

IMMIGRATION AND EDITORIAL PAGE POLICY:
A CASE STUDY OF THE DALLAS
MORNING NEWS

by

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ABSTRACT

IMMIGRATION AND EDITORIAL PAGE POLICY:

A CASE STUDY OF THE DALLAS

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Newspaper editorial pages play a crucial role in democratic society, serving as forums for informed debate. On major issues such as immigration, many factors are at play when members of an editorial board sit down together to shape the institutional voice of their newspaper. Using the explanatory case study method, the author directly observes editorial board deliberations at the *Dallas Morning News*, and sheds light on the influences that affect those writers and editors before the paper publishes its formal positions. The thesis finds that many influences exist beyond news judgment. Those influences range from intra-group dynamics and corporate management, to inequality

among interest groups and the privileged role that business plays in the policy-making process. Editorial boards utilizing their agenda-setting role must weigh all those factors. Then they must provide a reasoned editorial that will engage readers and spark further debate.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 History

For centuries, the United States has opened its doors to people from other nations, but the constant question of how wide to open those doors vexes everyone from national policymakers and immigration officials to the media and everyday citizens.

The issue currently centers on the estimated 500,000 undocumented immigrants who enter the United States each year (Passel 2006). The total number of undocumented immigrants – or illegal aliens, depending on one’s perspective – now residing in the country stands at twelve million, according to generally accepted estimates (Passel 2006). With more undocumented immigrants entering each year, the issue has reached a boiling point within certain segments of society.

In Congress, debate alternates between xenophobia and the notion that the United States should welcome those in search of a job and a better life. The debate also alternates between the need for economic security among United States citizens to the need among businesses for workers to fill unwanted or low-paying jobs that others may not take. Commentators such as Lou Dobbs on CNN and conservative politicians such as Republican Congressman Tom Tancredo of Colorado consistently raise the specter of an unabated flow of migrants taking jobs and participating in publicly-funded programs

without any benefit to their adopted country. Others argue that immigration and the flow of undocumented immigrants, particularly from Mexico, helps the United States and its economy. According to Rivera-Batiz (2000), “Mexican illegal workers, both men and women, come to the US in search of employment opportunities. The underemployment and low pay they face means they are willing to take jobs with pay and working conditions that very few American workers would take” (494).

With all sides of the debate presenting forceful arguments, the choice of whether to accept immigrants resonates loudly with a divided American public. There may be new momentum for some resolution after the November 2006 elections. Exit polls found that 57 percent of voters favored creation of a program to allow immigrants to continue working in the United States and eventually apply for citizenship (“Border is Being Secured,” 2006, 24A). Ultimately, the debate leads to the question of how open United States society should be. As if to illustrate the complex, back-and-forth nature of the debate, Congress has alternated between attempts to tackle the issue head-on and, in the end, recently passing a bill that does little more than authorize construction of a 700-mile barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border. President George W. Bush signed the bill in late October 2006. Critics argue that it does nothing to address the question of what to do with the twelve million undocumented immigrants already in the country or how they can eventually become legal residents or citizens.

1.1.1 Past Immigration Legislation

Policymakers have made attempts at comprehensive immigration reform in the past, including the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, California’s

Proposition 187 in 1994 and the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 extended the promise of amnesty to some undocumented immigrants who had been in the country for at least four years, but it also established new, rigorous penalties for employers who hired undocumented workers (Rivera-Batiz 2000). Those penalties have seldom been enforced, further heightening the current debate about the apparent need to enforce existing immigration laws (Pagan 1998).

Proposition 187, crafted during a period of anti-immigrant fervor in California, sought to limit undocumented immigrants' access to public programs (Newton 2000). Courts later struck down most provisions of Proposition 187 (Barkan 2003). Now, similar restrictions and penalties are being discussed, along with the possibility of granting citizenship to millions of people already living in the United States. So far, no clear picture has emerged on how to balance the needs of millions of foreign-born workers against the demands of an electorate that is growing increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress toward a solution (Lelyveld 2006).

1.2 Role of Media

As the immigration debate has grown, so has attention paid to it by newspapers, television news outlets, talk shows and even Internet journalists and bloggers. The issue has many news angles. With constant developments and debate in Congress, the issue of immigration reform requires regular monitoring and updates on every new development. As an arbiter of national discourse, media outlets provide a forum for

topics like immigration that concern politicians and everyday people alike. Immigration is a quintessential newsworthy topic.

It is under that umbrella that this thesis will attempt to shed light on questions about how media cover an issue like immigration. It will look at the *Dallas Morning News* editorial board, in particular. Because the research for this thesis involves extensive observation of the editorial board's deliberations, it will also attempt to draw parallels between the formation of an editorial board's stance on immigration with Lindblom and Woodhouse's (1993) description of the policy-making process.

This thesis contributes to a growing body of research regarding the role of newspaper editorial boards on topics of interest and importance. It is innovative in that it provides an unprecedented level of access to editorial deliberations of the twelve-person editorial board at one of the nation's largest newspapers. The newspaper has a daily circulation of about 400,000, and it has a Sunday circulation of about 600,000. The editorial board, with members from a variety of backgrounds and political leanings, can be viewed as a microcosm of North Texas.

1.2.1 Media Portrayals of Immigrants

To date, most research into the role of media in immigration has been limited to analyses of how immigrants are portrayed in news accounts and how media coverage affects public attitudes about immigrants. In one study of British attitudes toward immigration, "[t]he media (both broadcast and print) were confirmed by the survey as a powerful influence on people's attitudes" (Saggar 2003, 184). Those analyses do not

delve into the dynamics of forming an editorial opinion about such a hot-button topic, making the editorial formation question an area ripe for study.

In the United States, attention has focused on whether the media portray immigrant groups accurately. According to Burns and Gimpel (2000), “[t]he media is a major source of information about ethnic groups, from coverage of criminal conduct where black and Latino faces are often shown in connection with arrests to stories about the use of welfare and social security benefits by immigrants” (207). Burns and Gimpel (2000) went on to say how the immigration debate surrounding Proposition 187 focused on the use of public benefits, and that “[t]he association of immigrants with welfare use and the connection between welfare use and negative racial stereotypes underscore how immigration can easily be translated into a racial issue with redistributive undertones” (207).

In other examples, journalism researchers have shown how reporters can easily fall into the trap of reporting stories about neighborhoods “in transition,” code for areas with growing immigrant communities. For example, Millman (1999) showed that reporter Elsa Arnett of the Knight Ridder chain of newspapers wrote stories about immigrant communities only from the perspective of the longtime residents who chose to flee their town in the face of changing demographics. “To balance such sentiments, Arnett could have found out – as I did in researching my book – that the town’s middle class is now much richer and better educated, on average, than it was before the town emerged as a haven for Taiwanese-born Americans” (62). Those pitfalls illustrate the difficult role the media have in fairly portraying an issue as complex as immigration.

