

Images of an Immigrant Nation: Portrayals of an Immigrant in the Mass Media

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As the United States continues to record a growing population of immigrants, our research seeks to review how immigrants are portrayed in the mass media in different areas of the country over time. This helps to illuminate what Americans and immigrants feel about immigration across different contexts. Eighteen regional and six national papers—including the USA Today, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal—were analyzed from the years 1985 through 2012. From a specific newspaper and a given year, articles that contained sufficient information about immigration were surveyed through a content analysis procedure. These articles were chosen based on several criteria: 1) at least two-thirds of the article is about immigration; 2) the article is about immigration to the US only; 3) the article is about immigration in the present. These articles were then coded in relation to various topics such as the tone of the article—that is, whether the article mentions immigrants as having positive or negative consequences for the US, as well as whether immigrants benefit from immigration to the US. Preliminary findings from my review of articles from our set of newspapers suggests the tone of the articles as they relate to the consequences of immigration for immigrants tend to be more positive than negative, and the tone as it relates to the consequences of immigration for the US tends to be more negative than positive. Additionally, most articles have expressed the greatest concern for illegal immigration and its consequences for the US.

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Abstract

As the United States continues to record a growing population of immigrants, our research seeks to review how immigrants are portrayed in the mass media in different areas of the country over time. This helps to illuminate what Americans and immigrants feel about immigration across different contexts. Eighteen regional and six national papers—including the USA Today, the New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal—were analyzed from the years 1985 through 2012. From a specific newspaper and a given year, articles that contained sufficient information about immigration were surveyed through a content analysis procedure. These articles were chosen based on several criteria: 1) at least two-thirds of the article is about immigration; 2) the article is about immigration to the US only; 3) the article is about immigration in the present. These articles were then coded in relation to various topics such as the tone of the article—that is, whether the article mentions immigrants as having positive or negative consequences for the US, as well as whether immigrants benefit from immigration to the US. Preliminary findings from my review of articles from our set of newspapers suggests the tone of the articles as they relate to the consequences of immigration for immigrants tend to be more positive than negative, and the tone as they relate to the consequences of immigration for the US tends to be more negative than positive. Additionally, most articles have expressed the greatest concern for illegal immigration and its consequences for the US.

Objectives

The aim of our research is to learn how media coverage of immigration has changed over time and in different areas of the US.

Methods

Our research focused on 18 regional and 6 national newspapers using the databases ProQuest and newsbank at the Mlibrary as our source. From a specific newspaper and a given year, we searched for the word immigra* to find what articles mention immigration/immigrants/immigrate. From the list of articles found, a random number list was created, and this list was used to determine the order at which articles are reviewed. Going through the random number list, articles that contained sufficient information about immigration were downloaded and then coded. While coding, series of questions were asked and answered about these articles. The questions ranged from whether the article mentions immigrants as contributing to public revenue, affecting the growth of the economy or affecting the US political process, to whether the article mentions immigrants as having positive or negative consequences for the US. Subsequently, media coverage of immigration is connected to public opinion polls over time and across regions.



Findings

In my review of these sets of newspaper articles, I found that articles show the most concern for illegal immigration. Also, Latinos, among others, are the most discussed immigrant groups, which could be because they constitute the largest immigrant population in the US. Similarly, political parties target immigrant groups especially Latinos while deciding political strategies during the elections. More importantly, the articles suggest a more positive than negative tone in relation to the consequences of immigration for immigrants, and a more negative than positive tone as it relates to the consequences of immigration for the US.

Dominant Issues



Figure 1.1. represents a chart showing the percentage of issues/topics that arised the most while coding articles.

