which is interested only in the actual mention of particular unauthorized migration statistics (direct dissemination), and the synthetic, which assessed the use of these numbers in the context of the thematic exposition of the topic.

Data for the study are from a variety of sources in the mass media—newspapers, radio, the internet, and a short survey of journalists and demographic professionals working on immigration. Articles culled through a LexisNexis search of select newspapers form the core of the data. In the UK, broadsheet newspapers accessed include *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *The Independent*. These papers are representative of both liberal (*The Guardian*, *The Independent*) and conservative (*The Telegraph*, *The Times*) political views. Searches in tabloids in wide circulation were included for comparison for the overall salience of ‘illegal immigration’ issues. In the United States the search was broader, given that the country is less politically and culturally centralized. Primary focus was placed on

the papers noted as publications of record: the *New York Times* (NYT), the *Washington Post* (WP), the *Los Angeles Times* (LAT), and *USA Today* (USAT). All article searches were made using the LexisNexus engine, with the exception of the *Los Angeles Times* where ProQuest was used. Although similar search terms were used and the operations appear superficially comparable, this discrepancy may have skewed results in an undetermined manner. A more general search was conducted through LexisNexus and the internet for articles from regional and local papers in an effort to gain perspective on how statistics on unauthorized immigrants affect views in smaller communities and those with fewer or newer migrant populations. In both countries popular immigration websites were also a source of data. Search terms included ‘illegal immigrant’, ‘illegal immigration’, ‘undocumented’, and ‘unauthorized’.

Articles cover the two year period surrounding the publication of the reports—in the case of the UK from January 2004 through December 2006; in the United States from January 2005 to December 2007. A simple count of the citations forms the central focus of the study. Articles were scanned for context, offering a perspective on how the estimates were used to frame the debate. Given the association of ‘fact’ accorded statistical information, accuracy was of particular interest (specifically the reporting of high, mid or low estimates and the rounding of figures). In addition to these qualities and given common journalistic practices, the articles were also assessed in light of numeric terminology; relative scale (i.e. balancing the scale of migrants in the community to the national data and impression given by the article through adjectival descriptors like mass, rampant, etc.); human interest (i.e. relating national data to a single person or event and the representativeness of that story); local color (i.e. relating national data to local circumstance); and general politicization. Given the strong focus on ‘illegality’ and its connotation of criminality and the assumption that stories that play on fearful stereotypes generate more interest, many articles fell into an ‘if it bleeds it leads’ discourse. A short, informal survey of demographers, immigration scholars and journalists were conducted. Their contributions shaped both the content and approach of the paper. Interviews were primarily conducted via telephone.

Unauthorized migration estimates in major newspapers: U.S. and UK

This section reports the primary results of the American and British newspapers surveyed.

United States (2005-06)

Unauthorized migration estimates are widely disseminated in the United States, reflecting the Census mandate and giving wide stake in both the validity and accessibility of the information.⁸ Such estimates, particularly on unauthorized migration from Mexico, have a long history; the first detailed report was undertaken by Mexican government researchers from an *encuesta del frontera norte*⁹. This, and other early reports, were designed to set a boundary on what was clearly becoming an situation rife with possibility for politically expedient hyperbole. Initial U.S. estimates (early 1980s) used a Delphi method¹⁰, which asked ‘experts’ how many unauthorized migrants there were in the country.¹¹ The current reports

⁸ Pers. Comm. Emigh, 2008.

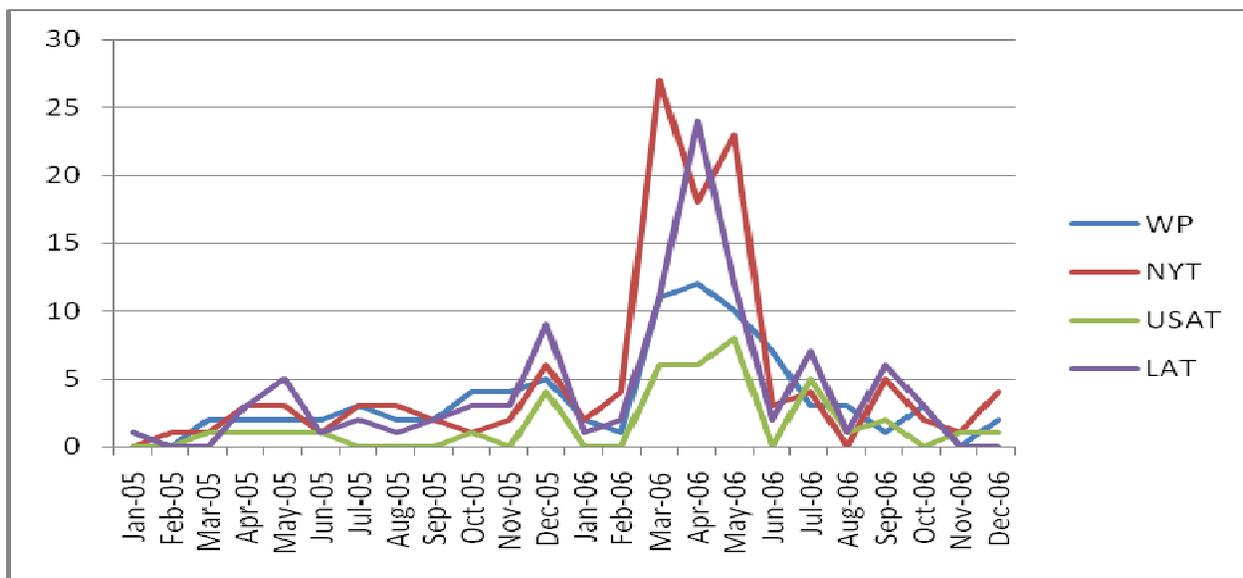
⁹ *La migración de Mexicanos no documentados*, Secretaria del Trabajo y Previsión Social (Garcia y Griego 1980)

¹⁰ Still applied in Switzerland, among other contexts. See Jandel 2004.

¹¹ Pers. comm. L. Lowell, 2008.

were spurred by information briefs created (by Passel) for Tuesday afternoon discussions at The Urban Institute in 2004.¹² A number of the scholars interviewed noted that one of the most important functions of the current estimates was that they provide an upper limit—given their widely acknowledged credibility—to those who would exaggerate figures. For example, a BearStearns (Justich and Ng 2005) report with an estimate of 20 million or one from the right-wing publication *The Social Contract* giving a range of 20 to 38 million and which called the Pew figures ‘a gross understatement.’ (Hull 2007) Recently, the Federation for American Immigration reform (FAIR)¹³ released a new estimate—13 million as of 2007—on its website alongside previous estimates (including those examined here), but refrained from explicitly identifying how it came to its conclusions other than that ‘the U.S. Census Bureau estimated 8.7 million illegal aliens were here in 2000, and immigration officials estimate that the illegal alien population grows by as many as 500,000 every year.’ January 2006 estimates in a DHS report (Hoefer, Rytina, and Cambell 2007) came up with figures roughly the same as the Pew reports, as did a rent CIS study¹⁴, although its conclusions were shaped by its political persuasion.

Figure 1. U.S.—Citation of national unauthorized migration estimate, 2005-06



Clear from the data is that increased use of estimates corresponds both to the release of a report and to immigration events. That is, data spikes sharply in the days surrounding the release of official figures and when immigration becomes newsworthy or is the subject of explicit—rather than general—political debate. The December 2005 rise, for example, reflects debate over the controversial H.R. 4437¹⁵ which passed in the House in that month. In the period from March through May 2006, another round of

¹² Pers. comm.. Passel, 2008.

¹³ http://www.fairus.org/site/PageServer?pagename=iic_immigrationissuecentersb8ca

¹⁴ <http://www.cis.org/articles/2007/back1007.html>

¹⁵ H.R. 4437 [109th]: Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005

controversial immigration legislation before Congress, the release of the 2nd Pew report (Passel 2006), and—most significantly—a nationwide series of rallies staged by unauthorized migrants protesting their status, conspired to raise the use of population estimates as a shorthand for the problem. This is clearest in reporting from Los Angeles, which showed greater focus on the rallies given its significant unauthorized immigrant population, than reporting in other cities.¹⁶In the *Washington Post* political debates unsurprisingly took center stage and immigration issues rose to prominence during a much disputed day labor center in Herndon, Virginia.¹⁷ The *New York Times* tended to use estimates before other papers and for a longer duration. The *Los Angeles Times* exhibited greater peaks and troughs during periods when immigration was central in the public sphere—especially as the Minuteman group rose to prominence along the border (April 2005). The *New York Times* had more sustained, more national and many ‘human interest’ stories about migration outside the Tri-state region. Nearly all coverage of the release of new Pew estimates in non-national papers echoed the news wires.

