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# The effect of media bias on legislation: a case study of Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 on immigration

Rachael Burgess

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**THE EFFECT OF MEDIA BIAS ON LEGISLATION:  
A CASE STUDY OF ARIZONA'S SENATE BILL 1070 ON IMMIGRATION**

By  
Rachael Lee Burgess

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Department of Public Relations  
College of Communications  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts  
At  
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June 30, 2011

Thesis Chair: Suzanne Fitzgerald, Ph.D.

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## **Abstract**

Rachael Lee Burgess  
THE EFFECT OF MEDIA BIAS ON LEGISLATION:  
A CASE STUDY OF ARIZONA'S SENATE BILL 1070 ON IMMIGRATION  
2010/11  
Suzanne Fitzgerald, Ph.D.  
Master of Arts in Public Relations

In order to understand the relationship between government, media and public opinion in the case of Arizona Senate Bill 1070, Arizona's bill to combat illegal immigration. The purpose of this study was to (a) examine whether the media coverage of Arizona Senate Bill 1070 initiated government action and (b) examine whether the media coverage presented emotional or legal arguments supporting or not supporting the bill. Examining tone, use of emotional and legal arguments, subjectivity and objectivity in two national newspapers and interviewing four communications directors for the state of Arizona, the study showed the existence of media bias and subjectivity, but did not influence government action against the bill.

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## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

Technology over the past 20 years has changed how the public receives its news. With the emergence of the “citizen journalist,” anyone can create a website where the writer can voice an opinion on any topic for a large audience. The reporters may have changed, but the power of journalism has not faltered in persuasive power.

With mass media now in the hands of the people and powerful citizens buying struggling newspapers, objective and ethical journalism may find itself in the history books. Media bias and political views appear in the writing of journalists in national newspapers or banter between broadcasters on the evening news channels. Partisan favor is emerging while reporting on national issues or political strategies. Objectivity has given way to political favor of the reporter and those who financially back them (Hackett, 1984).

When Arizona enacted the *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act* or *Arizona Senate Bill 1070* in April 2010, media coverage across the country voiced opinions for or against the passing of the immigration bill. Attitudes about the bill ranged from an “evolutionary step forward” (Medrando & Richey, 2010) to calling the US a “Nazi Police State,” (Antle, 2010). After the media voiced its opinion and thus influenced public opinion, the US government sued Arizona and barred parts of the document from becoming law.

The issue of media bias and its impact on public opinion raises the question of how government can interact with the people if a third party contorts the message. Though the Schramm Model of Communication shows that an opinion leader, like the members of the mass

media, is more trustworthy to the public than a bigger organization like government, the bias in media reporting can affect how the public interacts with its government. It raises the question of who really holds power (Broom, 2009).

Organizations such as Harvard University have researched the impact of media bias in Supreme Court decisions and coverage like *Lawrence v. Texas* (Haider-Markel, Allen, & Johansen, 2006), finding that media coverage heavy in areas directly affected by the ruling in the case and increased numbers of subjective articles when the Supreme Court heard the case.

Tawnya J. Adkins Covert and Philo C. Wasburn conducted a longitudinal study of media bias in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The National Review*, and *The Progressive* over a 25-year period when covering social issues such as feminism and global warming. According to the authors, media bias helps readers make informed decisions by understanding opposition and encouraging democracy (Adkins Covert & Wasburn, 2009).

According to a study in *Media Psychology* as to whether or not the bias drew audiences rather than offended and repelled them, it found less argumentative people were unlikely to question the bias in a news article (Arpan & Peterson, 2008). The data was surprisingly supported by a study conducted in a 1979 study of media bias covering the 1972 Presidential Election. Those who were politically active found more media bias than those who were not as argumentative. People actually expected newspapers to show more bias than television, but many viewers did not seem to notice bias (Hofstetter, 1979).

According to insider journalists like Martin Lee and Norman Solomon who look at media bias and why some stories are picked over others—they look at why information is omitted from the news (Lee & Solomon, 1990). Ted Robbins, a NPR reporter for the Southwest, reports how media skews the number of illegal immigrants entering the country by basing its numbers off

formulas that have no scientific basis. The estimation is based on bias rather than journalistic objectivity (Robbins, 2006). Even journalists like Dianne Solis argue that word usage by the media impacts opinions of the public and illegal immigration (Solis, 2008). Insider information looks at the existence of media bias and why news sources are not objective.

Studies have looked at the prevalence of media bias, but not how the bias will influence a population's relationship with its government. The purpose of this study is not to solely detect media bias, but also to look for causes and solutions to counteract media bias, specifically looking at Arizona's Senate Bill 1070.

## **The Problem**

*Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act or Arizona Senate Bill 1070* was written by Senator Russell Pearce in 2010 after the murder of Douglas, Ariz. resident Robert Krentz by an illegal immigrant (Pearce, 2010). Border Patrol checkpoints and news about illegal immigration was a common occurrence in Arizona before writing the bill and citizens debate whether to grant amnesty to immigrants or to build a wall between the US and Mexico. But Pearce claimed that the murder of Krentz was "the straw that broke the camel's back," and the bill had to be written to protect the people.

The bill included that:

For any lawful contact made by a law enforcement official or a law enforcement agency of this state or a law enforcement agency of a county, city, town or other political subdivision of this state where reasonable suspicion exists that the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States, a reasonable attempt shall be made, when practicable, to determine the immigration status of the person, except if the determination may hinder or obstruct an investigation. Any person who is arrested shall have the person's immigration status determined before the person is released. The

person's immigration status shall be verified with the Federal Government pursuant to 8 United States Code Section 1373 (c). (Unlawful Present Aliens Act, 2010)

The bill continues to say that no person can be discriminated due to race, color, or nationality unless within the limitations of the US and Arizona constitution. A person is determined to be legally in the country when providing law enforcement with legal government identification or paperwork.

Governor Jan Brewer signed the bill into law April 23, 2010 to be enforced starting July 19, 2010. When the decision reached the mass media, controversy over how the law would be enforced and the possibility of racial discrimination ensued. The bill added to the blaring question dealing with border security and immigrant safety. The argument of illegal immigration became national headlines. Many argued that the act gave law enforcement officers too much power (Chin, Hessick, Massaro, & Miller, 2010). Cities across the country boycotted the Arizona. Many organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the state for enacting the law.

The US government quickly filed its own lawsuit against the state of Arizona and prevented the enforcement of any controversial section included in the bill. The court weakened controversial parts of the law and appeals are being heard (The United States of America, Plaintiff v. The State of Arizona; and Janice K. Brewer, Governor of the State of Arizona, in her Official Capacity, 2010).

The actions of the US government begs the question, did the uproar caused from mass media coverage force the government to act against the law? How do political media affect government decisions?

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to look at how the media influences government policy, understanding not only how politics influence mass media but also how mass media influences government decision making. The relationship between the two determines how the public understands and interacts with their government. The role of media and the government will also influence a government's ability to inform and enforce laws (Haider-Markel, Allen, & Johansen, 2006).

By recognizing media bias from its root cause, government organizations can look at trends and counteract it. For public affairs specialists, the research will show how communication changes and objectivity will influence public opinion and how politicians or the government should handle it.

Through research, the author suggests the following hypotheses:

*H1: It is expected that the media bias in covering Arizona Senate Bill 1070 influenced the government's decision to act against the bill.*

According to Arizona Senator Russell Pearce, the enacting of the bill caused a media frenzy that encouraged states across the country to boycott the state of Arizona and cause economic decline (Pearce, 2010).

The affect of media bias on the federal government will also influence how the state governments interact with the federal government. The media bias will impact the relationship between the federal and state government, which could blur the lines of state and national laws (Chin, Hessick, Massaro & Miller, 2010).