1.3 Economic Impact of Immigration

What is the economic impact of immigration? While the question may seem straightforward, the issue of whether undocumented immigrants pose a free-rider problem to society is much more difficult to quantify. In many cases, the answer comes down to dueling statistics and how experts decide to measure costs and benefits. Costs can be readily calculated for everything from emergency room visits for uninsured immigrants to the cost of jailing immigrants who commit crimes, down to the cost to educate children of immigrants (Weintraub 1984). Benefits of immigration, on the other hand, can be more difficult to measure. Businesses that employ undocumented workers gain financially by hiring workers at lower wages. While many of those workers skirt income tax laws by taking their pay in cash, they pay a substantial share of their income in indirect taxes in the form of sales taxes and property taxes included in rents (Weintraub 1984).

As with many cost-benefit analyses, the answer to the question of immigrants' direct and indirect costs depend on the variables included in the study. Often the results are inconclusive. Some research indicates that people who come to the United States to work usually assimilate into the country and reach income levels of natives within three to five years (Simon 1984). In addition, undocumented workers and immigrants were found to use fewer social services than natives after living in the United States for twelve years (Simon 1984). But another report (DeMott 1994) written in the midst of the debate over Proposition 187 in California quoted state officials there saying that undocumented immigrants consume \$2.4 billion in services and pay \$730 million in

taxes. With dueling analyses, Porter (2006) argues, “[e]ven economists striving hardest to find evidence of immigration’s effect on domestic workers are finding that, at most, the surge of illegal immigrants probably had only a small impact on the wages of the least-educated Americans...” (sec. 8, p. 3).

Researchers have devoted more attention to immigrants’ perceived effects on citizens’ economic self-interest. Once again, attempts to quantify the effects of immigration prove elusive. As Citrin et al. (1997) point out, “[h]istorical research indicates that surges in anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States have followed sharp economic downturns, partly in response to the tendency of politicians and labor unions to blame foreign workers for unemployment and downward pressure on wages” (859). Taking that research a step further, Burns and Gimpel (2000) showed that pessimism about the national economy had a more dramatic effect on attitudes about immigration than did assessments of personal economic conditions.

1.4 Public Opinion and Immigration

In studying how the policy formation process relates to public opinion and editorial pages, it is beneficial to view undocumented immigrants with Schneider and Ingram’s *Policy Design for Democracy* (1997). The authors categorize groups competing against each other in the policy formation process with one of four descriptions: *advantaged*, *contenders*, *dependents* or *deviants*. Those descriptions, also called social constructs of target populations, can help researchers understand how public opinion is formed during the debate on the role of immigrants in today’s society.

The advantaged target population, which could include big business and the middle class, has a privileged position in the policy-making process. According to Schneider and Ingram, bestowing policy benefits to the advantaged target population can produce “substantial political payoffs” to policymakers (113). Contenders, described by the authors as powerful but negatively viewed groups, pose a greater policy-making challenge. Some examples of contenders include corporations, the rich and defense contractors. According to the authors, contenders “are only occasionally the recipients of directly beneficial policy, because to serve their interests too blatantly is to risk countervailing mobilization and resistance from the general public” (117).

Therefore, undocumented immigrants will not be considered as advantaged or contenders in the policy formation process. Those categories indicate groups with standing in the policy formation process.

Instead, undocumented immigrants are either dependents or, at the extreme, deviants. Dependent target groups, according to Schneider and Ingram (1997), “have less political power than advantaged groups and are more positively constructed than deviants. Their constructions, however, usually emphasize their helplessness and neediness” (123).

The final target group in Schneider and Ingram’s social construction framework is the deviant group, which often is targeted by policy makers for punishment. As Schneider and Ingram explain, targeting deviants is “a means for displacing blame onto others and creating opportunities for political gain” (120). Depending on momentum in

Congress, undocumented immigrants can be viewed as deviants if policy makers see the opportunity for political gain by targeting immigrants for policy burdens.

In general, however, the policy process and the public tend to view immigrants as dependents. Schneider and Ingram (1997) characterize dependents as actors in the political system that deserve benefits on occasion, but who have little political standing to fight for those benefits. Instead, policymakers tend to bestow benefits on groups like immigrants only when it is politically necessary. Researchers should view the results of recent public opinion studies with that perspective.

Immigrants' status in the process can and does change with time. Consider that at one point this year Congress considered making it a felony for anyone to be in this country without permission or proper documentation (Middlestadt 2006). Such a move would have shifted undocumented immigrants into the deviant category of the policy formation process. That would have made it much more difficult for politicians to bestow any benefits on them during the give-and-take of policy formation.

Applying Schneider and Ingram's (1997) framework to the editorial board and editorial writers of the *Morning News*, one can argue that they are part of the political process, as well. Editorial boards, along with interest groups, have the ability to monitor the Congressional debates on immigration and point out degenerative policy designs, such as the attempt to make felons of illegal immigrants. With their policy platform, editorial boards have the ability to either exacerbate degenerative policy making by helping to target immigrants, or they can break through the framing dynamics of an issue as complex as immigration and publicly challenge lawmakers who attempt to

target immigrants unfairly. As *Morning News* editorial writer Bill McKenzie said, “people who cover politics and people who are in politics, they’re all in the same arena. They just play different roles. I think that’s one reason why they actually kind of like each other at some level. They understand each other” (2006).

Editorial boards can be considered to be in either the advantaged group or the contender group. Because of their close alignment with decision makers, one can argue that editorial boards are part of the advantaged target group. They have a privileged position in the policy-making process. While they don’t often lobby for direct benefits to themselves, they have a large amount of standing to advocate for an array of interest groups or target populations, or for policies that they believe will have some overall benefit.

1.4.1 Public Opinion Research

Research into the reasons that the public opposes an increase in the number of undocumented immigrants has been plentiful. Investigators have studied the relationship between support for immigration and political affiliation; race and ethnicity; national economic conditions; personal economic conditions; geographic location; and perceived threats to the country’s cultural identity.

In general researchers have found that acceptance of higher levels of immigration increased as income and education levels increased (Citrin et al. 1997; and Espenshade and Hempstead 1996). They also have found that African-Americans have a higher level of support for undocumented immigrants, even when their own economic conditions could be perceived as being threatened (Diamond 1998).

Researchers also have found that classifying oneself as conservative or liberal is a predictive factor for support of immigration, but political party affiliation alone is not a predictive factor (Citrin, Reingold and Green 1990). But researchers also have found that reducing the flow of immigrants gained support from people who perceived the newcomers as threats to the country's culture (Chandler and Tsai 2001).

Studies also showed that where one lives in the United States has a strong effect on support for undocumented immigrants, with higher support among Anglos and others who live near high concentrations of undocumented immigrants, and with less support in rural areas (Espenshade and Hempstead 1996).

Public opinion varies dramatically, given the economic and political variables considered, as well as the subjects studied. The research also comes with a warning for politicians, policymakers and others trying to predict public opinion on an issue as challenging as immigration: Public opinion can change noticeably in a relatively short time. As Espenshade and Hempstead (1996) argue, "restrictionist sentiment is often subject to sharp vicissitudes and the proportion of U.S. respondents who feel that levels of immigration should be reduced can change abruptly in the course of a few years" (557).