Association of immigrants with criminal acts

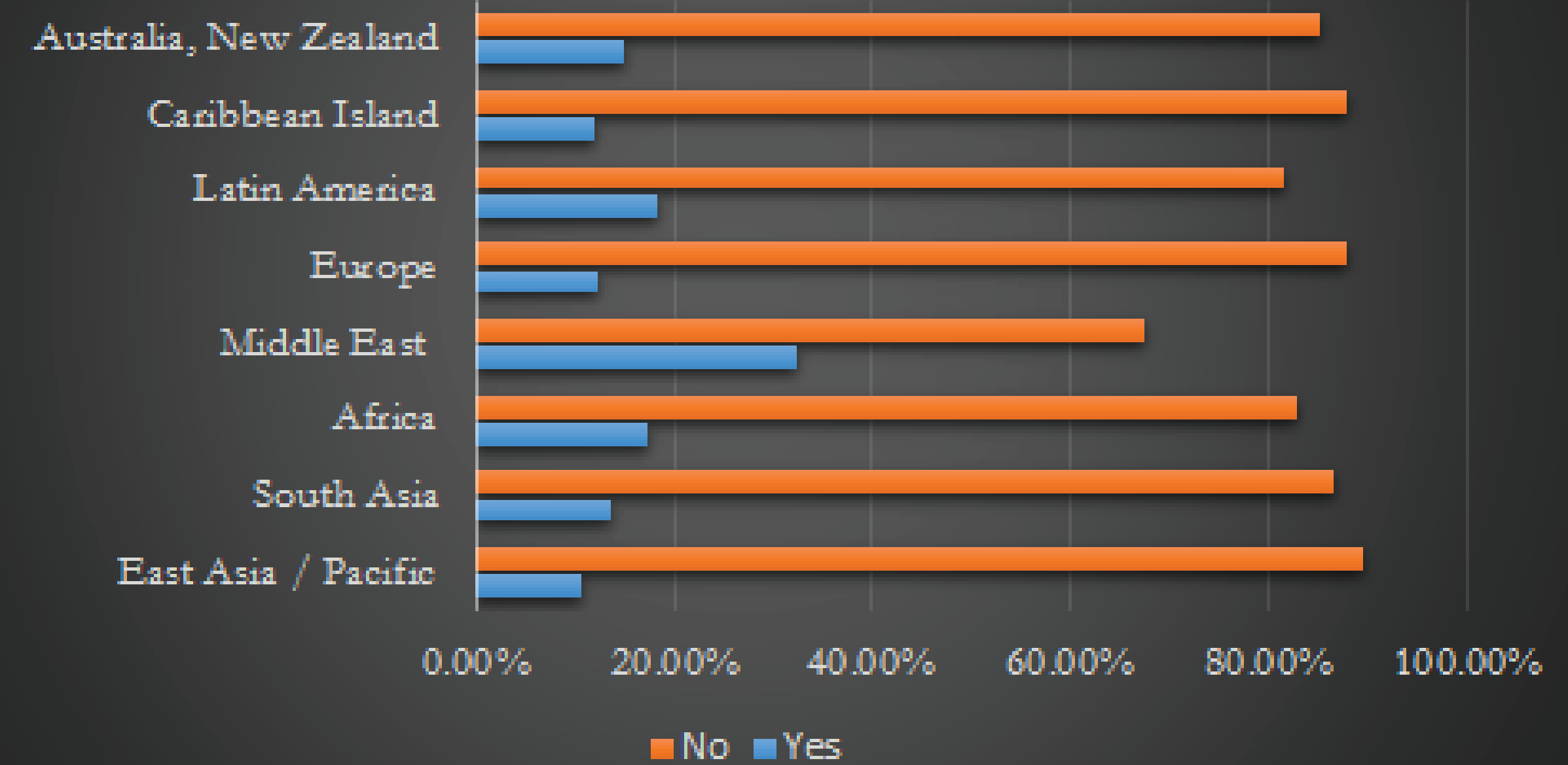


Figure 1.2 represents the graph showing the percentage of articles that associate immigrants with criminal activities in the US.