All scholars interviewed felt that the numbers were of central importance to the U.S. debate, but were concerned that their use did not always express the complexities of the migration experience, especially stock and flow. In an interview, Julia Preston¹⁸, a national correspondent for the *New York Times* on immigration issues, said that ‘the numbers matter a great deal’ in the debate and that she frequently responded to queries from readers about reported estimates and statistics. An example she gave of one such reader question is telling of the most common factual error in the reporting of unauthorized migration evident in the articles reviewed. The reader had questioned her use of the Pew estimate of 12 million—which was called ‘the gold standard’ by several of the scholars interviewed and is the most frequently used estimate—saying that that was ‘just the workforce in California’ and ‘why don’t you update your figure.’ Unsurprisingly, the *New York Times* readers most exercised by the numbers want them increased, yet paradoxically are skeptical that the number of unauthorized farm laborers could be so high. According to Passel, Pew did not feel the need to issue a subsequent report because a review of the data didn’t warrant it. However, as the public is not privy to the intricacies of interactions among population groups at an aggregate level, this seems at times willful obfuscation rather than necessary restraint. To a news-reading public, articles state bald facts—‘illegals outpace legal migration,’ 5000,000 illegal immigrants per year, ‘immigration has slowed’, ‘highest rate in 100 years.’ In the clearest example of misreporting of numbers, the national estimate was sometimes¹⁹ characterized as 12 million workers—only 7.2 million were employed in 2005. In many instances this error seemed as much due to the efforts of reporters to find a more positive way to characterize unauthorized migrants, by using descriptors that shied from the epithet ‘illegal.’

¹⁶ ‘In 2004, about two-fifths (41 percent) of California’s unauthorized population resided in Los Angeles. No other metropolitan area had as many unauthorized immigrants as Los Angeles...and two Southern California metropolitan areas that border Los Angeles—Orange County (220,000) and Riverside—San Bernardino (215,000)—rounded out the top 10.’ (Capps and Fortuny 2007)

¹⁷ Day labor centers and *esquineros* were a common point of contention throughout the country in 2005-06.

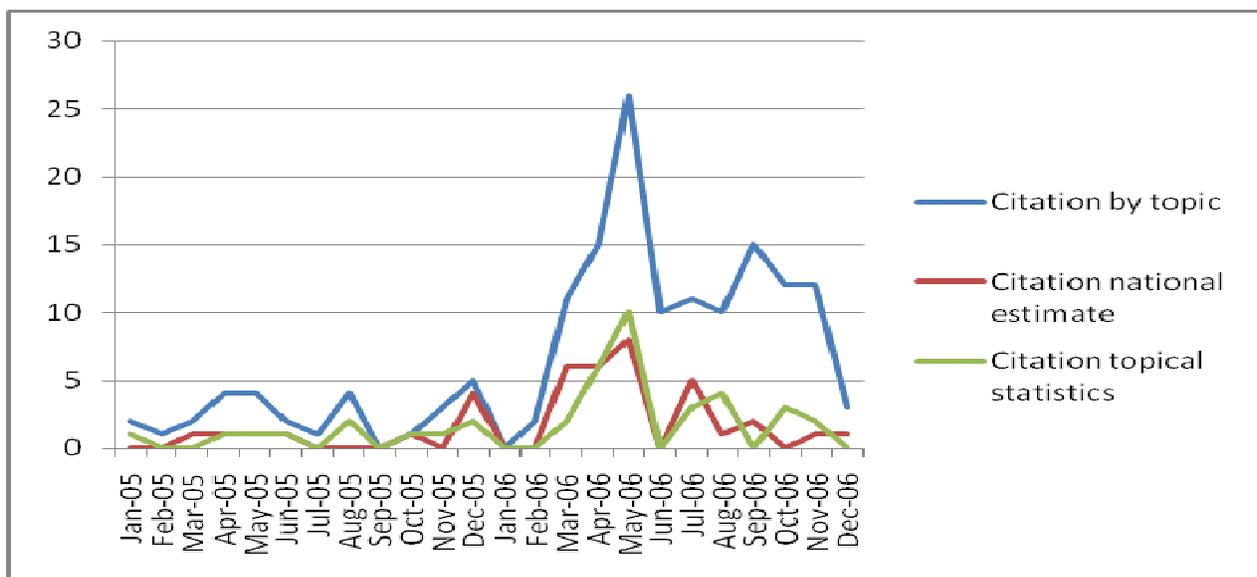
¹⁸ February 25, 2008.

¹⁹ I did not record exactly how many times this occurred but it was frequent enough to be a notable mistake.

‘Local context is everything.’ Preston and all other U.S. scholars interviewed identified that the local context was of utmost importance to the public’s experience and opinions on immigration. Contrary to initial expectations that national estimates would be used to inflate or aggrandize local stories, the opposite appeared to be the case—local stories featured prominently in the ‘national papers’ or ‘papers of record’ surveyed. That is, the presence of the local in the national rather than the national in the local. This is both the result of and illustrative of the effect of the dispersal of immigrants. One important follow-up to this research is a means of assessing how localized or regional immigration issues affect public opinion as a whole. For example, although immigration is a more salient issue in California due to high numbers of immigrants, Californians are also accustomed to immigrants—it is part of the culture. Although bouts of reactionary politics (like Proposition 187 in 1994) have characterized the state’s fitful relationship to its growing immigrant population, the tone of immigration reports from areas newer to the phenomenon like Georgia and the Carolinas indicates greater concern (again, positive and negative) over this change. Given the widely recognized imbalance in who sustains the costs and reaps the benefits of immigration, the federal versus local construction and experience of migration is a minefield and should be a point of focus for policymakers. This is backed up by studies of the dissemination of migrants (Singer 2008) and the interviews with scholars for this paper—sheer numbers are important, relative numbers are becoming even more so. Do five migrants in Iowa count for more than fifty in California in the national debate given their visibility?

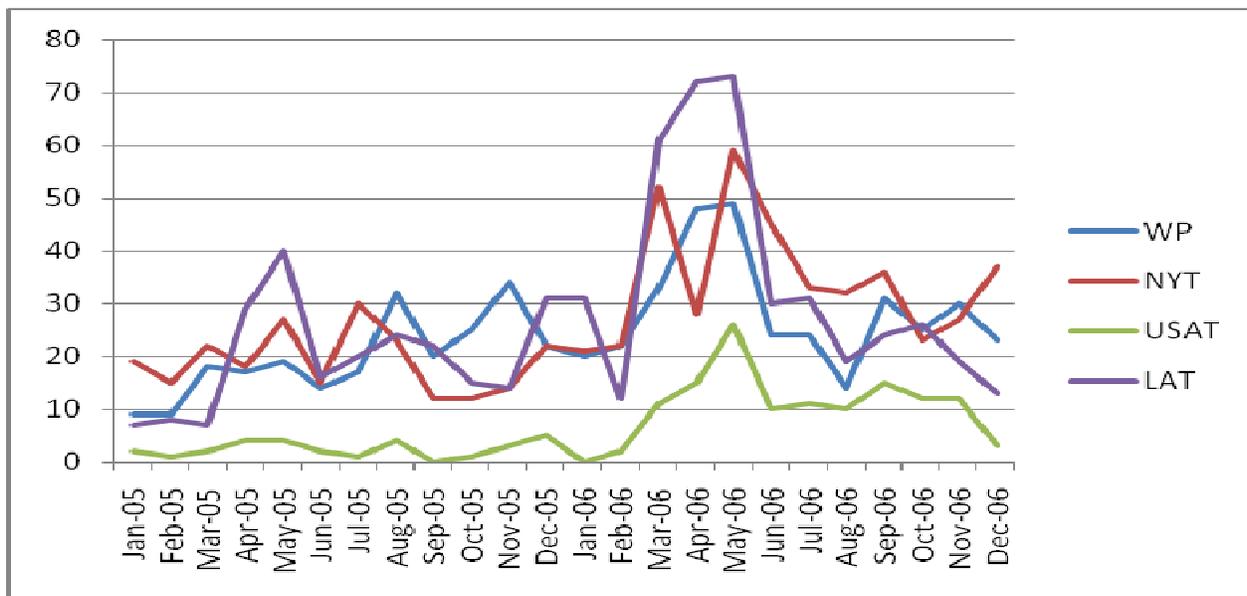
Although USA Today had the highest proportion of articles using quantitative information on immigration, the salience of immigration in the paper was significantly lower than in the three other newspapers surveyed, largely due to its smaller size and ‘national’ focus. Sixty-one percent of all articles in USA Today relating to ‘illegal immigration’ used statistics of some sort, normally in graphical sidebars. The paper’s ability to represent statistics graphically illustrates the importance of accurate imaging of data—and how numbers have become increasingly embedded in images.