1.4.2 Implications

As policy makers press forward, they must also consider the ballot box. Hundreds of thousands of supporters of immigrant rights marched in a number of cities nationwide in spring 2006, carrying the threat to register voters and make their voices heard at the ballot box (Jeffers 2006). It is that type of popular sentiment that media

outlets have attempted to tap as they also weigh the policy implications of restrictions on the flow of undocumented immigrants. Newspaper editorial boards, no stranger to politics and the policy formation process themselves, have an especially challenging task. They must stake out a public position on a difficult topic such as immigration at a time when Congress found it more expedient to scuttle a comprehensive immigration bill before adjourning for the fall 2006 mid-term elections.

At the *Morning News*, the board must write editorials based not only on public opinion, economic conditions and history, but also based on the opinions of the twelve-member editorial board, the editorial page editor and possibly even top managers at the newspaper. As it advances the issue in the public sphere, the editorial board can accomplish its goal of providing a place for reasoned debate, even on issues as complex and sensitive as immigration.

As the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States grows, so does the debate on immigration reform. Recent history provides several examples of immigration policies, each with its own shortcomings. Policy makers and interest groups try to define the issue in terms of cost-benefit analyses, but with little effect. And public opinion on immigration varies widely depending on many variables. In this atmosphere, the media attempt to cover all sides of the issue and provide readers and viewers with the information they need to formulate their own opinions about immigration policy.

This thesis explores the one area of media where writers and editors are not constrained by the professional goal of objectivity: the newspaper editorial page. This

thesis uses the case study model to explore the *editorial policy formation process* at the *Dallas Morning News*. The thesis illustrates how writers and editors deal with and overcome some of the same obstacles as policy makers while deciding what editorial stance to take on immigration.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout their history, newspaper editorial pages have assumed various roles and held various identities. To some observers, editorial pages resemble “ivory towers” where opinions come down daily from on high. But by taking stands on issues and political candidates, the newspaper’s editorial pages provide a forum found virtually nowhere else – a forum for reasoned debate on the day’s issues. That traditional role of editorial pages has evolved in the past few decades, even while today’s marketplace of ideas grows more crowded with the Internet and bloggers. Faced with that competition, editorial pages must continue to take reasoned, informative stands on the issues that concern their readers. If the editorials serve their purpose, they will most certainly stand the test in the increasingly crowded media marketplace. Most importantly, the public benefits. According to Hynds (1994), “[e]ditors have long believed that these [editorial] pages can create a public forum through which the democratic system can work more effectively” (573).

This chapter explains the changing nature of editorial pages, which have assumed a more active role in policy making since the 1970s. Editorial pages may play a large role in shaping public opinion and the opinions of policy makers on various issues, including immigration. This chapter will show that media, and editorial pages in

particular, have the ability to expand the marketplace of ideas when they focus intently on a subject and provide a forum for groups that may otherwise be shut out of the policy formation process.

2.1 History of Editorial Pages

Like their newsroom counterparts, editorial page staffs showed substantial growth in the middle decades of the last century. In 1937, editorial page staffs at 65 newspapers nationwide employed, on average, fewer than three writers. By 1950, that number had increased to an average of four editorial page writers per publication (Kriehbaum 1950). A half century later, those figures appear woefully inadequate at major daily newspapers. The *Morning News*, for example, employs twelve writers, editors and page designers to publish two pages daily and a six-page section on Sunday. Anecdotal evidence also shows that salaries, like staff sizes, have grown. Thirty-five years ago, a “well-rewarded” editorial writer could expect to receive \$16,751 a year in salary (Wilhoit and Drew 1973, 640). Editorial writers at the *Morning News* currently earn an average \$70,000 annual salary (Willey 2006).

2.1.1 Changing Role of Editorial Pages

While the editorial page staffs have grown over the years, so has their mission. As recently as 1978, only 38 percent of editorial writers said that their primary function was to express a viewpoint (Hynds and Martin 1978). By the mid-1980s, the editorial page at the *Morning News* had shifted from a more ideological stance that reflected the mindset of local conservative politicians to an educational and problem-solving role (Barta 2006).

In another survey conducted in 1992, editorial page editors said they held an enthusiastic vision of their professional future. They also stated that, with the addition of specific features to make the pages more readable, editorial pages would remain a vital part of daily newspapers (Hynds 1994). That evolution continues today, with the advent of features including editorial page blogs by the *Morning News* and other newspapers, as well as live podcasting of interviews conducted by the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* editorial board.

Editorial writers take their job and their mission seriously. They also take great pride in their chosen profession. According to one early 1970s survey more interesting as a curiosity than for current relevance, editorial writers considered their job to be a very prestigious occupation (Wilhoit and Drew 1973). In the survey, editorial writers ranked very few professions above their own: Supreme Court justice, presidential cabinet member, novelist, mayor of a large city, nuclear physicist, state governor, representative in Congress and physician. Jobs that ranked lower than editorial writer, according to those editorial writers surveyed: college professor, lawyer, banker, large factory owners, psychologist and dentist.

The survey illustrates the seriousness with which those who craft a newspaper's institutional voice approach their job. But ultimately, editorial writers also have the understanding that the newspaper's voice is not just their voice. As Hynds and Martin (1978) point out, the editorial page also "is the voice of the editor, publisher, and owner seeking to inform, influence, stimulate and motivate readers concerning important issues" (776).

2.2 Agenda Setting in Media

Media, in deciding what issues to cover and how to cover them, have significant influence over what issues take center stage in political debates. That ability has been a productive area for communications researchers for decades. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), media “play an important part in shaping political reality” (176). Writers, editors and broadcasters are able to shape political reality by the placement of stories in the paper or on a broadcast. They also shape reality by the content of their work (McCombs and Shaw 1972). By extension, newspaper editorial boards also have great potential to shape political reality, and their role is worth exploration. With the publication of two to three editorials daily, editorial boards have great potential for shaping political, social and cultural discussions in what is known as an *agenda-setting* role.

The *Morning News* editorial board’s consistent use of its space to frame the immigration debate for the North Texas congressional delegation presents area useful context in which to explore the agenda-setting role. The newspaper regularly has devoted editorial space in 2006 to urge Congress to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill. The newspaper also helped set the agenda on immigration by forging an unusual alliance with Texas business leaders and publishing a letter urging lawmakers to pass a comprehensive reform bill (“Pass Immigration Reform,” 2006, 13A).

The editorial board also extended its agenda-setting role to several other issues, further documenting of the board’s attempts to call out policy makers and influence them directly. One current example is the unusual alliance between the editorial pages

of the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* in urging support for a regional mass transit network. Their efforts were first outlined in a 2003 editorial. In the editorial, the paper states that the two papers' editorial boards "have put their mortal competition in abeyance and temporarily joined forces to advance a noble cause in which both fervently believe: the creation of a unified, all-encompassing public transit agency" ("The Road Less Traveled," 2003, 2H). Those efforts led the newspapers to invite about 500 regional leaders to a 2003 summit, where they were asked by the editorial boards to sign pledges supporting a regional transit network. Almost half of them signed the pledge (Hartzel 2003).