Illegal or undocumented immigrants

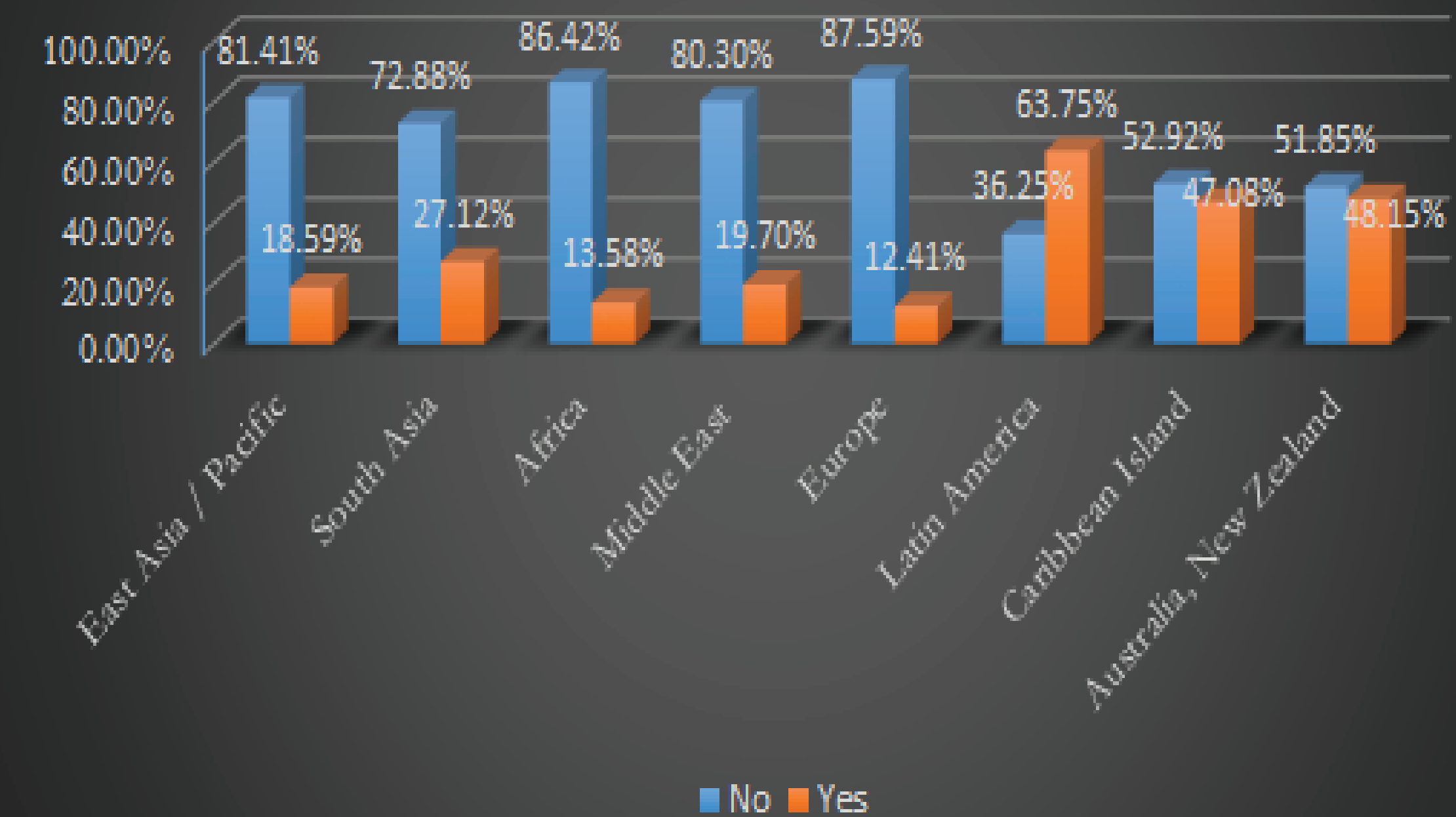


Figure 1.3 represents a graph showing the percentage of articles that mention illegal immigration/ undocumented immigrants in the US for 8 dominant immigrant groups.