Not only does media bias impact how the national and state governments interact, but also how the state government and residents interact. Media is the way to inform the public of government policy in order to keep the community unified (Broom, 2009). Bias in the media will impact how the state interacts with its citizens and how effective the government will be when enforcing laws (Haider-Markel, Allen & Johansen, 2006).

*H2: It is expect to find that the media bias was emotionally based rather than legally based in this instance.*

A study by the University of Arizona looks at how the Senate Bill opposes federal laws (Chin, Hessick, Massaro & Miller, 2010), it is expected to find that many of these arguments were not used when presenting the Senate Bill in the media. Because emotional appeals reach an audience more effectively than logical arguments (Broom, 2009), the author expects that the media coverage will have few legal arguments against the enacting of the bill.

By looking at how national newspapers reported the passing of the bill, the author expects to see how media bias impacted the government's decision to challenge the law and what Arizona could and should have done in order to counteract media bias.

## **Procedure**

To better understand the media coverage, the author will first conduct a content analysis of two major newspapers for their coverage of *Arizona Senate Bill 1070*. *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* will be used because of their reputable liberal and conservative political views respectively. The data collected will show the amount of coverage on the case and how each periodical portrayed the enacting of the bill. The articles dating from March 1, 2010 (shortly before the Krentz murder) to November 1, 2010, when appeals were heard by a Ninth Circuit court. The author will train a coder for intercoder reliability of content analysis. This researcher selected articles from the eight months to look at media coverage in the two national newspapers and categorize them by attitude. The articles will then be looked at for persuasion devices, that is whether the arguments were either legal or emotional.

The last part of the study will comprise a series of personal interviews with public affairs professionals. Their information will provide qualitative data as to how the media and government influences one another and how the Arizona government could have or still can counteract any media bias surrounding the enacting of the bill. The data will also shed light on how government interacts with media and the public.

## **Delimitation**

Because of limitations in location and time, the author will only collect qualitative data from public affairs experts and professors in Arizona and in New Jersey and not from any other states. The limitation will still enable the reader to see variations in journalism cross-country.

Using articles from March 1, 2010 to November 1, 2010 limits the data because it excludes media coverage of illegal immigration before the bill was passed and does not include

the articles after the appeal process began. The end date is a time restriction because the appeals are not complete and will continue for several more months. No other articles will be used outside of this time line.

## **Summary**

Media bias has been a heavily researched topic that has played a large role in the relationship between government and citizens. Chapter 2 looks at previous research on media bias and the relationship with illegal immigration and Arizona Senate Bill 1070.

## **Definition of Terms**

**SB 1070**—The *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act* or *Arizona Senate Bill 1070* will be abbreviated throughout the document as SB 1070.

**Positive**—the term will be used when an attitude is determined to be for the signing and enforcing of SB 1070 and against the government’s suit against Arizona.

**Negative**—the term will be used when an attitude is determined to be against the signing and enforcing of SB 1070 and for the government’s suit against Arizona.

**Neutral**—the term will be used when an attitude in an article cannot be determined about either the signing of SB 1070 or the government’s suit against Arizona.

**Legal**—the term will be used when an argument uses or refers to legal reasons (such as conflict with current laws or Constitution) that SB 1070 should be passed or eliminated.

**Emotional**—the term will be used when an argument uses or refers to non-legal reasons that SB 1070 should be passed or eliminated.

**Objective**—the term will be used to describe an article’s balance view of SB1070

**Subjective**—the term will be used to describe an article’s unbalanced view of SB170, whether positive or negative.

## Chapter 2

### *Literature Review*

#### **Media Bias**

Robert Hacket of Simon Fraser University looks at the amount of media bias in his article published by *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. Hacket looks at the decline of newspapers. As newspapers gain private financial backers, the privatization influences how journalists present their stories. Though ideal objective journalism means no personal opinion obscuring truth, Hacket argues that objectivity is by definition representation of the real world. He suggests that researchers should look at the sources of bias rather than condemn it (Hacket, 1984).

Authors and journalists Martin Lee and Norman Solomon wrote about their first hand knowledge of the journalism business. The two authors discuss how and why subjects such as politics and disasters make news headlines and why many journalists leave out crucial details. They looked at specific cases when journalists took liberties in leaving out crucial information about important stories to promote readership. By manipulating information, the authors argue that the bias keeps the public from making informed decisions and thus creating a one-way communication between an elite group and the population (Lee & Solomon, 1990).

The perception of media bias traces its roots to decades ago. A study by John P. Robinson of the American Enterprise Institute looked at the public's opinion of news coverage on the 1972 presidential election. Using personal interviews of over 1,000 participants 40 days

before and showing 15 minute interview clips to 700 participants 14 days after the election, Robinson found that many people believed the media was biased before the election, but few detected media bias in those same media clips after the election. He also found people felt print media showed more bias than television. Though people expected newspapers to take sides rather than television, the viewers did not seem to notice bias unless they were politically active and articles opposed their views (Hofstetter, 1979). The study shows how audience opinion of a news source is less likely to sway if the reader is less argumentative (Alpan & Peterson, 2008).

Though it is safe to argue that media bias exists, the audience who reads these papers articles play a role in the continuation of biased journalism, according to Laura Arpan and Erik Peterson of Florida University. Arpan and Peterson published a study in *Media Psychology* looking at whether an audience will read a particular newspaper if the paper presents biased articles. The researchers presented their subjects with articles from cnn.com and a fake news source called allnews.com and were asked to rate how much they liked the articles and how argumentative they seemed. The subjects were then assigned six articles and asked to state how biased the article seemed and how likely they were to use that news source. The researchers found that the participants were more likely to stay loyal to a news source even if the articles offended them. The participants were less likely to argue with a journalist's bias if they liked the news source, enabling the ability to present personal opinion in news sources without worrying about a loss in readership (Alpan & Peterson, 2008).

Partisanship overshadowing journalistic objectivity is a common feeling among the public. Because many complain about the lack of honesty and the increase of personal opinion in the news, many researchers felt a need to look at the growing phenomenon. Tawnya J. Adkins Covert of Western Illinois University and Philo C. Wasburn of Perdue University looked at the

growth of media bias over a period of 25 years. The two authors used a content analysis to compare media coverage on social issues such as immigration, healthcare, and feminism using news sources like *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The National Review*, and *The Progressive*. The authors found a substantial difference in coverage on various issues such as environmental concerns and crime.

The authors argue that media bias might not be a bad thing. The ability to speak freely and presenting many personal beliefs allows democracy to survive. The authors describe how media bias can allow an audience to see all sides of an issue and to create a social unity, (Adkins Covert & Wasburn, 2009).

*Donald P. Haider-Markel, Mahalley D. Allen, and Morgen Johansen* of Harvard University looked at media bias in the case of a Supreme Court decision of *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003. The court decision involved homosexual rights in Texas and anti-sodomy. The authors argue that media bias could impact the ability to enforce laws on the people.

Haider-Markel, Allen and Johansen decided to conduct a content analysis on capital newspapers from anti-sodomy law states (Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, and Texas), 15 randomly selected states without anti-sodomy laws (Arkansas, California, Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Vermont, and Wyoming) and national papers (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*). The authors used a LexisNexis search to find articles between December 2002 and July 2003 using the keywords *sodomy* and *Lawrence v. Texas*. They took these articles and coded them as positive, negative and neutral.

The researchers found that states directly affected by the decision had a greater number of articles, a smaller word count, and were likely to be on the front of the newspaper. National newspapers had a slightly smaller number of articles and a larger word count. The states least affected by the law had a larger word count and the least number of articles. Those state newspapers that appear to have consistently under covered the case were in Maine, Delaware, Vermont, Wyoming, and Missouri. Four of these five were states without sodomy laws. They started in December 2002 because that is when the Supreme Court decided to hear the case. The authors found that states affected by the decision were neutral until hearing arguments in March 2003, when bias against banning the law surfaced. After making the decision in June 2003, the articles became biased in the opposite direction. *USA Today* had more bias against banning the law than *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, but there were fewer articles. The study shows varying media bias across the country and briefly touches on how the lack of coverage and media bias can impact a government's relationship to a group of people and its ability to create and enforce laws to an unformed public (Haider-Markel, Allen & Johansen, 2006).