The mass transit efforts continue. No decisions have been made about a regional transit network, but the editorial boards continue to closely monitor the progress of policy makers. Those policy makers, including State Representative Fred Hill of Richardson, explicitly acknowledge the impact the two editorial boards had on bringing the issue to the fore and keeping it in the public view (Hill 2006). Several years later, the editorial boards of both newspapers still press the issue with new editorials. They even publish names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of key local lawmakers in the transit debate urging readers to contact those lawmakers to show their support for a regional rail network ("Stay on Track," 2005, 28A). A summer 2006 survey, paid for by the regional transit agencies, found broad public support for mass transit. The survey found that 63 percent of registered voters in eight counties would support increased taxes for a regional rail network (Hartzel 2006).

Substantial attention has been given to the causal relationship between media coverage and topics to which politicians and policy makers give additional weight. In other words, the relationship that exists between the media agenda and the political agenda. While some ties between media and political agendas are evident, other research makes the case that direct links are often difficult to determine. A review of 19 studies of mass media's impact on the political agenda by Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) found mixed results. Almost half of the studies established a strong media impact on the political agenda, four reported "considerable" impacts, and seven others reported weak or no impacts. On the other hand, McCombs (2005) states in his overview of the agenda-setting role of media that "[j]ournalism and public opinion are inextricably intertwined" (552).

A topic on the media's agenda more easily translates into a topic on the political agenda when it becomes a crisis. Crises that serve as "focusing events" help propel issues into the public and political consciousness, but as Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) state, "[o]f course, journalists cannot turn every event into a crisis" (93). Crises help forge a common perception of an issue. Sometimes media outlets choose to inject drama into their news product to generate a sense of urgency. With immigration, the coverage of an issue as a crisis can be seen with CNN's daily "Broken Borders" segments, which feature stories about the negative effects of immigration or the lack of consensus in Congress to pass a comprehensive immigration reform bill. As McCombs (2005) explained, "[t]he media not only can be successful in telling us *what to think about*, they also can be successful in telling us *how to think about it*" (546).

Although they frequently have an adversarial role with politicians and public figures, media outlets play an integral role in the political process. By defining what makes a news story and an editorial, media have the ability to set the political agenda. That strengthens the connection between media and politicians, and even formalizes it. As Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) note, “[i]n advanced industrial democracies, media are part of politics, and they are the marketplace/arena in which political ideas and proposals are launched, tested, scrutinized and contested” (100).

Without the perception of a crisis, the ability of media to set the political agenda becomes more difficult. With their blend of news and opinion, editorial boards provide a natural way to bridge the media’s agenda-setting role with policy makers’ agenda-setting role. But whether it is editorial board members or other media members, all reporters and editors have an ethical responsibility to frame issues accurately and advance the public debate, hopefully without injecting bias. As McCombs (2005) put it, “[s]etting the agenda is an awesome responsibility” (556).

Newsrooms and editorial boards offer a system of checks and balances to reduce the possibility of bias or undue influence by a single writer or group of writers. The checks and balances occur in all roles, including agenda setting. Each idea for an editorial is discussed by the full editorial board, and it must be approved by an assistant editor or the editorial page editor. Above the editorial page editor are the publisher and newspaper management, who can and do use their own news judgment when the situation warrants it.

2.2.1 *San Antonio Light* Case Study

Newspapers and editorial boards can influence the political process when they marshal their resources to focus on a particular topic, thereby transferring a media agenda to the political agenda (Brewer and McCombs 1996). One notable example comes from the now-defunct *San Antonio Light*, which in its first Sunday edition of 1992 set out “The *Light*’s 1992 Agenda – For the Children” (Brewer and McCombs 1996). The paper announced on its editorial page that it would give extensive attention to coverage of issues affecting children. The paper coupled its newsroom efforts with its editorial page staff to increase attention paid to issues such as youth crime, funding for job training and funding for parks and recreation programs. The *Light* published 2,669 items about children’s issues in that year, just before the paper ceased publication in January 1993. The amount of coverage, Brewer and McCombs (1996) explained, was remarkable: “Although all newspapers try to stimulate public opinion with their editorial page, few systematically formulate such a highly focused editorial agenda and then follow through with extensive news coverage. The *San Antonio Light* did” (7).

2.2.1.1 Policy Agenda Effect

The strategy of coupling the *Light*’s newsroom with the editorial page staff, according to Brewer and McCombs (1996), “recognized both the limitations of direct persuasion through editorials and the substantial agenda-setting effects of continuing news coverage” (7). With such a massive effort, the *Light* was able to transform its own agenda into something even stronger than just a political agenda. It was able to establish a *policy agenda*, which resulted in the adoption of new city policies and funding

priorities. Studies showed that the city of San Antonio, in its first full budget cycle after the *Light's* series, increased funding for youth job training and youth parks and recreation programs by 61 percent and 55 percent, respectively. Other youth programs also received substantial increases (Brewer and McCombs 1996).

2.2.2 Changing Demographics, Changing Editorial Boards

With media agendas and political agendas constantly evolving, editorial boards must also evolve to meet the demands of a diverse core of readers. In 1950, a survey of the backgrounds of editorial writers found that virtually all were college graduates and experienced reporters, which made them “capable newspapermen” (Kriegbaum 1950, 25). That gender-specific phrase was, for the time, fairly accurate. By 1973, women made up only 2.4 percent of the 341 editorial writers surveyed, and the median age on editorial boards was 48.4 years. Both figures were similar to findings from a 1963 survey of editorial writers (Wilhoit and Drew 1973). Today, editorial writers need to reflect the diversity of the communities they cover, particularly to resonate with readers on issues such as immigration reform. Newsroom diversity has improved, and along with it the proportion of minorities on editorial boards also appears to be increasing. An informal count by the National Conference of Editorial Writers identified about 80 minority editorial page professionals among its members in 2002, but there is more room for improvement (Prince 2002). The *Morning News* features a diverse editorial board, with Assistant Editorial Page Editor Mike Hashimoto, who is Japanese-American; Editorial Writer/Columnist Macarena Hernández, who is Latina; and Editorial Writer Jim Mitchell, who is African-American.

2.2.2.1 Diversity of Editorial Page Opinions and Ideas

Diversity can play a crucial role in the formulation of editorial positions on topics such as immigration. As McCombs (1992) puts it: “Who sets the news media’s agenda?” (818). News judgment, as defined by the stories and editorials chosen for reporting and publishing, has several influences. Among them is intermedia agenda setting, or the consultation of other media as a resource. Writers routinely cite the works of other editorial boards and professional journals. But according to McCombs (1992), the most profound effects come from reporters and editors’ college experiences and their daily experiences on the job. “These attitudes and behaviors are the ultimate filters shaping the nature of the news agenda” (817). With examples of inaccurate media portrayals of immigrants and the communities where they live, the need is crucial for a balanced approach on stories and editorials. Asked Millman (2005): “Why do so many journalists play immigration as a here comes trouble story?” (61).

2.2.3 Editorial Policy Formation

Even with years of news experience and news judgment, how does a dynamic editorial board of twelve staffers, all with varying backgrounds and opinions, come to agree on what to say in an editorial? What is the relationship between the agenda-setting positions that the board takes and what can be called the editorial policy formation process?