Figure 2. U.S.—Use of statistics on unauthorized migration in USA Today, 2005-06



New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg was the most frequent user of a national immigration figure—and statistics in general—in the articles surveyed. This is unsurprising as Bloomberg’s management style has been noted as ‘a corporate executive’s by-the-numbers approach’ in which ‘numbers are the lifeblood of the administration, driv[ing] policy rather than just track[ing] progress.’ (Rutenberg 2005) Illustrating both his views on unauthorized migration and his numbers oriented approach the Mayor offered advice in April 2006, ‘Legalize them and be serious about closing the border... if 3,000 come through one little point...every day and you build a wall so only 10 climb the wall, I would argue that if you get it down to a hundred, if you get it down to a thousand, you'd be successful by that standard.’ (Chan 2006a) Adding a common refrain during a CNN interview, Bloomberg stated: ‘We’re not going to deport 12 million people, so let’s stop this fiction.’ (Chan 2006b) While Bloomberg’s numbers driven approach has merit, scale is of supreme importance—even in a city the size of New York. Simply, with national data the question must be what works locally as well as what works. More recently, Elaine Chen, the Labor Secretary, announced the updated H2A rules, simultaneously suggesting that 70 to 75 percent of the farm labor force is unauthorized—a somewhat ironic failure to address one piece of data with another. Michael Chertoff at the Justice Department was described as ‘blithely’ stating that there are about 12 million unauthorized migrants. Although not untrue the acceptance of the estimates, even as they are agreed upon as a sign of serious malfunction, indicates a level of conditioned political intractability on the issue.²⁰

Figure 3. U.S.—Articles on unauthorized migration by month, 2005-06



In particular, the use of estimates by political figures is telling of both their power and how numbers frame the immigration debate. Although President Bush spoke frequently about ‘undocumented’

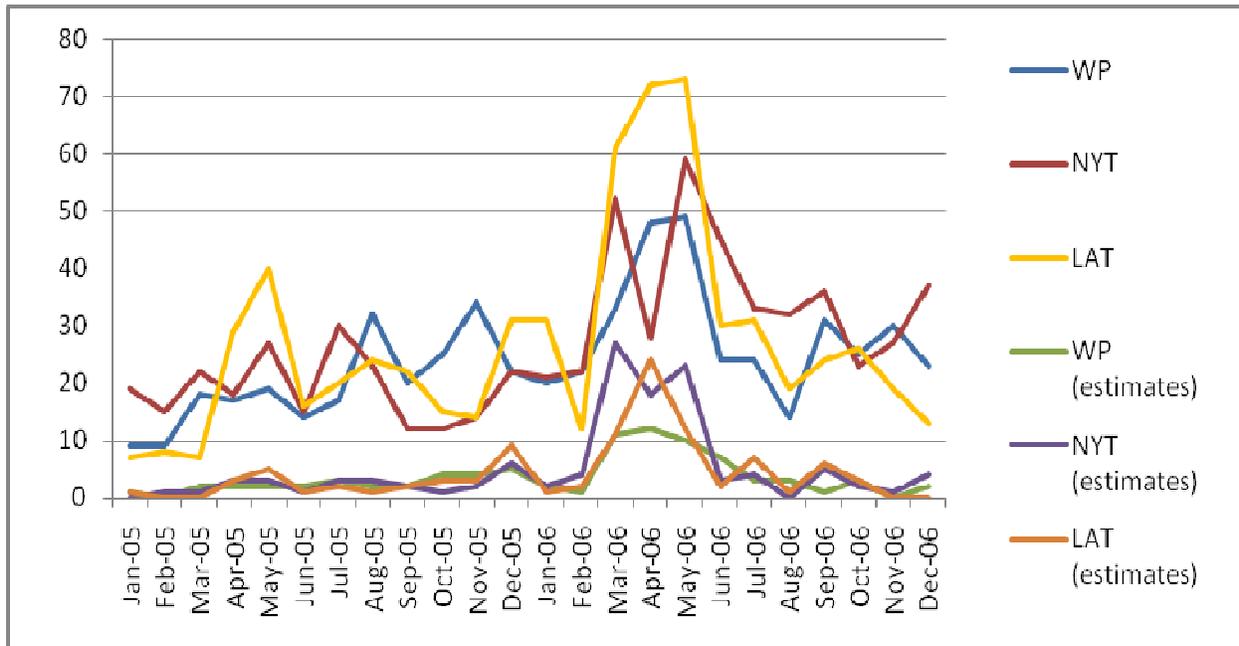
²⁰ Pers. Comm., J. Preston, 2008. See http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/testimony/testimony_1204746985090.shtm

immigration throughout 2005 and 2006, in no instance within the several thousand articles surveyed did he use a more specific quantitative referent than 'millions' for this population. In fact, no political figures in the executive branch quoted the estimates within this data set. However, members of Congress and political figures used the 12 million estimate to press home the gravity—and often the intractability—of the issue, as the following representative quotes illustrate:

- Rep. Steve King (R-IA): 'It is one thing to see an abstract number of 12 million illegal immigrants. It is another thing to see more than a million marching through the streets demanding benefits as if it were a birthright. I think people resent that.' (Kirkpatrick 2006)
- Sen. John McCain (R-AZ): 'This is one of the greatest challenges we face in our time, securing our borders, taking 11 million people out of the shadows who are exploited every day, fulfilling the job requirements we all know are necessary to ensure the economic future.' (Swarns 2006)
- Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY): '...I think it really begs the question, because what we're looking at here is 12 to 14 million people. They live in our neighborhoods. They take care of our elderly parents. They probably made the beds in the hotels that some of us stayed in last night. They are embedded in our society.' (NPR 2007)
- Rep. James Sensenbrenner (R-WI): 'Immigrants are not terrorists, except a few of them.' (Kirkpatrick 2005)²¹
- Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.) : 'You don't filibuster away the problem of 11 million undocumented workers. You don't filibuster away the idea that our borders are broken and our legal system's a failure on immigration.'
- Rep. Tom Price (R-GA) : 'Everybody is frankly astounded at the numbers of individuals who are willing to stand up and say they are here illegally. If nothing else can give a picture of why we need to act rapidly, it's this.'
- Luis Ernesto Derbez, Mexican foreign minister: 'There are 12 million Mexicans on the other side, 12 million people who live every day in anguish about the need for a reform to let them live peacefully.' (Reuters 2006)

²¹ The sentence finished: 'The legislation that was introduced today is designed to get the bad apples out of the barrel before the barrel was spoiled.'

Figure 4. U.S.—Estimates in topical reporting (Figures 2 and 3 compared)



Not everyone is dismayed at the high numbers revealed by the estimates, as an executive with Jefferies & Company, the brokerage firm, noted: ‘What’s great about the [immigrant] detention business is not that it’s a brand-new channel of demand, but that it is growing and significant.’ (Kolodner 2006) Those with anti-(illegal) immigration agendas tended more toward the use of numerical adjectives or inundating metaphors, like waves, invasions, floods or those implying something natural and ceaseless like tides. These headlines are illustrative: ‘The Illegal-Alien Crime Wave’ (McDonald 2004), ‘A Flood of Bad Immigration Numbers’ (Griswold 2006), ‘Wave of illegal immigrants peaks’ (AP 2004), ‘EU Grapples with Flood of Illegal Immigrants’ (NPR 2006). Negative characterizations were more common than those with a positive slant. One exception, which seemed to capture a missing part of the story was the phrase ‘12 million life stories.’ (NYT) Interestingly, it is the centrist debate that is more focused on ‘accurate’ estimates—the far right, one of the most vocal factions in the debate, seems to prefer the nonspecific ‘millions’ as if the number were all the time swelling with invading hordes. Graphs on anti-illegal immigration websites like www.illegalaliens.us showed insurmountable peaks in their data sections in the colors of the Mexican flag, in case anyone was confused.