### **The Illegal Immigration Debate**

The mass media covers hot button issues such as illegal immigration, bringing with it media bias. Before states created laws to counteract illegal immigration from Mexico into the U.S., the media present many opposing viewpoints on this particular issue.

Getting to the root of the illegal immigration debate, Charles Cozic organized an anthology of articles debating all sides of illegal immigration from affects on the economy, health care, to enforcing immigration law. According to Cozic, roughly 300,000 immigrants enter the U.S. illegally each year (Cozic, 1997).

Palmer Morrel-Samuels of the Employee Motivation and Assessment and University of Michigan Business School decided to look at how the U.S. contributes to the growing illegal immigration controversy. The author of the article randomly sampled 5,614 out of 500 million inspections on travelers entering the United States from Mexico. The researcher found that due to errors in paperwork and procedures, 8% of the sample should not have been let into the country. Morrel-Samuels' research analyses the errors in port of entry procedures and how it contributes to illegal immigration. (Morrel-Samuels, 2002)

An article in *International Issues*, Donald L. Huddle expresses how illegal immigrants utilize government and social services while costing American citizens money (Huddle, 1995). By entering the country, many argue how illegal immigrants can forge legal documents in order to utilize government services such as unemployment. Many also point out how immigrants utilize the American health system in order to give birth to children in the U.S., making them instant citizens. Those supporting illegal immigration reform point out that illegal immigration is a burden on tax payers and the American legal system (Huffington, 1994).

Frank Sharry of *Spectrum* and others opposed to immigration reform argue that the work of illegal immigration keeps the American economy stronger by assimilation of cultures and values of many and all people (Sharry, 1994). Those opposed to immigration reform point out that many entering the country are not criminals, but desperate people trying to make a living for the sake of their families. The jobs taken by illegal immigrants are jobs not wanted by many American citizens, helping the economy grow and the American way of life even less expensive (Rayner, 1996)

According to Susan Bibler Coutin of the University of California, the actual definition of criminology is changing due to the illegal immigration debate. Studying a group of Salvadoran

immigrants, she argues that illegal immigration is a victimless crime because many entering the U.S. illegally are law-abiding citizens. Many do not commit any sort of property or violent crimes. She points out that no one suffers any injury from immigrants entering the country, so is the act of crossing the border really a “crime”? The concept of criminology over the next few years is likely to adapt because of this controversial issue, (Coutin, 2005).

According to *Wall Street Journal* writer Dianne Solis, the debate around illegal immigration has caused widespread media bias. The use of negative terminology in reporting illegal immigration including use of the word “illegal” as a noun rather than an adjective and the kind of prejudice a small word creates. Talking through her personal experiences as a Mexican-American, Solis discussed how media bias influences how people view her and her work (Solis, 2008).

Despite the lack of consensus on the illegal immigration debate, states have nonetheless attempted to secure their borders with Mexico by eliminating the desire to enter the country. California implemented the controversial Proposition 187, which denied social services to those who were not American citizens. The law excluded illegal immigrants from unemployment benefits and free public education for their children. The proposition caused a stir in California, being one of the first steps taken to calm the growing problem (Fein, 1994).

A study by Yueh-Ting Lee of *Minnesota State University* and Victor Ottati of *Loyola University Chicago* looked at how ethnicity played a role in opinions of Proposition 187 by surveying participants in Chicago, Mexico City, California, and along the east coast. The opinions differed between the Anglo-American group and the Hispanic American group, the Hispanic American group feeling the law was unjust and the Anglo-American group feeling

opposite. The data supported the hypothesis of the opposite but brings up the economic problems that were stirred from the enacting of the bill (Lee & Ottati, 2002).

Ted Robbins, NPR reporter for the *Southwest*, says from firsthand experience how media skews the number of illegal immigrants entering the country. The number of illegal immigrants entering the country is based on the number of illegal immigrants caught. In this case, a person could be caught multiple times and eventually enter the country without capture. The actual number is unknown so many formulas used to calculate the number of illegal immigrants entering the country have no scientific basis. The estimation is based on opinion rather than journalistic objectivity (Robbins, 2006).

## **Public Affairs**

With growing debate and controversy over the new law, the author looks at how this law influences the Arizona government's with the mass public. Public affairs or government affairs deal specifically with how the government interacts with the people.

The primary job of public affairs practitioners is to inform the mass public about government decisions and handling media relations for the government. The public affairs practitioner deals with controversy, protests, handling the press, and mediating between branches of government (Broom, 2009).

Crisis intervention is a major role in the public affairs field. Being able to control a crisis before it stirs a major public uproar is crucial. Patrick Jackson presents methods of confronting other groups and avoiding giving the impression of an oppressor (Jackson, 1984). The need for crisis intervention and picking battles is important, especially to the state government of Arizona

who needs to counteract organizations filing lawsuits against them while not looking like a suppressing government.

The Arizona government must then look at government affairs, the state's government relationship with the federal government. The relationship between the government and the public as well as the state's government with the federal government is all connected through public affairs.

### **Senate Bill 1070 and Media Bias**

Arizona recently enacted the Unlawful Present Aliens, or SB 1070, in 2010. The law allowed law enforcement to ask for legal documentation of people under suspicion of being an illegal immigration during any lawful contact (Unlawful Present Aliens Act, 2010). The enacting of the law caused controversy across the state of Arizona, even affecting local tourism and economy due to boycotts (Beard & Gilbertson, 2010). Many organizations sued the state, including the U.S. government (The United States of America, Plaintiff v. The State of Arizona; and Janice K. Brewer, Governor of the State of Arizona, in her Official Capacity, 2010). The lawsuits not only caused the state to, at least temporarily, soften some of the controversial sections of the law by initiating House Bill 2162, making "any lawful contact" with suspected illegal immigrants to a "lawful stop, detention, or arrest" and reducing the fines (Arizona House Bill 2162).

Media bias and SB1070 has not been studied because of the newness of the enacting of the law. Studies such as those by The Morrison Institute-Knowledge Networks based at Arizona State University showed through surveying Arizona registered voters that many Arizonans favored the enacting of SB1070. They asked the 614 participants whether people should be

required to produce documents verifying legal status. Ninety-two percent of Republicans, seventy-nine percent of Independents, and sixty-eight percent of democrats answered “yes”. When asked if police should be allowed to detain anyone unable to verify their legal status, 93 percent of Republicans, 73 percent of independents and 50 percent of Democrats answered “yes”. When asked if police should be allowed to question anyone they think may be in the country illegally, 87 of Republicans, 67 percent of independents and 48 percent of Democrats answered “yes” (The Morrison Institute-Knowledge Networks, 2010).

Carissa Byrne Hessick of Arizona State University and Gabriel J. Chin, Toni Massaro, Marc L. Miller of The University of Arizona conducted a content analysis on SB1070 looking at the legal problems presented in the bill, finding clear differences between the bill and federal law. These conclusions noted a possible problem in the relationship between federal and state government, possibly requiring state government to answer to federal authorities before enacting any enforcement on illegal immigration. The study presents a new relationship between state and federal government. (Chin, Hessick, Massaro & Miller, 2010).

Arizona Senator Russell Pearce wrote in *Human Events* about the reasoning behind enacting the bill, stating that the bill was written to help save Arizona from budget problems and illegal activity due to illegal immigration, especially after the murder of a long-time Arizona resident by an alleged illegal immigrant. Pearce argues that most reporting on the bill is biased with little knowledge of what is written in the bill. The media bias surrounding the bill caused many states to boycott Arizona and hurt the state’s economy and tourism (Pearce, 2010).