While a substantial body of research exists on the impact of editorials once they are published, little research has been done on the interplay that precedes a formal editorial page position on a selected topic. Often, an editorial’s tone can be traced to

newspaper staffers who sit in the room and hash out their opinions. Usually, that debate occurs in a professional manner, but sometimes it involves a more heated exchange. As one editorial board veteran (Burgard 2003) put it, “[m]ore than two decades on editorial boards have demonstrated to me that the structure of relationships between the editorial page and publishers differs across the country. Indeed, personal chemistry often can determine how issues get decided on the editorial page” (61).

At many papers, including the *Morning News*, the editorial page editor has the freedom to set the newspaper’s editorial agenda. But many other factors go into that agenda-setting process before a 350-word editorial hits the newsstand.

By setting their own agenda and focusing on an issue, newspaper editorial pages can change the policy-making process. They can give a voice to groups or policy goals that had been previously ignored by those with decision-making power. By focusing their attention, they can force policy makers to become more responsive. Because of that prominent role in the policy debate, it becomes important to understand how those on an editorial board develop the newspaper’s policy position on major issues such as immigration.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This thesis uses an explanatory case study model to explore the deliberative process of the *Dallas Morning News* editorial board. The case study focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the issue of immigration. While a substantial body of research has been published about the effect that editorials have on the political process and setting political agendas, little research exists on the editorial policy formation process of a major daily newspaper's editorial board. By studying the *Morning News* editorial board in depth, this thesis shows that editorial writing often goes beyond simple news judgment. This thesis demystifies the process that the newspaper uses to formulate its institutional voice and shows how editorial boards reach agreement or consensus on an editorial stance taken. This case study delves into the editorial board members' interactions and board members' ability to persuade their colleagues to agree to take a stand on a particular issue.

The case study attempts to address several research questions about editorial page policy: What factors must an editorial board consider other than news value? What role does newspaper management play? What groups hold the most sway in the editorial formation process? What role does the editorial page editor have over the editorial writers who work for her? Taking all those questions into account, this case

study attempts to answer the overarching question “How is the *Dallas Morning News* editorial page agenda determined?”

Several research hypotheses were formed before the study began. First, that the editorial page editor holds a large amount of control over the editorial process. Second, that business interests hold a privileged role in the editorial process. And third, that upper levels of newspaper management hold a large amount of discretion in what appears in daily editorials.

In attempting to test those hypotheses, this study goes beyond the immigration issue. Other issues of interest and debate at the *Morning News* editorial page are the large number of political candidate recommendations in the 2006 races for Congress and the Texas Legislature, business-oriented issues and community-interest editorials on major public works projects deemed vital to the Dallas area. Exploration of those subjects allows parallels to be drawn with the policy formation process described in *The Policy-Making Process* by Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993). With exclusive access to the editorial board’s deliberative process, this thesis sheds light on the world of media decision-making that addresses not only news judgment and what makes for a good editorial, but also what an editorial should say.

3.1 Research Design

The thesis design employs the case study method, and it uses direct observation and interviews of its subject, current and past members of the *Morning News* editorial board. The newspaper granted access to the researcher to attend the editorial board’s twice-weekly staff meetings from Aug. 14, 2006 to Oct. 11, 2006. Those meetings were

where most decisions were made about what editorials ran, when they ran and what they said.

The researcher, who has worked as a reporter for the *Morning News* for fifteen years, obtained permission from the editorial page editor to observe the editorial board discussions. As a reporter, the researcher has worked in the past with the editorial page editor and other current and former members of the editorial board. That familiarity made it easier for the subjects to trust the researcher and give him permission to observe the board meetings. As a *Morning News* employee, the researcher also had greater access to subjects, which made scheduling interviews easier.

As a *Morning News* employee, the researcher also has access to the newspaper's back copies, or morgue files. Historical research was aided by the use of and extensive familiarity with the newspaper's electronic databases. Those databases, which are available to the public for a fee, allow searching of almost all back copies from 1885 to the present, except for a few years in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to the *Morning News* web site, those years are not available at the *Morning News* or most other papers because of freelancer copyright issues at the national level.

The case study requires University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board approval. That approval comes with requirements for formal consent from each current or former board member observed or interviewed. The IRB protocol limited the pool of subjects to fifteen. It would have been preferable to have a larger number of subjects, to expand the range of interview subjects. But the fifteen-person subject pool offers enough flexibility to observe all twelve current board members and interview

three past board members. The researcher offered anonymity to each subject, but all signed waivers allowing their names to be used in this study.

The research design poses some key questions for a *Morning News* employee attempting to do an objective analysis of colleagues in another part of the same newspaper. One of the editorial board members hired the researcher for his first job at the paper, and several of the editorial board members previously supervised the researcher. In addition, the Institutional Review Board protocol requires the researcher to submit his work to each of the subjects for comments and revisions. Case study subjects did not request substantial revisions. However, the review process and potential for others in newspaper management to read the case study results before their completion arguably could color the researcher's analysis. But in providing a balanced view of the editorial board, the researcher draws upon his fifteen years' experience in providing balanced coverage of major news events. If the researcher's ties to the *Morning News* play any role, they may lead the researcher to consider and present as much evidence of competing or mitigating viewpoints on the role of newspaper management in the editorial process before reaching conclusions.

The editorial board has twelve members: *Morning News* Vice President and Editorial Page Editor Keven Willey; Deputy Editorial Page Editor Sharon Grigsby; Assistant Editorial Page Editor Mike Hashimoto; Assistant Editorial Page Editor for Suburbs Michael Landauer; editorial writer/columnists Rod Dreher, Macarena Hernández and Bill McKenzie; editorial writers Rodger Jones, Jim Mitchell and Colleen

McCain Nelson; and senior designers Noel Gross and Sarah Hanan. Hanan left the *Morning News* toward the end of the case study observation period.

Interviews were conducted with selected editorial writers, including editorial page editor Keven Willey and lead immigration writer Bill McKenzie, as well as several other current board members. In addition, former editorial board members also were interviewed, including former editorial page editor Rena Pederson; former op-ed and Viewpoints editor and longtime board member Carolyn Barta; and twenty-one-year editorial board veteran Hank Tatum, who is now retired. Table 3.1 indicates which individuals were observed in meetings and which were interviewed.

Table 3.1. Current and Former *Dallas Morning News* Employees Who Participated as Research Subjects

Research Subject	Title	Observed, Interviewed or Both
Keven Willey	Vice President and Editorial Page Editor	Both
Sharon Grigsby	Deputy Editorial Page Editor	Observed
Mike Hashimoto	Assistant Editorial Page Editor	Observed
Michael Landauer	Assistant Editorial Page Editor for Suburbs	Both
Rod Dreher	Editorial Writer/Columnist	Observed
Noel Gross	Senior Designer	Observed
Sarah Hanan	Senior Designer	Observed
Macarena Hernández	Editorial Writer/Columnist	Observed
Rodger Jones	Editorial Writer	Both
Colleen McCain-Nelson	Editorial Writer	Observed
Bill McKenzie	Editorial Writer/Columnist	Both
Jim Mitchell	Editorial Writer	Both
Carolyn Barta	Former Op-ed//Viewpoints Editor	Interviewed
Rena Pederson	Former Vice President and Editorial Page Editor	Interviewed
Hank Tatum	Former Editorial Writer	Interviewed

All editorial board discussions and one-on-one interviews were recorded and later transcribed to ensure accuracy. Use of a formal interview coding process was considered, but the investigation instead relied on notations on detailed transcriptions.