Evidencing how words become vogue and cross ‘disciplines,’ the word surge began to appear more frequently after its increased use in relation to the policy in Iraq (Dinan 2006). Do migrants surge across the border in the same way that the military surge is intended to stop terrorist militias in Iraq? An oft cited Time magazine article, that purported to change the poor and biased reporting of illegal immigration (from heart felt stories about workers and families to the chaotic frontier criss-crossed by criminals and terrorists), used such language and self-calculated 3 million illegal immigrants entering in 2004 alone: ‘The influx is so great, the invaders seemingly trip over one another...’ No mention was made that apprehension statistics are notoriously poor and full of multiple counts of the same people.

And in case the 3 million estimate was unclear, authors Bartlett and Steele (2004) offered clarification—‘enough [illegal aliens] to fill 22,000 Boeing 737-700 airliners, or 60 flights every day for a year.’ Jim Gilchrist, a founder of the Minutemen Project took another tack : ‘When the rule of law is dictated by a mob of illegal aliens taking to the streets, especially under a foreign flag, then that means the nation is not governed by a rule of law—it is a mobocracy.’ (Archibold 2006) For the most part official figures are used in tandem with adjectival expressions of quantity—expressions, like those listed above, which carry more information and implication as to what those numbers mean than do ‘exact’ figures. Why should official counts of this population—430,000 or 11,600,000—then be of greater relevance to the general public than concepts like *some*, *many*, *too many* or *a lot* or the more common and less benign *mass*, *rampant*, *flood*?

United Kingdom (2004-05)

Unsurprisingly, given that the UK’s first official unauthorized migration estimate was released in 2005, there has been limited use of estimates in the British media although asylum figures have been controversial for a decade. Nonetheless, their release was ‘a significant moment in the debate.’²² frequently offered as a policy object in the phrase ‘illegal immigration, benefits fraud, crime and terrorism’ unauthorized migration does not figure as an overt concern of the media or, one would suspect, the populace. Immigration issues, even when illegality is a factor, have tended to focus on the more ‘traditionally’ European issue of asylum seekers. The Polish plumber²³ is a stock figure of the British tabloids, yet only events like the drowning of Chinese cocklepickers in Cumbria brought attention to unauthorized migrants less visible in the system. Overall population levels were a focus, particularly in the conservative papers. The 2005 report followed the publication of a document the previous year of the same name (Pinkerton et. al 2004) that assessed methodologies for estimating the resident unauthorized population in the UK but offered no population count. That report had concluded that residual methods—like those used in the estimations of the unauthorized migrant population in the United States—were most appropriate given the quality and type of data available to UK researchers. It also made clear the usual reservations that accompany official reporting of statistics on unauthorized migrants, as well as other sensitive political topics calling the process ‘hypothetical calculations.’

Indeed earlier numbers issued by MigrationWatch in 2002 ‘set off an immigration timebomb’ according to *The Telegraph*:

He [Andrew Green, director of MigrationWatch] suspects the Home Office set out to discredit his research...while his statistics were prominently reported by The Telegraph and the Daily Mail, they were initially ignored by Left- leaning newspapers. The following day, however, the Independent wrote a sniffy article about Sir Andrew’s group that purported to tell ‘the truth’ about the immigration figures. The Guardian followed up by calling Migration Watch ‘a swamp of muddled thinking’. Both newspapers conceded that accurate forecasting was virtually

²² Pers. comm. A.Geddes, 2008.

²³ The 2004 EU accession process made it legal for Poles and other eastern Europeans to work in Britain.

impossible because of poor record-keeping and the unknown levels of clandestine entry, accepting the projections offered by the government's actuary department, whose figures in the past have been woefully understated.²⁴ Inevitably, the story became trapped in an unsavoury mire of political innuendo: those who accepted the figures were, by extension, closet racists. (Johnston 2002)

While this article reflects *The Telegraph's* anti-immigration bias it also indicates a critical difference between the American and British newspaper reporting reviewed. In UK papers the argument about estimates and reporting on migration seems as much a debate between liberal and conservative media as between the Labour or Tory parties. Conservatives, however, have stuck to a line that it is unprecedented migration and the government's overwhelming desire to boost the labor market at the expense of quality of life, rather than migrants per se that is at question. Although part of the dialogue in the United States—particularly on talk radio, where the liberal-elite bias has become a call to arms for conservatives—articles surveyed for this paper showed more consensus than dissent in reporting on immigration. An exception are internet sites of organizations devoted to anti-illegal immigration advocacy. Numbers were general held up as a 'shocking indictment' of Labor's policy, substantiated by several political figures who claimed they 'haven't a clue' how many unauthorized migrants were in the country.

Although the government did not release a report until 2005, based on the methodologies issued in the 2004 paper, David Leppard of *The Times* issued his own numbers after an purportedly off the record interview with Professor John Salt, a demographer at the Migration Research Unit at the University College London. He called his number 'the Salt figure' although it was merely the author's suggested methodology rather than his calculations that were on offer.²⁵ Indeed, Salt stated that he had been asked to do the investigation in 2003 and that it was shelved until swiftly published in 2004—'policy based evidence making.' He also noted that the press seemed more concerned with their editorial line than the truth, calling much of the report 'debate by anecdote rather than analysis.'²⁶ Given that no numbers had previously been released and that immigration had been a consistent topic in the news, particularly in early 2004 when then immigration minister Beverly Hughes resigned over allegations of 'visa fixing' for Romanian nationals—a scandal that reached the highest echelons of government as Tony Blair promised to take 'close interest' about immigration (Jones 2004; Tempest and Oliver 2004). Indeed, 'dodgy' visa regimes—false school as well as government corruption and exploitative gangmasters—are a consistent feature of UK coverage.

- Prime Minister Tony Blair (April 2005): 'Impossible...I don't think there's any point in speculating on the number of illegal migrants.'

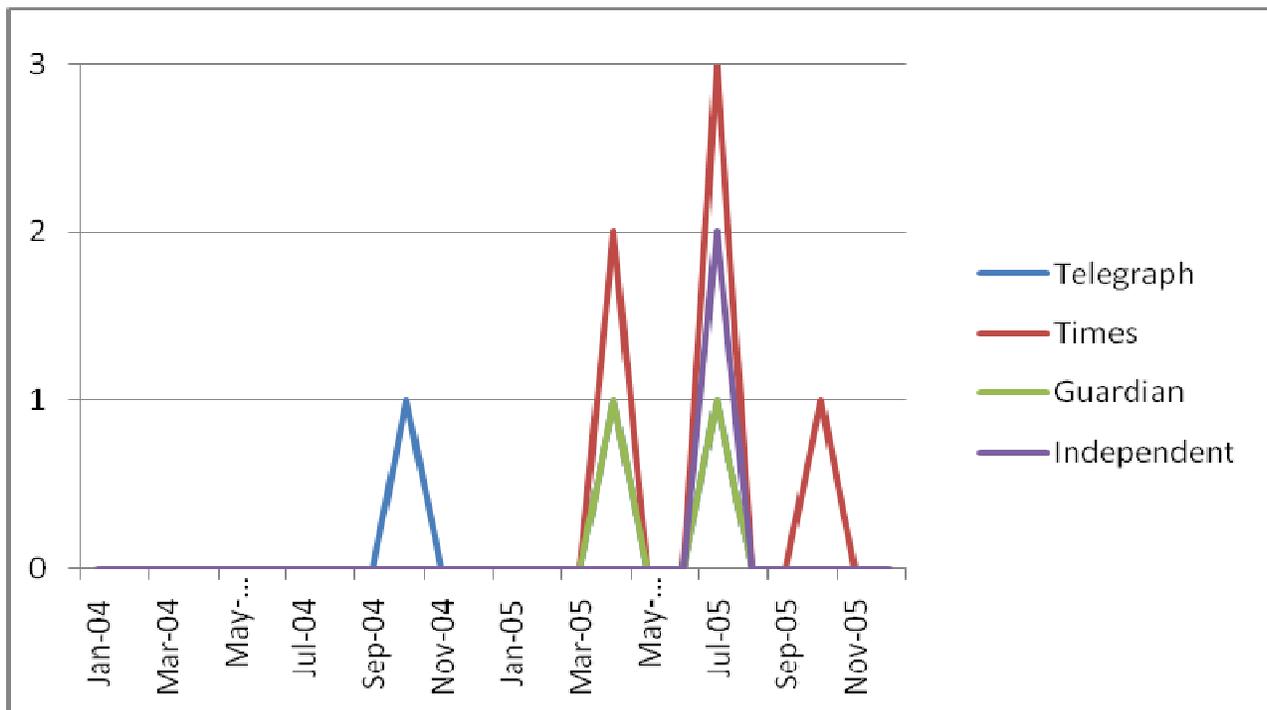
²⁴ Migration Watch's analysis was produced by Dr David Coleman. David Coleman was interviewed for this paper.