Though media bias of SB 1070 has yet to be studied, the author plans to look at the media coverage of the bill and how Arizona could deal with the growing situation through effective public affairs. Chapter 3 will define how the author will study the media bias of SB 1070.

## **Chapter 3**

### *Methodology*

A government's relationship with the public relies heavily on the relationship between the government and the mass media. How did media coverage of SB 1070 influence Arizona's ability to pass the law and cause the federal government to intervene? Will the amount of media bias affect how the state government will pass laws in order to please the public?

#### **Research Design**

The study will look at the existence of media bias in national news coverage to understand how the government typically reacts and how communicators can counteract the bias. Many studies look at whether media bias exists, but not how the bias can influence the relationship between a government and the public, or even between the state and federal governments.

The findings in the study will identify media bias and what journalists use to present their view of a topic. The study will also identify ways to counteract media bias to maintain a better relationship between government and the public.

## **Source of Data**

In order to understand the Arizona government's relationship with the mass media, the researcher will look at bias in the news media surrounding the coverage of SB 1070. The study will require two methods of research including a content analysis on the media coverage from March 1, 2010 until November 1, 2010 and personal interviews with current public affairs practitioners.

## **Method 1: Content Analysis**

The content analysis will look at two national newspapers, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*. *The New York Times* maintains a reputation of leaning liberal in their coverage of news. *The Wall Street Journal* has a reputation of leaning more right to a conservative stance.

The study will look at all newspaper articles published by the two papers between March 1, 2010 (roughly a month before the Sen. Peirce pushed the bill) and November 1, 2010 (when the lawsuit hearings between the federal government and the state of Arizona began). An independent coder will categorize the articles by content, looking at word length, date, subject and objectivity, and article tone or whether the articles are positive, negative, or neutral (see chapter I for definitions of these terms).

The coder will then determine whether the articles considered bias contain emotional arguments (emotional words that cause an emotional reaction from the audience such as "racism" or "Nazi state") or legal arguments (sighting laws or cases that support or do not support the law.)

The author will conduct a Boolean search of the articles through ABI Inform's database of newspapers (dating back to the late eighties) using the terms "illegal immigration" and "Arizona" as the search terms between March 1, 2010 and November 1, 2010. Anything not pertaining to SB1070 (such as *The Dream Act*, also introduced during this time) will not be included in the study.

The researcher will train an independent coder to conduct the content analysis in order to ensure intercoder reliability. Because the researcher is familiar with the study, to eliminate a possibility of skewed data, the researcher will train another researcher not familiar with the hypothesis to categorize the articles.

## **Method 2: Personal Interviews**

Public affairs practitioners have to deal with government and their relationship with the public through the media. The researcher will talk to practitioners from Arizona's state government. The interviewees will be selected from both major political parties (Democrat and Republican) from both the state legislature and state senate.

The author will ask them to share their experiences with media bias and influencing their communication with the public. The author will also ask the practitioners whether media bias causes government reaction and how they try to counteract media bias.

By speaking with the public affairs practitioners, the researcher will look at media bias from the view of the government in order to look for ways to counteract the bias.

The practitioners will also be a non-random sample of public affairs practitioners in the Arizona state government.

## **Summary**

The content analysis of the two national newspapers with reputations of political leanings in articles will look at the prevalence of media bias for SB 1070. The analysis will look at the prevalence of media bias. The personal interviews will look at public affairs practitioners who deal with media on a daily basis. Using these research methods, the researcher will look at the coverage of SB1070 and ways to counteract media bias.

Chapter 4 illustrates the findings of the research and if the data supports or not support the hypotheses stated in Chapter 1.

## **Chapter 4**

### *Results*

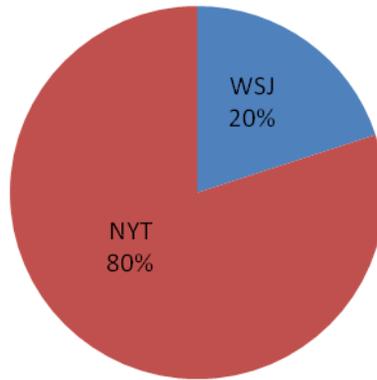
To study the affect of media on government the author conducted a content analysis through an independent coder unfamiliar with SB1070. The coder looked at articles from both national newspapers, *New York Times (NYT)* and *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)*, to study tone, objectivity, legal and emotional arguments.

To look at how media bias impacts government from the perspectives of public affairs professionals, the author interviewed four communications directors in the Arizona government. Half of the interviewees run the communications for the Arizona legislature (a Democrat and Republican) and the other half of the interviewees run the communications for the Arizona senate (a Democrat and Republican).

### **General Findings**

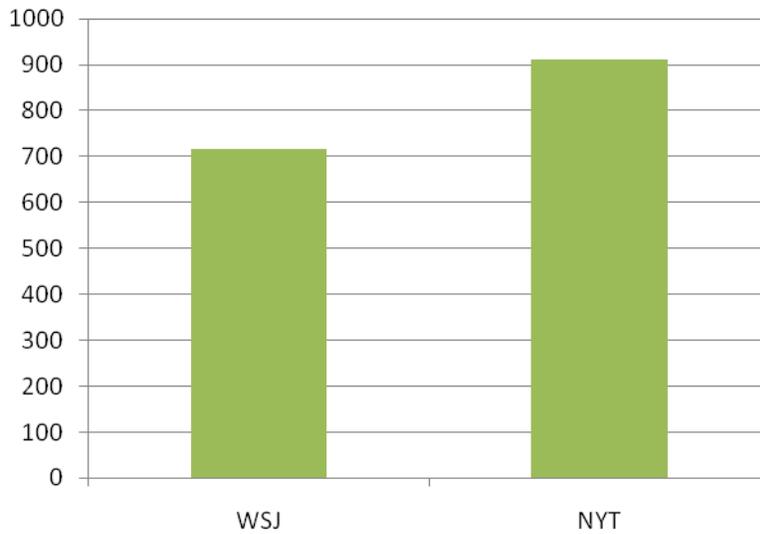
#### *Content Analysis*

There were 56 articles pertaining to SB 1070 in *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* between March 1, 2010 and November 1, 2010. Comparing the two national papers, 80% of the coverage came from *NYT* and 20% came from *WSJ*.



*Figure 1: Coverage of NYT and WSJ*

The average word count of all articles was 873.75 words. *NYT* had a larger word count, 912 words, than *WSJ* with 717 words.



*Figure 2: Word Count of WSJ and NYT*

*Interviews:*

The four interviewees each had a background in journalism and half with a focus in Spanish. Two of the interviewees are directors of communications for the Arizona Democratic

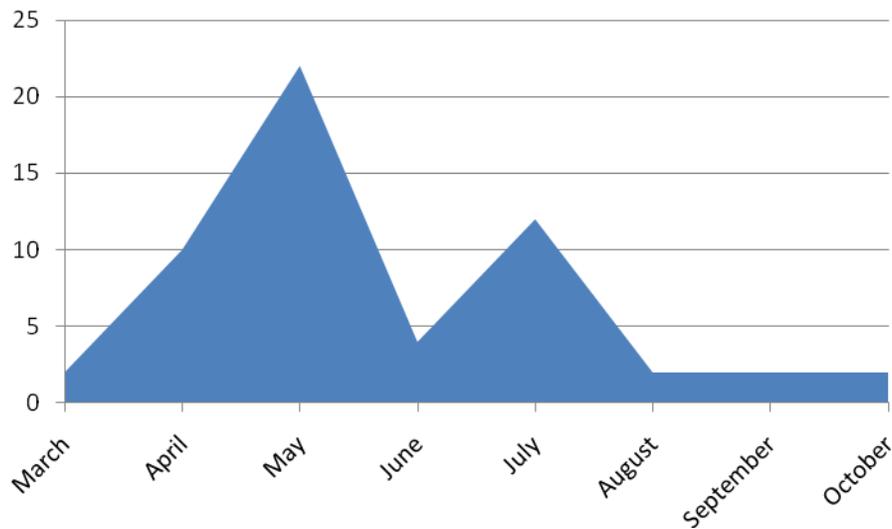
representatives and two are directors of communications for the Arizona Republican representatives.