In subsequent chapters of the thesis, quotes from personal interviews are cited in author-date parenthetical references. Quotes from and paraphrases of editorial board discussions are noted in square brackets, with the source of the quote and the abbreviation *obsv.* (for *observation*), along with the date of the editorial board meeting. For example: [Dreher, *obsv.*, Aug. 14, 2006].

The editorial board holds its staff meetings at 9 a.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays. Those meetings generally last about an hour. The longest meeting observed lasted one hour and thirty nine minutes. The observer attended all regularly scheduled editorial meetings between Aug. 14 and Oct. 11, 2006, for a total of seventeen meetings observed and about nineteen hours of deliberations. The researcher missed one irregularly scheduled meeting of the editorial board, on the afternoon of Sept. 6, 2006. Meetings observed and individuals present at those meetings are indicated in Table 3.2.

Consistent with the observational case study method, the researcher did not participate in the discussions. The research design focuses on both the editorial page and the Viewpoints page. As with most newspapers, the *Morning News* also publishes a companion Viewpoints or op-ed page beside its editorial page. It features columns from editorial board members, community leaders and nationally syndicated opinion writers.

Table 3.2. *Dallas Morning News* Editorial Board Meetings Observed and Members Present, by Meeting Date

Date	Members Present
Aug. 14	Willey, Landauer, McKenzie, Hanan, Mitchell, Dreher, Gross, Jones, Hashimoto, McCain-Nelson
Aug. 16	Willey, Landauer, McKenzie, Hernández, McCain-Nelson, Mitchell, Hanan, Gross, Jones, Hashimoto, Dreher
Aug. 21	Grigsby, Landauer, McKenzie, Hanan, Hernández, Mitchell, McCain-Nelson, Gross, Jones, Hashimoto, Dreher
Aug. 23	Grigsby, McKenzie, Hanan, Mitchell, McCain-Nelson, Jones, Hashimoto, Dreher
Aug. 28	Willey, Landauer, Dreher, Hernández, Mitchell, McCain-Nelson, Gross, Jones, Hashimoto, Grigsby
Aug. 30	Grigsby, Landauer, McCain-Nelson, Hernández, Mitchell, Jones, Dreher
Sept. 5	Grigsby, Landauer, McCain-Nelson, Mitchell, Hanan, Gross, Jones, Dreher
Sept. 11	Willey, Landauer, Hernández, Gross, Mitchell, Hanan, McCain-Nelson, Jones, McKenzie, Grigsby
Sept. 13	Grigsby, Landauer, McKenzie, Hanan, Gross, Mitchell, McCain-Nelson, Jones, Hashimoto, Dreher
Sept. 18	Willey, Landauer, McKenzie, Gross, McCain-Nelson, Mitchell, Hernández, Jones, Hashimoto, Dreher, Grigsby, Hanan
Sept. 20	Grigsby, Landauer, McKenzie, Hernández, Hanan, Mitchell, McCain-Nelson, Jones, Hashimoto, Dreher
Sept. 25	Willey, Grigsby, McKenzie, Gross, Mitchell, Hanan, Hernández, Jones, Dreher, Hashimoto
Sept. 27	Grigsby, Landauer, McKenzie, Hernández, Mitchell, Hanan, McCain-Nelson, Hashimoto, Jones, Gross, Dreher
Oct. 2	Willey, Landauer, McKenzie, Gross, Mitchell, McCain-Nelson, Jones, Hashimoto, Dreher
Oct. 4	Willey, Landauer, McKenzie, Hernández, Mitchell, McCain-Nelson, Jones, Hashimoto
Oct. 9	Willey, Landauer, McKenzie, Gross, Hernández, McCain-Nelson, Jones, Hashimoto, Grigsby
Oct. 11	Willey, Landauer, McKenzie, Gross, Mitchell, Hernández, McCain-Nelson, Jones, Hashimoto, Grigsby, Dreher

On one occasion during the observation period, the Viewpoints page played a major role in the editorial board discussions and the agenda-setting role of the *Morning News*. The deputy editorial page editor determines the content of the Viewpoints page,

edits it, and participates in discussions of the editorial page. Most of the time, the full editorial board does not deliberate the content or tone of the Viewpoints pages, which generally present competing arguments on a newsworthy topic. The editorial board also does not ordinarily debate its letters to the editor selections, leaving those decisions to another assistant editor.

The case study's unit of analysis is the full editorial board and the decisions it ultimately makes. As a case study, the function of this thesis is to shed light on the editorial formation process of the *Morning News* editorial board and explore the myriad factors involved. By doing so, it may also provide areas for further exploration, particularly on a topic such as this where gaps in research exist.

3.1.1 Validity

According to Yin (2003), case studies are preferred when the research attempts to answer “how” or “why” questions, and “when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (1). As a case study, the observation of the *Morning News* editorial board will not have the external validity that would allow its findings to be generalized to other editorial boards or other news processes. It is a snapshot of one twelve-member board. The practices of the *Morning News* editorial board may be considered fairly common, but major differences almost certainly exist major among editorial page editors and publishers because of their personal styles and relationships. In addition, the case study did not attempt to address concerns about the effect direct observation would have on the editorial board members' interactions. While board members participated in

sometimes lively discussions, it is human nature to tone down emotions when one knows one is being observed. Although there were indications of more heated debates among board members before the case study observations began, it is unclear whether the observer's presence served to temper the debate and the personalities during the two-month period.

3.2 Editorial Formation and Policy Formation: Possible Parallels

The thesis also will attempt to draw parallels between the policy formation process described in Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) and the formation of editorial stances by the *Morning News* on immigration and other topics. Lindblom and Woodhouse spell out five obstacles to making effective decisions in the political arena. Some of those obstacles become apparent in the editorial board processes.

The five obstacles are: the power of business in making policy; dysfunctional aspects of government; limits of analysis, or how attempts at analyzing a complex issue like the costs and benefits of immigration rarely lead to conclusive results; political inequality, or how some interest groups exercise more power in the political process than others; and impaired inquiry, or the failure to consider fundamental questions about an issue like immigration, perhaps relying instead on politicians to frame the issue in more dramatic and exploitative terms designed to rally their base of supporters. This thesis will explore some of the obstacles in greater detail, including the limits of analysis; the exercise of interest group power; impaired inquiry; and the power of business.