²⁵ Pers. comm. J. Salt, 2008.

²⁶ Ibid.

- Home secretary Charles Clarke (April 2005): ‘There are no official estimates...and my estimates would be highly speculative.’
- Des Browne, former immigration minister (April 2005): ‘We know that the 500,000 figure is likely to be grossly inaccurate.’
- David Davis, shadow home secretary (July 2005): ‘I find it impossible to believe that having asked for it [estimate] in March 2004, the prime minister had still not received it at the time of the general election, one year later.’
- ‘Professor John Salt...says the Sunday Times figures are a distortion of his work...he told the Guardian's Alan Travis: ‘Neither I nor anyone else knows the size of the illegal population in the UK ... Nor is there any effective methodology for producing one.’ (April 2005)
- Professor John Salt, UCL : ‘Talking numbers ‘becomes a political football.’
- Ann Singleton (migration researcher, University of Bristol): ‘By definition, official statistics do not capture people who are not meant to be here. It is not a science; it's an art to try to come up with something meaningful.’ (April 2005)

Figure 4. UK—Citation of national unauthorized migration estimate, 2004-05

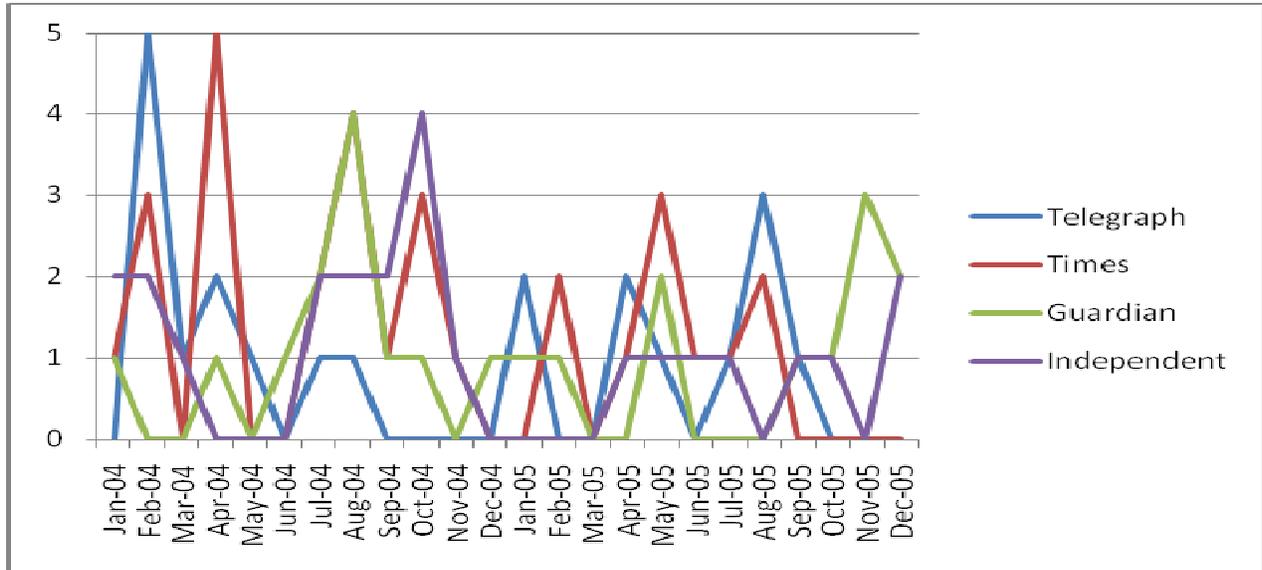


Given that both the issues and the estimates—outside of their role as a symbol of government inefficiency and repression of information—articles from 2004-05 illustrate the contention over the release of estimates and the issues that surrounded heightened interest in unauthorized migration in

the UK press. The move to introduce ID cards dominate the debate as does a concern over organized crime, particularly from Eastern Europe. The UK papers also illustrated the extensive use of figures in sidebars, particularly in articles viewed over the internet. The UK newspapers also showed a much greater interest in international immigration, reporting widely on France, Spain, Poland and Italy—all of whom affect the UK—and also the United States. Reporting of the US focused almost exclusively on the number of unauthorized migrants and the ‘wild west’ of the border. ‘America's problem is more than four times as serious. Anywhere from half a million to a million people - no one knows for sure - cross the American border illegally . . . sorry, without permission every year. During the six weeks it took us to collect all those documents, at least 50,000 Mexicans waded the Rio Grande.’ (Wintour 2005)

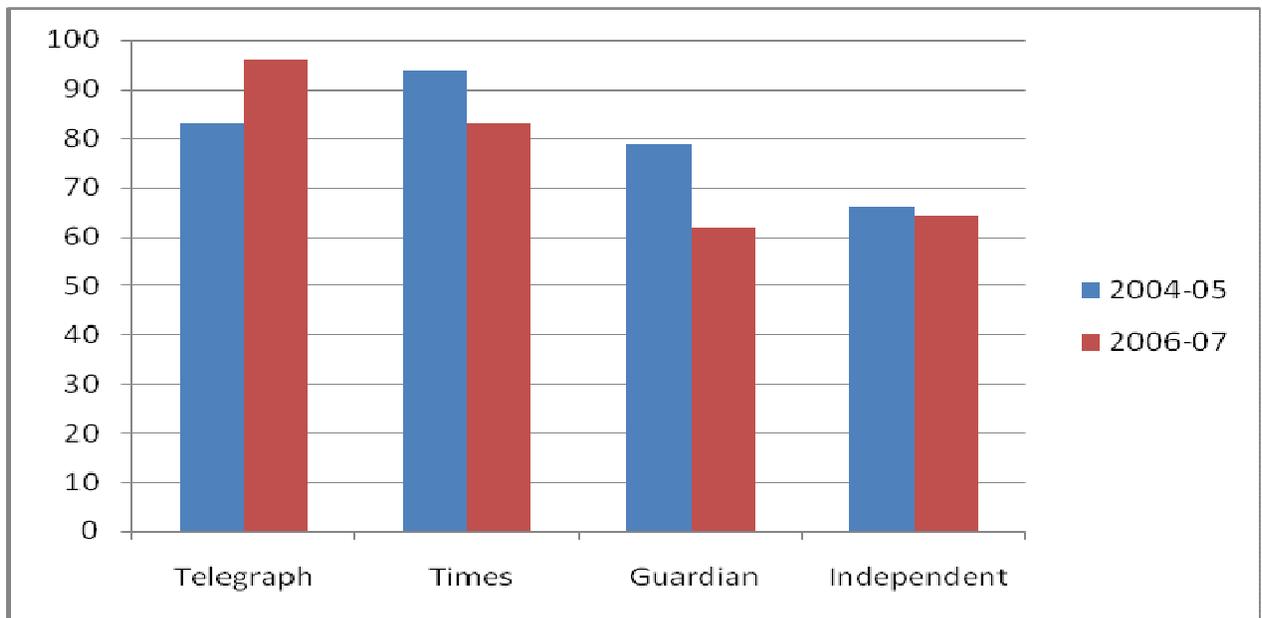
- ‘...combat **terrorism, organized crime**, illegal immigration and **welfare fraud**...’ (2004-05)
- ‘It [the figure] is a useful contribution to the debate and it underlines the need for a robust **ID card scheme** which will...help tackle illegal working and immigration.’ (2005)
- ‘Mr. Blair announced an inquiry into **asylum statistics** to restore **public faith** and denied claims of a secret deal to admit Romanian workers.’ (2004)
- ‘A very significant proportion of **gangmasters** break the law...clearly some organisations that run people-trafficking are very evident in these areas.’ (2005)
- ‘The speed and **scale of migration** combined with the shortcomings of **official population figures** is placing pressure on funding for services...’ (2007)
- ‘The Press Complaints Commission is to crack down on the use of the term illegal asylum seeker by newspapers after research revealed its continued usage.’ (December 2004)
- ‘The paper [released by the Home Office mapping out immigration strategy] warns of the risk that the government's message is "consistently undermined by a series of population and migration publications and revisions" from the Office for National Statistics and proposes "rationalising" these publications. It acknowledges, however, that "the argument won't be won on numbers". There must be a consistent message and "our solution is to take a marketing approach".’ (Macleod 2004)

Figure 5. UK— Unauthorized migration coverage, 2004-05



The deaths of unauthorized Chinese workers picking cockles in Morecambe Bay and the subsequent trial also increased immigration reporting. European issues were of significant concern and numbers of migrants in Britain were often held up against those in neighboring countries. Throughout the time period examined migration rose significantly in Spain and Italy and off-shore detention centers (particularly in Africa were discussed as part of EU policy.