The four directors say that they have a close relationship with editors and reporters because of their personal ties.

**H1: It is expected that the media bias in covering *Arizona Senate Bill 1070* influenced the government’s decision to act against the bill.**

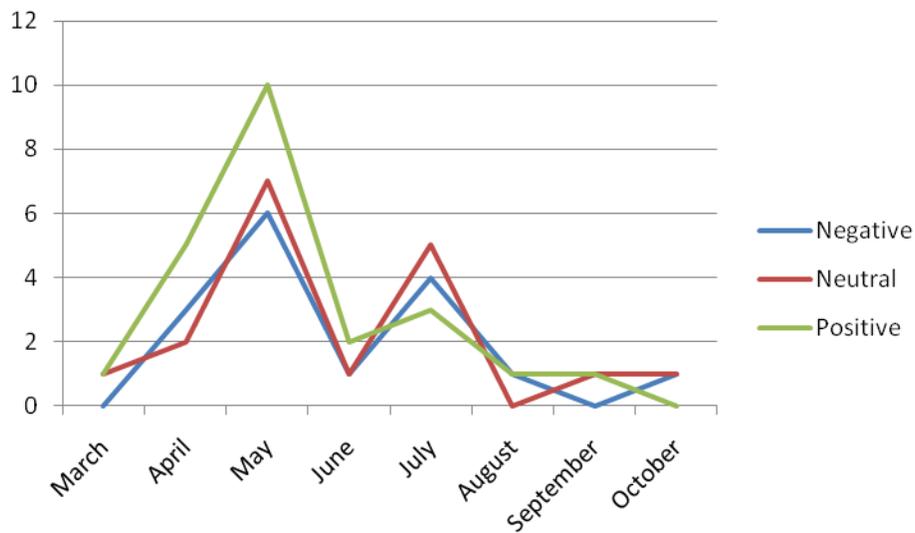
*Content Analysis*

When looking at the publication dates of all the articles between both papers, coverage of the bill peaked during the month of May shortly after Gov. Jan Brewer signed the bill into law. Though coverage during the month of June, reports spiked again when the U.S. government filed suit against the state July 6. After the beginning of July, reports reduced to reach a consistent low during the months of August, September, and October. *Figure 3* illustrates the trend in media coverage.



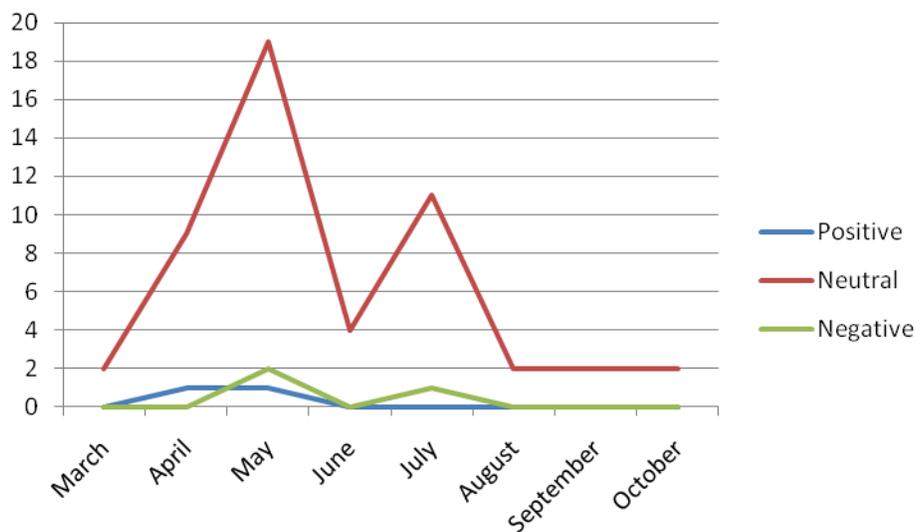
*Figure 3: Coverage between March 2010 and November 2010*

Comparing article tone to the number of articles published during the eight month period (negative meaning against the passing of SB1070, positive meaning for the passing of SB 1070, and neutral meaning no definitive opinion either way), the content analysis revealed that both national newspapers published more positive tone articles than articles with negative or neutral tones. The trend drops in July, shortly after the government filed suit against the state as depicted in *Figure 4*.



*Figure 4: Article Tone between March and November 2010*

The titles of the articles showed a similar trend in figure 5. Most of the article titles were neutral but showed some bias when the bill was signed into law and when the federal government filed suit against Arizona.



*Figure 5: Title Tone between March and November 2010*

Due to the drop of media coverage before the government filed suit in July and the lack of negative articles building up to cause federal intervention, the author concludes that the content analysis does not support H1.

### *Interviews*

When asked how media influences government action, the four interviewees' responses were similar.

Since some of the directors were former reporters, they felt that reporters try to report stories objectively with the facts at hand.

As for how media bias impacts the government's actions to react, all felt that though media bias gave the public a slanted view of a topic, government actions are not in reaction to public opinion. One of the interviewee's stated that though media bias does not "[affect] government in particular, it definitely affects citizens who hear the messages."

Another interviewee stated that “lawmakers are inclined to take the opposite approach of what the media are advocating,” suggesting the opposite of H1.

Due to the consistent opinions of the communications directors, the research does not support H1.

**H2: It is expected in the instance of SB 1070 that the media bias was emotionally based rather than legally based.**

### *Content Analysis*

Counting the number of legal terms, or examples of legal reasons people should or should not support the bill, both newspapers used a total of 12 different legal arguments, citing different laws to justify a position. The terms were not used more than twice in all the articles combined.

The Fourteenth Amendment (a law stating that all citizens cannot lose citizenship without due process), Bill of Rights (the laws of the U.S. that defines the rights of citizens), and Proposition 187 (a law passed in California that kept illegal residents from receiving public benefits such as free education and unemployment) were referenced the most, twice each.