For purposes of this research, it is assumed that the context of political and editorial discussions about immigration policy regards undocumented immigrants as a “dependent” group in Schneider and Ingram’s (1997) framework. Discussions about Congress providing a path to citizenship for those migrants illustrates the nature of the dependent category, where potentially beneficial legislation is determined by others with little consideration of input from members of the target group. Immigrant-rights groups play a role in the policy process, but the national debate thus far has revolved around what policy makers themselves are willing to include in any federal legislation that provides a path to citizenship. At one point early in the proposal formulation for this thesis, it was considered possible that undocumented immigrants and their supporters might instead be considered contenders in the policy-making process. Large immigrant-rights rallies were held around the country this spring, gathering the attention of media and politicians in the months before the 2006 Congressional elections (Jeffers 2006). An estimated half a million immigrant-rights supporters rallied in Dallas in the spring. But momentum among immigrant-rights groups appears to have stalled, and the only way to determine the effect of those rallies will be at the ballot box (Jeffers 2006). But so far, leading policy makers have successfully kept the issue out of the Congressional agenda in the months before the 2006 elections. The only legislative progress on the issue has been approval of a bill that will build a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexico border, a far cry from the major policy debate advocated by immigrant-rights groups.

This thesis will also show how editorial pages follow Schneider and Ingram's (1997) recommendations for policy designs. The authors list seven "general principles of good [policy] design" that can enhance participatory democratic policy making (202-207).

Those principles are: "[c]onstruct target groups for benefits and burdens that cut across longstanding social, racial economic or other cleavages"; design policies to "ensure public involvement and avoid overly complex and technical designs"; "[c]reate designs to encourage and strengthen civility and communicative ethics"; create designs that "favor the creation of civic organizations"; "[d]raw from multiple theories and analyze from multiple perspectives"; "[d]esign policies that enhance self-governance rather than manipulate through slogans and symbols"; and "avoid designs that rely on deception for support."

Each of Schneider and Ingram's recommendations for enhancing participatory democracy is explored in the context of the editorial board and its consideration of the immigration debate.

3.3 Agenda Setting

Agenda setting is a major role of news and editorial pages. The *Morning News* case study offers several examples of agenda setting. Those include: immigration; regional transit; poverty in West Dallas; the newspaper's own recommendations for downtown Dallas after the economic crash of the late 1980s; and the recent "Tipping Point" series, which offered multiple recommendations for improving Dallas government.

This thesis also reviews the role of intermedia agenda setting as described by McCombs (1992). Editorial writers regularly look to their peers at other newspapers, journals and magazines to help them craft their own editorials (McCombs 2005; Wilhoit and Drew 1973). The *Morning News* is no exception. Its editorial writers use outside opinion pieces and news stories to help steer their discussions and formulate their own newspaper's stance on major issues.

As part of their agenda setting efforts, they also consult elected officials, interview community leaders at editorial board meetings and work with advocacy groups including the Immigrant Defense Project, the Texas Border Volunteers patrol group, and the conservative Manhattan Institute. Those and many other sources help formulate their opinions. Each of those sources plays a role in shaping editorial policy, but editorial writers say no one group or source takes precedence over any other.

By directly observing the deliberations of the *Morning News* editorial board for two months, this thesis sheds light on several dimensions of the editorial policy formation process. Those areas of exploration include the role of newspaper management; the role of the editorial page editor; the influence of business and other interest groups; and factors other than news judgment that affect an editorial stance. The thesis also draws parallels to Lindblom and Woodhouse's *The Policy-Making Process* (1993) and Schneider and Ingram's *Policy Design for Democracy* (1997).

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Empirical Findings

For decades, the editorial page has served as the institutional voice of newspapers. It provides a forum for debate. It provides readers with nuanced information, background and opinion to help them better understand a complex issue. It endorses candidates, providing research even in obscure local races. It can even prod elected officials or businesses to change their course of action. At a paper such as the *Morning News*, the editorial board has a chance to accomplish those goals with the publication of as many as three editorials a day.

The case study finds that the *Morning News* editorial page has a long history of fighting for causes, including the defeat of corrupt politicians and the passage of policies to help North Texas. The editorial page also has veered from a staunchly conservative tone to a more moderate tone over the last 30 years, reflecting what some editorial board members believe is a slow shift to the political center by North Texans. The study also finds that the editorial board welcomes more community voices than it did in the past, by meeting regularly with community groups and encouraging contributions to the paper's op-ed page. On immigration, the editorial board uses its influence to advocate extensively for comprehensive immigration reform in Congress.

But during election season, editorials about policy issues compete for space with a host of candidate recommendations, limiting the paper's editorial impact on any single topic.

The study also finds that the editorial policy formation process on immigration offers distinct parallels to the policy formation process. Editorial writers must weigh the role of business; overcome challenges presented by the limits of analysis; compensate for the lack of political standing by some interest groups; and take on an educational role to overcome the public's reluctance to challenge broad assumptions about immigrants. Weighing all those variables, the editorial board crafts an editorial policy that calls for comprehensive immigration reform.

4.2 *Morning News* Editorial Page Background

The *Morning News* has been owned by Belo Corp. or its predecessor since it first began publishing in 1885. The paper has featured an editorial page dating back to at least 1930. Over the decades, it has covered numerous issues that helped define the policy agenda for Dallas and for Texas.

One of the newspaper's first and most celebrated editorial stands took place in 1924, with the publication of editorials against the Ku Klux Klan and its political ally, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Felix Robertson. A review of the *Morning News*' electronic archives found that the paper published 835 stories mentioning the Ku Klux Klan that year. The paper also published a then-rare endorsement of a gubernatorial candidate. The paper endorsed Miriam (Ma) Ferguson, who opposed Mr. Robertson. In its groundbreaking editorial, the newspaper stated in part:

It is not the habit of The News to support or oppose the candidacies of men for public office. Its rule has been to keep out of such contests. But now and then it has disregarded this rule of conduct on occasions when it felt that a candidacy was fraught with graver consequences than the issues of measure and policy involved with them. The News feels that it is confronted by such an occasion now. (“Another Crucial Day in Texas History,” 1924, Sec. 3, p. 4)

The editorial went on to assert that “Judge Robertson is the nominee of the Ku Klux Klan” and argued that electing Ferguson “will sound the death knell of the Klan as a political power in this state” (“Another Crucial Day in Texas History,” 1924, Sec. 3, p. 4). The editorial helped lead the way for Ferguson’s successful bid to become governor. But the stance taken by the *Morning News* was a costly one. Three thousand readers canceled their subscriptions because of the endorsement, advertisers boycotted the paper and companies would not sell the blank paper to the *Morning News* (West 1969). In a 1969 story, former editorial director Dick West praised former publisher and longtime reporter Ted Dealey shortly after Dealey’s death that year, recognizing his lifetime of distinguished work against the Klan. The story also praised Dealey’s ability in 1924 to sway his father, then-publisher G.B. Dealey, to preside over a divided editorial board in the decision to endorse Ferguson and take a stand against the Klan. Since then, the West story says, the newspaper carried on the tradition of using its news and editorial departments to foster social change. Other examples of the paper’s corruption-busting and agenda-setting roles include the fight against the “courthouse ring” of corrupt officials. That fight by the editorial led to their ouster by Dallas County voters in the 1940s (West 1969).

But a few decades later, the newspaper found itself struggling against its conservative reputation. Many carried the perception that the paper had an unwelcoming tone toward President John F. Kennedy on the day of his arrival in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. Years after Kennedy's assassination, the paper received a lot of criticism. Some of it was unfair, said former *Morning News* vice president and editorial page editor Rena Pederson. The editorial published on the day of Kennedy's arrival was not strident, and in fact welcomed him to the city (Pederson 2006).