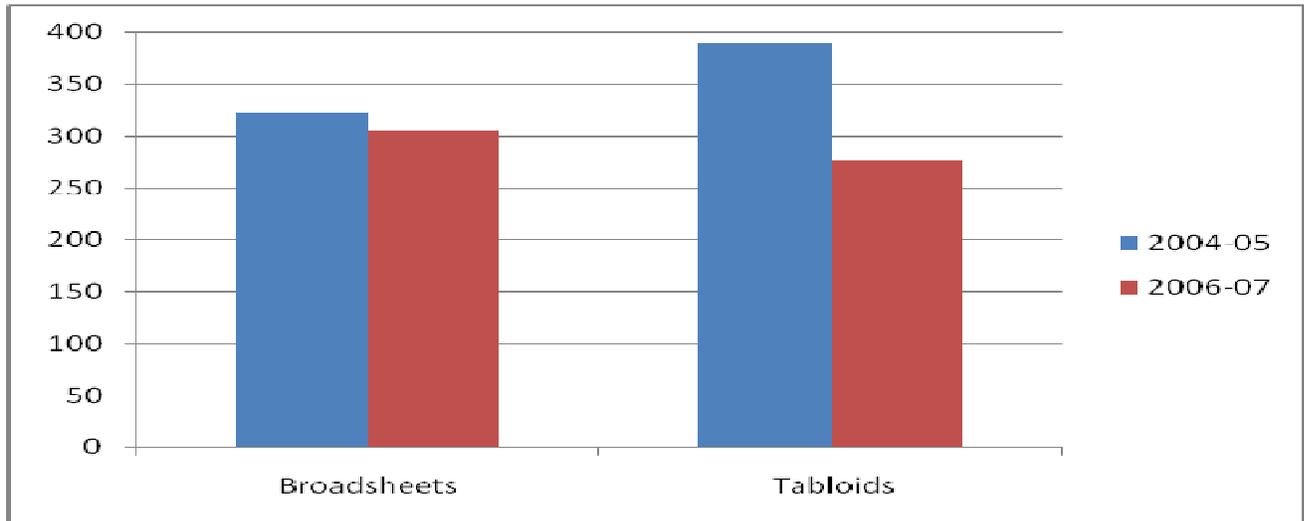
Figure 6. UK—Articles on unauthorized migration coverage, 2004-05 and 2006-07 compared



The points raised by researchers illustrate the extent to which the drama of the asylum process in the 1990s shaped subsequent debate about migration in the UK, particularly their characterization as economic migrants. A tendency to conflate across migration issue was noted by Geddes, who pointed to the phrase ‘illegal asylum seeker.’ Now, as then, the government’s ability to deal with migration has undergone a discursive shift with the term ‘managed migration’ used to describe policy into the millenium. Salt noted that the lack of information on unauthorized migrants is percieved as incompetence on the part of the government as well as the fact that at the center of the heated debate is an unknown figure and that you need a reliable starting point for analysis.²⁷

Given the widespread readership of tabloid newspapers in the UK, I ran a simple subject oriented search to determine the salience of the issue in broadsheet versus tabloid papers. My assumption was that there would be more extensive coverage of ‘illegal immigration’ in tabloid newspapers than broadsheets based on the volatile debate on the subject. Although this was the case during the 2004-05 period—when several immigration related scandals and incidents (particularly over ganagmasters)—the issue decreased in salience in the following two year period in all newspapers, with the exception of *The Telegraph*. A conservative paper, *The Telegraph* regularly publishes articles/editorials by Sir Andrew Green among others, who campaigns on behalf of MigrationWatch UK, which lobbies for lowering immigration numbers. Their focus is generally on high levels or ‘mass’ legal immigration, population increase generally and crowding, rather than specifically on unauthorized migrants; however, the think tank has issued its own reports predicting a net annual immigration to Britain over the next two decades prior to Home Office reports on the subject. MigrationWatch was a vocal critic of the Labour government during the ‘numbers’ scandal in 2005.

Figure 6 UK—Unauthorized migration in broadsheets and tabloids compared, 2004-05 and 2006-07



²⁷ Pers. comm.. J. Salt and A. Geddes, 2008.

Accounts and accountability

Estimates of the unauthorized population frame the migration debate in two principal ways, as the title to this section alludes. First, estimates are used to keep accounts. Newspaper articles invariably discuss unauthorized migration numbers in relation to some other population, be it a town, state, school children or number of border patrol agents. Migration is clearly framed as a zero sum game by all participants, although more so by the public than elites. Second, estimates are used to measure the success of explicit immigration policies or as indicators that implicit policy or other social or economic forces are in fact propelling the phenomenon. They are a tool for accountability for partisan pundits, advocacy groups and citizens. Outside of framing, this analysis yields several tentative conclusions. Tentative because this is a brief exercise—illustrating a pattern or describing in greater detail how numbers are used to frame immigration debates would require both a more thorough examination of texts and a review spanning a longer time period. These limitations aside, reviewed articles and interviews reveal that: 1) the numbers do matter and not just as a factor in the distribution of social resources ; 2) the most potent and problematic aspect of estimates in the immigration discourse is their use as multipliers *in tandem* with the strong stereotypes and pejorative descriptors often used to characterize this population; 3) numbers are used equally on both side of the debate, framing the subject in expected ways; 4) election cycles—where candidates substantiated opinions on immigration issues with statistics or statistical information was reported alongside campaign stances or commentary, immigration ‘events’ and report releases account for the majority of citations; 5) using inexact numbers stood out in contrast to the use of ‘exact’ estimates; 6) data are shorthand and imagistic language often hide ‘numbers.’

As in Simon and Jerit’s study (2007) this analysis reveals the media to be relatively faithful transmitters of research data, although high estimates were more frequently used than lower range estimates. The articles reviewed reveal that strong assumptions made about a part of this population are usually generalized to the whole, but that these estimates were positive or pro-immigrant—generally focusing on unauthorized migrants as ordinary, hardworking people with good intentions and families—as well as negative. Good intentions aside, bias was exacerbated by the reporting of aspects of illegal immigration which concerned the public rather than those that reflected the statistical diversity. A useful exercise who be to assess proportions of reporting against immigration demographics. This is most evident in the reporting in the United States, which focuses on Latinos and the U.S.-Mexico boundary and the Latino population to the exclusion of other aspects of migration. Similarly, in the UK, specific populations—Asians and Eastern Europeans—bear the brunt of a polarized immigration debate, regardless of legality. Also evident were the use of what Lakoff (1987) calls metonymic modeling, where a member or subcategory stands for a whole or synecdoche, where a part of something—wetback, bracero—signifies the whole. Further to this would be to assess the language of immigration in light of Lakoff’s (2001; 1987) research into metaphor and cognitive modeling. The paper indicates that the immigration discourse has potentially specific grammatical structures and categorization processes in which statistics play a role.