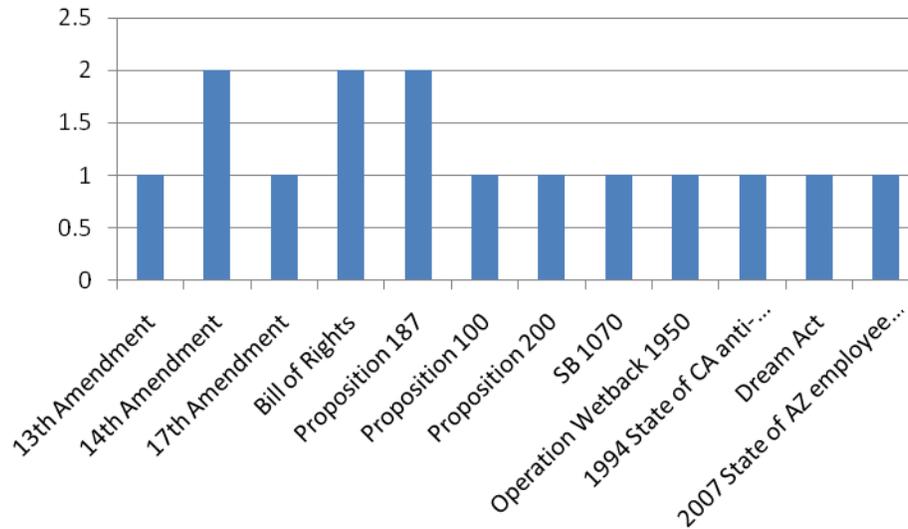


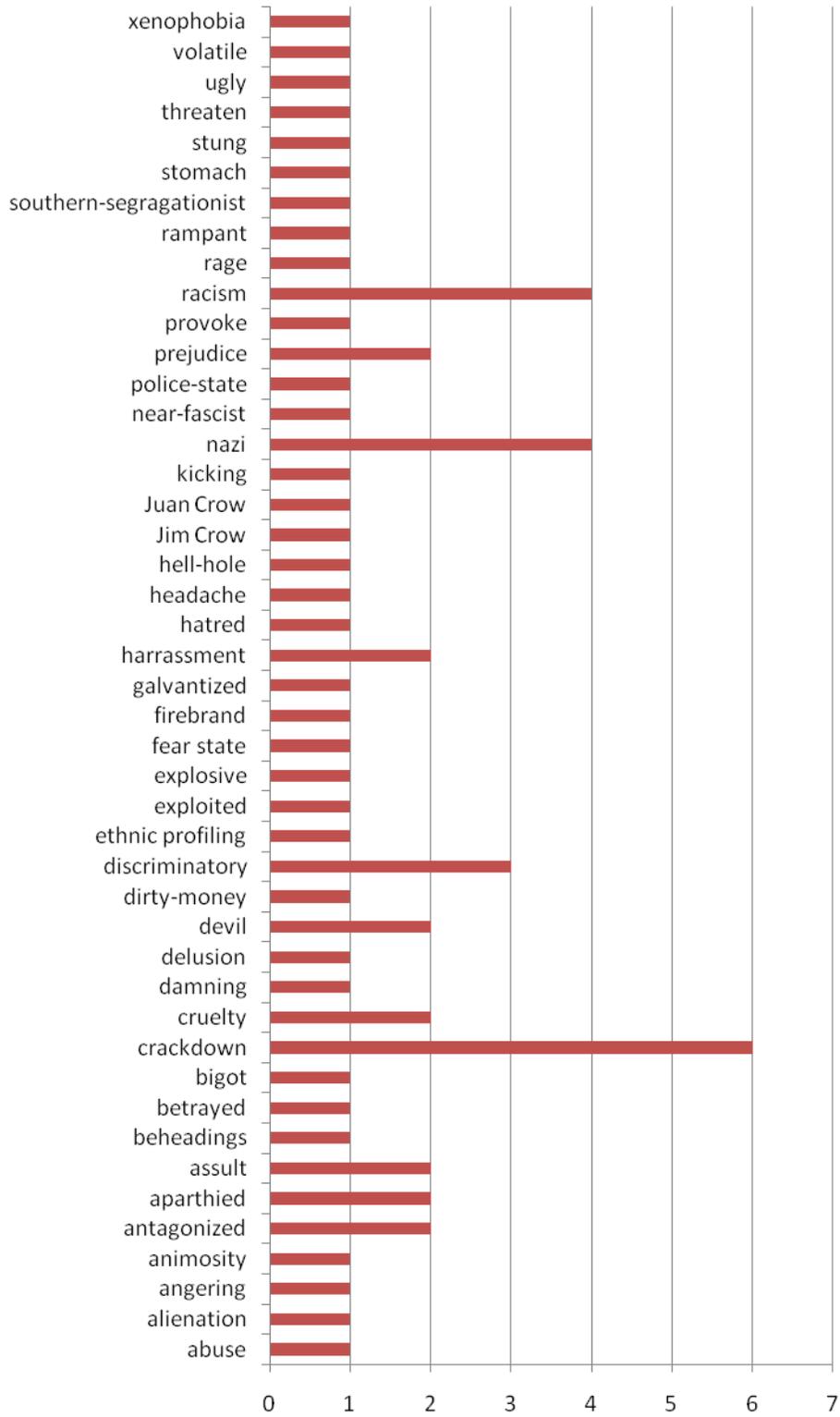
Figure 6: Use of Legal Terms

The independent coder listed words from the articles with an emotional charge, either positive or negative connotation towards SB1070. The majority of the words found contained a negative connotation against the passing and enforcing of SB1070.

The content analysis revealed 45 emotionally-charged words, depicting an emotional argument from both *NYT* and *WSJ*. The words were used anywhere between one and six times. Many of the words had to do with race, Nazism, discrimination, harassment, and government “crackdown.” The articles used the term “crackdown” most often than any of the other words.

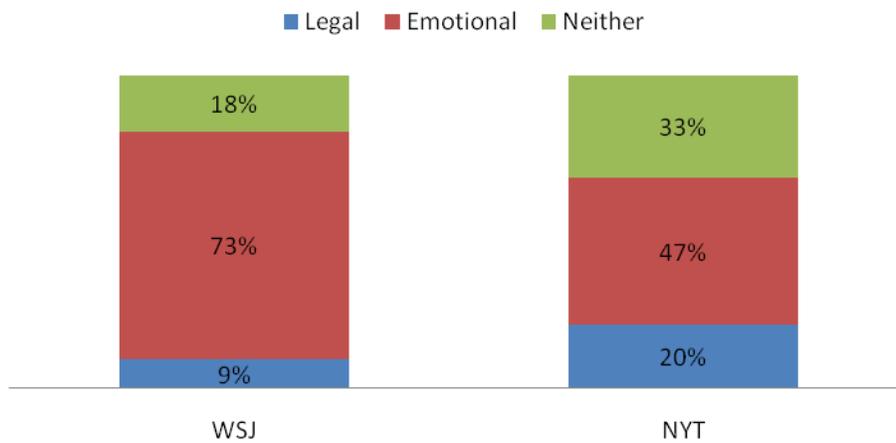
The news articles used the terms “racism” and “Nazi” throughout the study. “Discriminatory” appeared three times in the articles.

Other words included “harassment,” “rage,” “xenophobia,” “assault,” and “prejudice.” Some terms used, like “Juan Crow” were termed in reference to the “Jim Crow” laws of the post-civil war era. Another author of an article made reference to the term “Jim Crow” in his writing.



*Figure 7: Use of Emotional Terms*

When looking at the tone of the articles from *NYT* and *WSJ*, 9 percent of the arguments used in describing SB1070 in *WSJ* contained legal justification compared to *NYT* articles with 20 percent. The use of emotional terms were decidedly reversed between the two newspapers. *NYT* used emotional terms in 47 percent of the articles whereas *WSJ* used them 73 percent of the time. Eighteen percent of the *WSJ* articles and 33 percent of *NYT* articles did not present either argument.



*Figure 8: Use of Emotional vs. Legal Terms*

When looking at article tone, the two papers showed a similar pattern, where fewer than half the articles had a negative tone, close to 30 percent had a neutral tone, and about 22 to 27 percent had a positive tone in regards to SB1070. The trend is depicted in *Figure 9*.

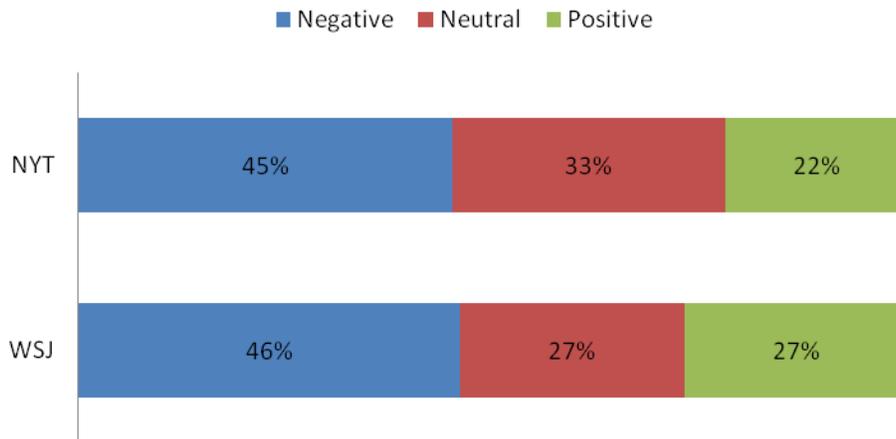


Figure 9: Article Tone toward SB1070

Looking at the arguments presented in the articles, each article was rated as either subjective or objective. If the author presented balanced information about SB1070 during its various stages over the eight-month period, the article was labeled objective. If the article appeared one-sided, the article was labeled subjective.

