



Title: News Media Representations of Immigrants in the Canadian Criminal Justice System

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Research Question:

Two research questions guide this study: 1) How are immigrants involved in the criminal justice system portrayed by mainstream Canadian news outlets? 2) What are the dominant narratives and thematic frames used to construct the image of immigrants involved in the criminal justice system?

Importance:

This study offers an in-depth understanding of the role mainstream newspapers play in transmitting images, ideas, and symbols about immigrants and immigration in Canada. I argue that since the news media are key actors in reflecting and informing public opinion, examining how they report on issues like immigration can have an important impact on the direction of immigration policy and reform. While there have been studies of specific immigration events in Canada, there have not been any recent larger scale studies examining the media treatment of immigrants involved in the criminal justice system. This study fills that gap by offering a broader examination of the role the news media occupies in the shaping of the immigration debate.

Research Findings:

The findings of this study indicate that immigrants are primarily portrayed as criminals in the news media. The four dominant images of immigrants and the justice system in the print news media are: 1) immigrants as war criminals; 2) immigrants as organized criminals (gang members/members of smuggling rings/terrorists); 3) immigrants as individual criminals; and 4) illegal immigrants. Crimes of violence involving immigrants as perpetrators and illegal immigration were the two most reported crimes found in the period studied. The dominant media slant in the news stories was either hostile towards immigrants, or concerned about the behavior of immigrants.

Implications:

Immigrants involved in the criminal justice system are overwhelmingly portrayed in a negative light by Canada's print media. This reinforces long-standing stereotypes about immigrants and makes it more difficult for immigrants to be seen as legitimate victims of crime. Furthermore, immigrants are put on trial by the news media, often without any opportunity to present their stories or accounts of the events in question. As a result, public perceptions about immigrants are unlikely to shift away from negative assumptions about who immigrants are, and whether or not they belong in Canada.