Several significant events highlighted immigration or were the direct result of it in the period surrounding the release of the reports in both countries. In the United States the evident failure of immigration reform seemed to totally deflate discussion, despite the consciousness raising attained through the rallies. Had no estimates been released, as in the UK, then clearly the actual magnitude of this population would figure less strongly in the discourse, although a presumed magnitude—either of greater or lesser proportion depending on public sentiment and most likely phrased relatively, eg. too many, enough, etc.—might enter the discussion. In the United States, given that a public estimates have long been in circulation, the question is whether the actual magnitude has any bearing on how often it is used. The articles reviewed here suggest that this is the case and that estimates in conjunction with descriptors stick in the public memory. Lowell noted that while for every ‘Hazelton,’ however, there is a corollary, indicating that some level of balance is struck in the collective mind.²⁸ Although I did not assess the more recent period, casual observation would suggest that following the increased use of estimates during the immigration rallies of May 2006 public awareness of these estimates and incumbent information grew. How long does it take for estimates to reach saturation? If the public grows weary or distrustful of numbers—as the questions asked of the *New York Times* indicate—do the numbers hamper debate even as they initially seemed to bring consensus?

Based on the data surveyed, the use of statistics to describe social issues is more common in the United States than in Britain. This reflects two things. First, and significantly, the number of unauthorized migrants in the United States is relatively larger, more problematic and more contentious. Although in both countries illegal migrants are scapegoats for immigration issues and larger social and economic woes, in the UK concern is more roundly centered on migration in general and on population growth than merely on the unauthorized population. Estimates are not only reflections of social reality however they are markers of achievement. They indicate dislocations—both explicit and implicit—in policy and/or system function. Second, the dissemination of census information is more widespread in the United States, whose size and diversity have led to an almost national obsession with the reporting of minutia on every conceivable cleavage of ethnicity, gender, status (marital, legal), and age. It is a parsed society and a society of parts. Given the salience of immigration reporting—particularly in the United States—that the numbers are not used more widely is somewhat surprising. However, many articles used quantitative information, although not necessarily a national estimate, to bolster more intimate portraits or illustrate broader trends. This was particularly clear in reporting of the dissemination of unauthorized migrants across the United States, with migration numbers reported in relation to the experience of a town or state less familiar with migrants rather than typical receiving areas like California. In line with the conclusions of Dunaway et. al (2007), immigration has greater salience in border states (Texas, Arizona and California)—due to both the higher number of immigrants and a more politically charged atmosphere around both the border and the distribution and use of resources.

²⁸ Hazelton, PN passed an ordinance in August 2006 proposing have unauthorized migrants prove their residence before renting and by targeting landlords and employers. http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-08-14-towns-immigration_x.htm

In the UK unauthorized migration reflects and is used to substantiate general concern over population growth and the perceived inability of the government to 'do its job.' Accountability was the primary factor bring unauthorized migration estimates to light in Britain—reported as an evident lack of trust between public and government. The press acted as intermediary for this process, although as noted substantial ideological in-fighting was evident and often obscured the line between the 'estates.' Use of figures outside of the brouhaha generated by the government's denial of and then hasty, but nonetheless tardy, release of illegal immigration figures is inconsequential. Illegal immigration is not the central issue facing policymakers nor is it the center of the capricious public eye. Rather, government failure to control the borders is tacked up against far more vehemently expressed concerns about immigration numbers—and population sustainability ratios—in general. On the one hand, this may be because the numbers were poor. Not only did articles widely tout 'the figure' as a guesstimate, follow-up reports giving more detailed explanations of the methodology and results of estimation efforts noted that even this guesstimate was based on relatively unreliable data from the 2001 Census and the Passenger Survey. Lowell noted that many of the concepts used to define migration were 'slippery' and that scholars had a responsibility to be precise; Singer that the creation of estimates was part of a process of education, of journalists as well as public.²⁹ Scholars in both the UK and the U.S. rued the 'cherry picking' of data by politicians and the media, but saw it as part of the game. They also noted the difficulty faced by journalists who needed sound bytes that often left out crucial context.

A 2005 BBC election watch report illustrates this, taking a statement by then shadow home secretary David Davis— 'There are 250,000 failed asylum seekers in this country who should have been returned to their home country and they haven't been. The Home Office has calculated there are around 500,000 illegal immigrants living in Britain. Why has Mr Blair's government said that an estimate does not exist, when we now know that it does?'—and applying known data , including discussion of the methodology in the 2004 Home Office report. Their conclusion: 'There are no reliable figures on the number failed asylum seekers in the UK. In the absence of any official figures, it is reasonable for the Conservatives to subtract the number of removed asylum seekers from the number of asylum seekers to produce an estimate of 250,000. Leading academics in the field say they have not found a system they would presently trust to come up with a figure for illegal immigration to the UK or for that matter elsewhere.' The result, public trust over immigration is poor; unauthorized migrants are scapegoats for public dissatisfaction with the government. Coleman noted the relationship between the government and the BBC to this end, again calling into question media impartiality.

In the United States, estimates were also used to hold the government or business or migrants accountable. In a *San Francisco Chronicle* article, Passel stated that the labor force figures indicated 'the dependence of the U.S. economy on illegal immigration,' 'We've got some occupations where 25 percent of the people in them are unauthorized.' (Hendricks 2006b) John Gay (spokesman, National Restaurant Association) iterated: 'Is it any surprise that we have 12 million undocumented? The legal channels don't exist for the economy to get the workers it needs.' (Kalita 2006) Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA):

²⁹ Pers. comm. L. Lowell and A. Singer, 2008.

'These numbers are the result of the government not being serious about stopping illegal immigration.' (Bunis 2006a) U.S. criticism focused primarily on the border and data 'invigorates supporters, foes' (Bunis 2006b) as a *San Francisco Chronicle* headline put it. Moreover, 'As many as one-third of those 11 million people did not walk across the border illegally, instead of entering the country on tourist, student or work visas and simply staying after the visas expired.' (Hendricks 2006a) Myth-busting is another popular trope and standard fare journalism. A *Dallas Morning News* article—with the unsurprising title of 'Illegal workers often in low paying jobs, study finds'—noted, 'The data do pierce the myth that illegal immigrants are overwhelmingly men coming alone in search of jobs. Focus in the media on the family aspects of both transit and settlement increased over the two year period studied. (Mittelstadt 2006)

The rise in the use of statistics inside a more general increase in immigration reporting is to be expected. Given the increasing use of statistical information overall, more articles on immigration quite naturally leads to more citations of estimates. The citation of national statistics in reporting local news—like the struggles over day labor centers in Virginia or the seemingly ever present battles over immigration and public resources in Orange County, CA—was minimal. Stories on the border were more likely to use statistics than those reporting internal immigration issues; however, reporting of apprehension numbers and overall estimates of the unauthorized population was generally matched by numbers of agents deployed in a specific time or place and descriptions of surveillance equipment or other technology. This is the most overt use of the ledger or accounting framework within which unauthorized migration is often presented. That is, descriptions of the chaotic border and the number of apprehensions are balanced by the increased deployment of deterrent measures as if to say, 'Yes, it's the out of control, but we've got it under control or at least we are spending money to control it.' However, when a figure comes out of the mouth of a government representative it receives the imprimatur of truth to unsavvy observers. James Gimpel, co-author of *Congressional Politics of Immigration Reform* said debate over estimates is unsurprising. 'Those favoring greater border enforcement will make their case using larger numbers, and those who favor leniency will use smaller numbers. There is certainly nothing new about that in the Washington interest-group community.' (Moscoso 2007)

The misreporting of data on everything from cancer rates to global warming illustrates this, as does one author's (Best 2001) favorite worst social statistic ever, 'Every year since 1950, the number of American children gunned down has doubled' or (by 1995 when the offending statistic was published) some 35 trillion children. Because the information presented in the articles reviewed is relatively straightforward—that is, a singular estimate of a population—there is less chance of error. Although I found no egregious misreporting of estimates from the reports (the Pew reports, in particular, are quite detailed and I did not look specifically at data reporting other than total population estimates), a common error and one that could have a significant impact on public perception of the unauthorized population is the reporting of 11 to 12 million 'illegal' workers. This error stems in part on the failure to agree upon a terminology for this population. In an effort to not use pejorative terms like aliens, reporters turn to what seem like less political choices like residents (correct) or workers (sometimes). Positively the production of numbers caused a convergence around the map of a particular issue, which

at least provides the benefit of having everyone working from the same model. However, this has not always been the case. In 2000, in an effort to counter propositions for another amnesty poor estimation of the results of IRCA formed a central argument by conservatives (Krikorian 2000). Rosello (1998) notes the extent to which the 'illegal immigrant' has become a striking point of political consensus. Indeed, this was a refrain among the researchers interviewed for this paper. As a final note to the idea that the U.S. figure has brought, if not resolution at least consensus around the magnitude of the problem, author Jeffery Passel (2008) noted, 'The numbers are so large it is pragmatically unnecessary to exaggerate them.'