With all the articles between both *NYT* and *WSJ*, 64 percent of the articles presented subjective perspectives of SB1070 and 36 presented a balance view of SB1070.

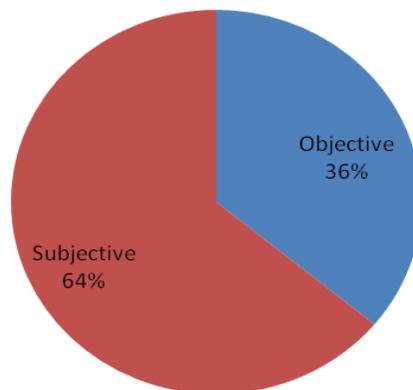


Figure 10: Subjective vs. Objective Articles

Because of the number of emotional compared to legal arguments, the frequency of the terms used, article tone, and amount of subjectivity, the content analysis supports H2 of the study.

### *Interviews*

When asked about whether the information portrayed by the media had a bias, half of the communications directors stated that they felt that the information presented to the public was “highly inaccurate.” The other half felt that “the media reported on the bill with the information they had, which they likely gathered from multiple sources, including attorneys, judges, human rights activists, lawmakers, other experts and people who will be affected by the law.”

Though the directors disagreed on the extent of media bias, all four admitted that some of the information from the media was not objective. When asked about whether the arguments presented in the media about SB1070 were legally or emotionally based, one interviewee stated that the arguments were “both. The bill is very complex. A headline of “immigration” is a very emotional appeal in Arizona, but the reports from the local mainstream media always seemed to include a legal opinion from a legal expert.”

Because the four interviewees somewhat agreed that the arguments in the media were emotionally rather than legally based, the interviews support H2 of the study.

## Summary

The tone of the articles building up to the federal government's suit against the state of Arizona were positive toward the passing of SB1070 rather than against the law's enforcement; the articles from the two national newspapers do not support H1, that the media coverage encouraged the federal suit against the state of Arizona.

The communications directors interviewed for the study agreed either that media bias had little impact on government decisions or had the opposite effect on government officials, causing them to act against public opinion. The interviewees for the study do not support H1.

The content analysis illustrated the presence of media bias and subjectivity in the articles of the national newspapers. The number of emotional terms outnumbers the number of legal terms. The information found in the articles from the content analysis support H2, that the media's arguments for or against SB1070 were emotionally based rather than legally based.

The information provided from the communications directors from the Arizona government said that media bias existed when reporting the information of SB1070 using emotional arguments, though they differ by the degree of bias. The four agree to the existence of bias, supporting H2 of the study.

Chapter 5 looks at why the data does not support Hypothesis 1 but does support Hypothesis 2. The author will explain the findings, how the data relates to public affairs, and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5

### *Discussion*

**H1: It is expected that the media bias in covering *Arizona Senate Bill 1070* influenced the government's decision to act against the bill.**

The data collected from the content analysis did not support the hypothesis that the media bias covering SB1070 for a number of reasons. If the national media prompted the federal government to file suit against the state of Arizona, one would expect a buildup of negative media coverage. If the bill generated national positive support shortly after Gov. Jan Brewer signed it into law, one would expect that the government would not file suit to keep the law from passage. The data suggests that the opposite happened.

One of the communications directors for the Arizona government during one of the interviews stated that media bias “has the opposite of what they intend it to have. Lawmakers are inclined to take the opposite approach of what the media are advocating.” The statement supports the findings found in the content analysis.

The other communication directors did not take such a strong approach to how media bias affects government action, but the other three did state that media coverage played little role in government decision making. Their statements do not support H1 either.

The study does not take into account other national newspapers such as *USA Today*, local newspapers television, radio, or internet news sources. Whether these news sources had a greater impact on public opinion, the author does not know.

Another thing to take into account is the lack of actual knowledge as to why the government filed suit against the state. By not interviewing those who filed the suit on behalf of the federal government, there is no definitive way to know what really triggered the suit. There is no way to tell if the suit was based on boundaries between state and federal law, public opinion across the country, political motives, or any other reason causing the federal government to act. By not having this information, it is impossible to know exactly how the government reacts to media coverage.

The trend suggests that the federal suit caused an opposite effect on media coverage. When the federal government acted to suppress parts of SB1070, article tone changed. Negative tone toward SB1070 peaked above positive and neutral tones and continued to stay higher for the rest of the allocated period. The trend may suggest the opposite than the author's original H1, that the government's decision to act against SB1070 influenced the media's direction of bias.

A broader study of the media coverage would illustrate national public opinion during the introduction of SB1070 and looking at tone leading up to the point the federal government acted.

**H2: It is expected in the instance of SB 1070 that the media bias was emotionally based rather than legally based.**

The data presented from the content analysis clearly illustrates the existence of media bias. In order to trust news sources, the authors of these articles should present balanced points of view on the topic.

The number of emotional arguments outnumbers emotional terms by nearly three to one. The two papers used emotional terms 300 times more often than legal terms, supporting H2 that the media bias was emotionally based rather than legally based.

The communications directors supported H2, but to varying degrees. The two Democratic directors believed that the reporters wrote the best they could with the information given while two Republican directors believed that the reporters portrayed the law subjectively. Whether political ties played a role in the difference remains inconclusive, but all four felt that there is media bias that uses emotion rather than legality.

### **Public Affairs**

Though the content analysis and interviews support the existence of media bias but not necessarily a relationship to government action, the communications directors gave similar advice to counteract media bias.

When supplying information to the media, they all suggest, “Telling the truth is the only way to go. If a report is slanted, we can issue statements with the facts or submit an editorial.”

Another director stated, “If we ever see a story that we think is lacking a point of view or missed something, we let reporters know.”

One of the directors suggested bypassing media by using “bloggers, social media and email to communicate directly without the filter of the mainstream media.”

The four agree that new and social media provides a means to interact directly with the public without filters.

The idea of social media presents a potential research topic for the future. Will government messages reach more citizens and create an interactive relationship or will the lack of filter create less credibility?

Tawnya J. Adkins Covert of Western Illinois University and Philo C. Wasburn of Perdue University suggest a similar topic in their study (referenced in Chapter II of this study). The two

suggest that media bias not only helps the audience define opinions and represents freedom of speech, but also that the filter creates a third party validation (Adkins Covert & Wasburn, 2009).

In public relations, practitioners learn the value of third party validation through “opinion leaders.” Without opinion leaders to filter messages, how will the relationship between the government and the public change?

### **Future Research**

The reach of government and the reach of mass media expand greater than the scope of two national newspapers. Looking at coverage from other national papers, local papers, or different forms of news media will provide a deeper look at the relationship between government and media.

The SB1070 debate did not end November 1, 2010. Many researchers in other cases looked at the pattern of media coverage and media tone throughout the lifespan of the case debate. The author looked at the beginning of a debate that will change the way Arizonans feel about illegal immigration and ways to handle the issue. SB1070 altered how the media approached stories taking place in a once ambiguous state. The debate and court cases will continue for months if not years.

The author suggests that the study deserves a revisit to not only view the changes in media coverage and bias over the lifespan but also seeing government action over that time.

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## Appendix A

### *Content Analysis Protocol*

Date and Time started:

Name of Newspaper:

Article Title:

Date of Article:

Author of Article:

Number of words:

Tone of Title

Illegal Immigration: Positive, Neutral, or Negative

SB1070: Positive, Neutral, or Negative

Tone of Article

Illegal Immigration: Positive, Neutral, or Negative

SB1070: Positive, Neutral, or Negative

Arguments

Use of legal terminology? Yes or No

(Such as cases like *Chy Lung v. Freeman* or references like § 11-1051(A))

What terms were used?

Use of personal Pronouns? Yes or No

Use of emotional terms? Yes or No

(such as “strict enforcement”, “Nazi Regime”, etc.)

What terms were used?

Objective or Subjective?

Date and End Time:

## **Appendix B**

### *Interview Transcripts*

#### **Interview 1 (R)**

*What is your academic background?*

BA, Journalism and Political Science, University of Arizona

*How did you enter the government affairs field?*

I worked as a newspaper reporter and editor at the state Capitol for 5 years. Went and did campaign work last year, after the elected was offered a job as Director of Communications in the House.

*What kind of relationship do you have with reporters and editors?*

A personal one. Many know me as a friend and journalist because of my recent work in the media. This makes for a very casual relationship that has been mutually beneficial.

*Do you encounter media bias in your profession?*

Yes.

*How often?*

It's not the norm, but I would say that the national media in particular have a partisan lens. The fact that the newspaper editorial pages in Arizona are all left of center creates a significant perception problem when they are dealing with Republican lawmakers.

*What kind of affect does media bias have on the state government and on the state?*

Usually it has the opposite of what they intend it to have. Lawmakers are inclined to take the opposite approach of what the media are advocating.

*How do you attempt to counter media bias?*

Utilizing bloggers, social media and email to communicate directly without the filter of the mainstream media.

*Has new media and social media changed how you communicate messages?*

Significantly. Rather than having the media carry our message for us, we communicate it directly. I view our office here as an in-house news organization. The media is a middle man in many ways.

*Do you feel that the media presented a bias account of SB 1070 (the illegal immigration law)?*

I do. Moreover, it was highly inaccurate. But by pegging anyone who supported the law as a racist, they totally misread the public's frustration with illegal immigration in Arizona and helped give the law a 70 percent approval rating.

*Do you feel the media reported on the bill with emotional appeals or with legal arguments?*

Emotional.

## **Interview 2 (D)**

*What is your academic background?*

I have an MA in International Relations and a BA in Mass Communication and Spanish.

*How did you enter the government affairs field?*

I had a fellowship to work in another state's legislature and found that I enjoyed researching public policy. My job is two-fold. I am a director of communications and a policy advisor, so I also staff several legislative committees and draft legislation. This is my fifth year with the Arizona Legislature.

*What kind of relationship do you have with reporters and editors?*

When I first began this job we had an in-house newsroom which made communication with reporters very easy. In the past few years, now that the media is housed in an office away from the Capitol, most communication is by phone or email. I mainly work with editors by phone and email. The rapid pace of media also means that PR people in this business need to use every moment we have to communicate with a reporter or editor wisely. Editors are more likely to call to find out where a particular bill is in the legislative process in order to find out when they should send a videographer to the Capitol. Working in PR at the Capitol is definitely part being the eyes and ears on the ground.

*Do you encounter media bias in your profession?*

Yes.

*How often?*

It varies. Some media outlets are more liberal and some are more conservative. It also varies by issue.

*What kind of affect does media bias have on the state government and on the state?*

I don't think it affects government in particular, but it definitely affects citizens who hear the messages. The danger is that government officials then cite that report as fact and run with it when it may not be accurate. Since 2010, the Arizona Republic and 12 News have had a joint operation called "AZ Fact Check" which fact-checks statements by officials. It has been very useful in holding members accountable for their statements.

Here is an example:

[http://www.azcentral.com/news/election/azelections/azfactcheck/fact-summary.php?candidate\\_id=126](http://www.azcentral.com/news/election/azelections/azfactcheck/fact-summary.php?candidate_id=126)

*How do you attempt to counter media bias?*

Telling the truth is the only way to go. If a report is slanted, we can issue statements with the facts or submit an editorial.

*Has new media and social media changed how you communicate messages?*

Absolutely. I operate the caucus Facebook, Twitter and blog. Social media has made communication much faster and creates a two-way street with people who follow on the social media outlets.

*Do you feel that the media presented a bias account of SB 1070 (the illegal immigration law)?*

The local mainstream media provided an accurate account of the legislation. Reporters who came to the Capitol were always willing to hear from both sides.

*Do you feel the media reported on the bill with emotional appeals or with legal arguments?*

Both. The bill is very complex. A headline of "immigration" is a very emotional appeal in Arizona, but the reports from the local mainstream media always seemed to include a legal opinion from a legal expert.

### **Interview 3 (R)**

*What is your academic background?*

Graduated with a degree in Journalism from the University of Missouri

*How did you enter the government affairs field?*

I covered a lot of politics and political figures in my job as News Director at the PBS station in Phoenix and thought it would be an interesting next job

*What kind of relationship do you have with reporters and editors?*

Very strong---It's generally the same crowd of journalists covering the Legislature, so they know me and I know them and we work well together

*Do you encounter media bias in your profession?*

Sure

*How often?*

Nearly every day

*What kind of affect does media bias have on the state government and on the state?*

The public is not getting the whole story of what is happening in government, because it is being filtered through someone who already has a preconceived notion of what "the story" is

*How do you attempt to counter media bias?*

Give the reporters all the facts I can, and explain the "why" behind stories

*Has new media and social media changed how you communicate messages?*

Yes, multiple platforms mean quicker responses and a wider audience

*Do you feel that the media presented a bias account of SB 1070 (the illegal immigration law)?*

Certain members of the media

*Do you feel the media reported on the bill with emotional appeals or with legal arguments?*

Stories tended to be covered based on the theatre, rather than the facts. SB 1070 got its heaviest coverage during anti-1070 protests, so many times the stories were based on heat rather than light.

#### **Interview 4 (D)**

*What is your academic background?*

I have a B.A. in Journalism from Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. I have minors in Justice Studies and Spanish.

*How did you enter the government affairs field?*

Once the economy meant bad news for newspapers, I left my job as a reporter at The Arizona Republic and took a job as Communication Director for a Congressional campaign in Arizona. Once the campaign ended, I started my current job.

*What kind of relationship do you have with reporters and editors?*

I have excellent professional relationships with reporters and editors. In fact, most of them I used to work with when I was a reporter.

*Do you encounter media bias in your profession?*

As a former reporter, I am very familiar with a journalist's job to report the news. I know they are doing their best to be fair in their reporting and anything that is perceived as bias is usually not intentional. If we ever see a story that we think is lacking a point of view or missed something, we let reporters know. When it comes to opinion columns/editorials, that's a different story altogether.

*How often?*

I would say talking to reporters about something we feel is lacking or missed would be maybe once or twice a month.

*What kind of affect does media bias have on the state government and on the state?*

When Republicans control all of state government, most of the time stories involve what they are doing since they are the majority. That coverage can be good and bad depending on the reader's perspective.

*Has new media and social media changed how you communicate messages?*

Yes. This is one of our priorities in getting messages out.

*Do you feel that the media presented a bias account of SB 1070 (the illegal immigration law)?*

I think that they could have done a better job at making the public aware that most of the law didn't take effect due to the court's action.

*Do you feel the media reported on the bill with emotional appeals or with legal arguments?*

I think the media reported on the bill with the information they had, which they likely gathered from multiple sources, including attorneys, judges, human rights activists, lawmakers, other experts and people who will be affected by the law.