Numbers are less overtly saturated with symbols and ideologies than images, a fact which makes them both more useful and more dangerous. Statistical representation is particularly important to the discourse on unauthorized migration—numbers are used to manipulate and downplay social concern for migrants by depersonalizing them *en masse*, just as personal stories are used to tug at the heart strings and humanize *the immigrant*. Unaddressed in the media literature is the extent to which has symbols the accrete cultural barnacles—stereotypes and assumptions that hook into their otherwise 'factual' surface. My argument here is not necessarily for propaganda—this small study provides neither the data nor the research to substantiate such a claim—but for the assertion of fact. Simply, numbers provide a veneer of truth. Politicians offer an imprimatur to this when they use the numbers, suggesting indisputable facts rather than statistics framed to highlight a particular argument. That the numbers reported may indeed be fact is sometimes and, I suggest, often beside the point. As Sokal and Bricmont (1998:11) noted in their controversial examination of the use of scientific 'metaphors' in social theory, 'We fail to see the advantage of invoking, even metaphorically, scientific concepts that one understands only shakily when addressing a readership composed almost entirely on non-scientists. Might the goal be to pass off as profound a rather banal philosophical or sociological observation, by dressing it up in fancy scientific jargon?' Although the presentation of estimates does not wander into the same realm of abstraction as some critical theory, their point is illustrative. And powerful, if one is to take Lou Dobbs as an example: 'I don't come to a conclusion out of thin air because of some partisan or ideological viewpoint, but rather an analysis of the facts.' (Carter and Steinberg 2006)

The presentation of immigration as an account—in which immigrants give or take from the economy as a whole or to specific aspects of it—betrays the numbers versus rights trade-off discussed by Ruhs and Martin. This is the world as a zero-sum game—if *they* have *you* will want, if *you* have *they* want it. Although there is some truth to such a schema, particularly in light of the established inequalities of the world system, this presentation fuels immigration fears—or is a reflection of them—as much as it represents the facts. Statistics are normative frameworks that reflexively describe and shape unconscious and conscious social attitudes, particularly around the 'commons.' It also corresponds to the elite-public divide long noted in immigration policies in liberal democratic states like the United States and UK. Estimates of unauthorized migrants are also, as Audrey Singer points out, an estimate is a multiplier.³⁰ This works both directly and indirectly. It is this secondary, subtle use of multipliers that is

³⁰ Pers. comm. A. Singer, 2008.

both more pervasive in the mass media and more insidious. Descriptive information—positive or negative—are aggrandized by estimates. Taking these two propositions together we can form a third—that in placing estimates alongside information conveying a particular view of illegal migrants acts as a multiplier for that view. If this information is negative or pejorative—like the use of the term illegal with its connotations of criminality—then that perspective is expanded. In many ways the divide is between fact and speculation as much as it is between fact and interpretation. Unauthorized immigrants, no matter how many of them there are, are often scapegoats counted, up short in the balance sheet and used as a measure for government failure.

The packaging and marketing of data has improved according to demographers, although for immigration issues this was clearly more the case in the United States than in the UK, where ham-fisted government action/inaction created more controversy—and unwelcome focus—than might have been occurred otherwise. Of the newspapers surveyed USA Today had a particularly strong use of statistics, both in articles and graphic presentations. Although reports from recognized institutions still carry more weight, many newspapers have in-house number crunchers and skilled graphic artists. A point that a number of scholars raised in interviews and which is illustrated by Durkheim's identification of statistics as social facts is that numbers can outlive their 'correctness' given that they describe dynamic events. However, there appears to be some room to maneuver. While the UK numbers were outdated before they were released given the data with which they were generated, the 2006 estimates from Pew—which, as author Jeffery Passel put it 'had passed into fact by the summer'³¹—have had considerable staying power given the evolution of immigration. Indeed, Pew did not update the report the following year because there seemed little need to do so—there was not enough difference in the numbers to warrant the effort. Cecilia Munoz, vice president for policy at the National Council of La Raza, summed up the current political atmosphere for more recent unauthorized migration estimates. 'The estimates of the undocumented population have always been fodder for scare tactics. Now that we're back in the land of the hysterical debates, people are throwing around crazy numbers.' (Moscoso 2007)

One indication of the power of the media in the UK as well as its relationship to government and public is the development of the Britain's new FBI-like agency, which will set priorities partly based on how much newspapers write about different types of organised crime. 'Illegal immigration has been identified as one of the top priorities, partly because more column inches are devoted to the subject than any other crime issue, the chairman of the Serious and Organised Crime Agency (Soca) has confirmed. As part of the formula, thirty-three national and regional newspapers have been monitored for the past five years and measured for how many words are written on each type of organised crime. Illegal immigration came top of the list, with drugs in second place.' (Bennetto 2005) Something that speaks to the purpose of this paper and the power of understanding not just how many unauthorized migrants there are but how coverage in the press results in public opinion and political change. As Rosello (1998) noted of the situation of *les clandestins* in France, 'There may be a sobering twist...the media's power as an instrument of control over the practices of the state has, to a certain extent, been

³¹ The report was released in March.

reasserted. They practically single-handedly created the *sans-papiers*.' This raises important questions about the directionality of public opinion, which this paper did not cover, and the role of quantitative information in forming opinions given the observations here about how it frames the debate. 'Individual judgments are grounded in a discursive process linking government and citizens.' (Simon and Jerit 2007) Statistics are more central to this process than ever and as much a tool of scientific understanding as of political communication. 'The more numbers you have, the more visibility you have, the more power and clout you potentially have.' (Bruillard and Williams 2006)

'If all records told the same tale...'

What emerges from this portrait of how numbers frame the immigration debate in the UK and United States is that the use of statistics is more subtle than crude. Yet even as the numbers change, discourse seems to stay the same, arguing that the political often trumps the real. In many ways the subtitle of this paper is a misnomer. Rather than the politics of unauthorized migration estimates, what is evident from this review of media is their politicization. That is, the estimates themselves are merely best attempts at assessing the magnitude of a population; the discourse surrounding them—in which the estimates are both tool and symbol—alters and politicizes numbers through both intentional and unintentional use of language. If one takes a broader view of number than the reporting of mere estimates, it becomes clear that numbers are used to frame the illegal immigration debate far more pervasively than might be imagined. Behind every deluge or flood of migrants is an impression of the many. As Francis Bacon explained, 'everything, even the framing of experiments, begins with language, with words; and words have a fatal tendency to substitute themselves for the facts they are supposed merely to report or reflect. While men 'believe that their reason governs words,' in fact 'words react on the understanding'; that is, they shape rather than serve rationality. Even precise definitions don't help because 'the definitions themselves consist of words, and those words beget others' and as the sequence of hypotheses and calculations extends itself, the investigator is carried not closer to but ever further away from the independent object he had set out to apprehend.' (Fish 2008) Every interpreter is a reader, and there is no such thing as a neutral or value-free reader (Said 1981).

The intent of statistical information in raw form is to present an accurate reflection of some facet of social reality. Such a process is beset by subjectivity and judgment—as well as in this case by the inherent difficulty in capturing clandestine behaviors. Estimates become shorthand. Numbers are as powerful as images, replete with assumptions and stereotypes—some positive, some not.³² It is this power—as well as a desire for accuracy—that drives their use. Making the point clearer, Best (2001) noted that the 'facts' do not speak for themselves, people speak with the facts. 'And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed—if all records told the same tale—then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'" (Orwell 1949) As this short exploration illustrates, all records do not tell the same tale. The search for the number or—as Sen. Mel Martinez (R-FL) put it 'the magic formula'—continues because the numbers, while revealing an important facet of reality are hardly even

³² Pers. comm.. L. Chavez, 2008.

a guide book, let alone a policy manual. Perhaps policymakers might take another cue from Orwell (despite Bloomberg) in regard to unauthorized migration, which seems to incite debate and protest and inflame contradictory passions no matter its proportion—relative or actual: ‘Sanity is not statistical.’ In the case of unauthorized migration the numbers are significant for the ‘problem’ they identify but it is up to policymakers, researchers and public to contextualize that problem. Pressing such a point, Starr (2007) noted, ‘While a small number of illegal residents or temporary workers may raise ethical questions, a large population with no rights or security undermines the rule of law, the rights of citizens, and the working of democracy.’

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