4.2.1 Evolution of the Morning News Editorial Page Voice

From the 1950s to 1970s, the editorial page of the *Morning News* was more ideologically and personality driven. The personalities of the publisher, editor and writers determined much of the content. Little attention was paid to views of others in the community or to letters to the editor, said Pederson, who served as editor of the page from 1986 until 2002. Over time, the page shifted to more of a problem-solving approach, said Carolyn Barta, a former Viewpoints page editor on the editorial board staff. "In the past, it was more conservative than it is today" (Barta 2006).

After the arrival of publisher Burl Osborne in 1986, staffers at the time said the paper began to moderate. Robert Decherd, chairman of Dallas-based Belo Corp., which owns the *Morning News*, came in to speak to the editorial board shortly after Osborne arrived. He described his vision for the paper's tone, saying he wanted more of a problem-solving approach on the editorial page, Barta said. "He [Decherd] wanted to see a less ideological approach and a less knee-jerk conservative approach" (Barta 2006).

Why the shift to the center? As an effort to better reflect the community, it was both a journalism decision and a business decision. The paper's demographic research at the time showed that about 75 percent of *Morning News* readers considered themselves somewhat conservative but not very conservative, Pederson said. The paper's new, less strident and less conservative leadership under Decherd and Osborne also was a factor at the time, she added. "It reflected their personalities. It was a good thing to do for business. And it was the right thing to do. It put us more in sync with our audience and with our personnel" (Pederson 2006). The decision to write editorials about local issues, which typically don't elicit partisan responses in the policy debate, also drove the editorial board more toward the center of the political spectrum.

On the political side, the paper in the 1980s endorsed Democrat and Republican candidates almost equally in the 1980s. That pattern has shifted heavily to Republican endorsements in 2006, a result of Texas' overall conservative shift. Democrats do not run in as many races as before, Pederson said. "We might have been conservative, but we were not Republican. People always use those interchangeably, but quite frankly, we did not consider ourselves an arm of the Republican Party. We looked for somebody whose values matched the paper's position" (Pederson 2006).

4.2.1.1 Current Editorial Page Philosophy

Today, current and former editorial board members offer varied descriptions of the editorial page's ideological leanings. Most describe the paper and the editorial board as either leaning conservative or as having conservative ideals. The question today for the editorial board is how much it can or should be described as a moderate or centrist

newspaper. The *Morning News* editorial pages are both reflective of the community in its positions taken and instructive to the community because it brings new points of view to a conservative-leaning community, said Vice President and Editorial Page Editor Keven Willey. “The *Morning News*’ editorial philosophy at this point is pretty centrist. On some issues, it’s still pretty conservative relative to other newspapers. On other issues, it’s more socially moderate. I think it’s pretty centrist” (Willey 2006).

Other board members have a slightly different take on the paper’s political leanings. Editorial writer and columnist Bill McKenzie, who writes most of the editorials about immigration, said the newspaper embraces progressive conservatism. That means the *Morning News* has a commitment to civil rights, a commitment to the United States’ leading role in the world, an appreciation for the role of economic markets and an understanding of the importance of local and state government. “We are a center-right paper. That means a kind of progressive conservatism. When we’re progressive, we’re more distinctly progressive. And when we’re conservative, we’re still conservative” (McKenzie 2006). His colleagues, editorial writer Rodger Jones and assistant editorial page editor Michael Landauer agree. Landauer describes the board as shifting from extremely conservative to one that is “crunchy moderate,” or a blend of conservatism and progressivism (Landauer 2006). The paper also is “pretty pro-business, free market” (Landauer 2006). Free markets are important, Jones added. “This is Texas, after all. If you want regulation, go to Minnesota. That’s my personal feeling” (Jones 2006a).

Although the paper adopts conservative ideals, the trend toward editorial independence continues today. The editorial board's theme in 2006 is to recommend candidates who "get Texas," not just those who represent a specific ideology. That means candidates who understand the challenges facing the state due to projected demographic changes and educational attainment levels, among other things. The newspaper still hears regularly from vocal conservatives, making it easy to wrongly assume that their voices reflect what actually is a more moderate community, Willey said. "Given the transient nature of the community and the influx of the people moving here, I think this is a much more moderate community than ever before. And I think our page reflects that" (Willey 2006).

4.3 Editorial Process

The experience of the editorial board members varies, with at least four members having more than 20 years of experience at the *Morning News*: Grigsby, Hashimoto, Jones and Mitchell. Grigsby and Hashimoto spent several years together as editors on the newspaper's city desk, with Grigsby serving as the former assistant managing editor for the city desk and Hashimoto as a city editor. Jones spent 10 years as the paper's state desk editor before joining the editorial board. Mitchell covered business before joining the editorial board in 1998.

Willey has 26 years of journalistic experience, including four years as editorial page editor at the *Morning News* and four years as editorial page editor at the *Arizona Republic*. One of the members with the most editorial board tenure, Bill McKenzie, joined the editorial board in 1991 after editing the conservative *Ripon Forum* in

Washington, D.C. He also was a member of independent presidential candidate John Anderson's team in 1980.

The backgrounds of some of the newer members of the editorial board vary widely. Nelson, the newest member, joined the editorial board in 2006 after stints on the city desk and national desk. Landauer joined the paper as an editorial writer in 2002 after working for several years as the editorial page editor of the paper's now-defunct sibling, the *Arlington Morning News*. Hernández joined the *Morning News* in 2005 after working as the Texas Valley bureau chief for the *San Antonio Express-News*. Dreher joined the *Morning News* in 2003 after working as an editor for the conservative *National Review*.

Political leanings could be important in deciding whom to hire for positions on the editorial board, but that is changing. Years ago, editors would pay closer attention to the political leanings people interviewing to become editorial board members. That emphasis lessened in the years before she left in 2004, Barta said. "I wouldn't say there were slots to fill, but there was attention paid to the hires. They didn't want it to become too tilted" (Barta 2006).

On average, eight to ten board members attend the twice-weekly editorial board meetings. Those who did not attend either were on vacations or on assignment. Meetings took place in what board members call the green room, a small conference room located between the editorial board staff offices and the offices of the *Morning News*' publisher and its editor. The editorial board holds formal interviews and meetings with visitors in one of two other conference rooms. All editorial offices are

located on the top floor of the four-story newspaper building. Editorial board members were mostly creatures of habit, preferring to sit in the same seats around the conference table at each meeting. Their choice of location did not appear to influence the debate or indicate that board members sided with certain colleagues more than with others. While some of the editorial page stands were controversial, the debate leading to consensus typically was courteous, professional and measured. For example, members consistently waited their turn to speak, letting people finish their statements before making their own argument.

4.3.1 Realities of Newshole in an Election Season

Deciding what makes it onto the editorial pages of the *Morning News* requires a methodical process. The need to publish up to twenty-one editorials a week requires extensive organization and efficient meetings. A small part of the Monday editorial board meetings are devoted to praise for and criticism of the previous week's work. But most of the two to three hours a week that the editorial board meets is spent discussing upcoming topics in detail. In an election season, the editorial board's news budgeting discussions are different, as most of the editorials are scheduled well in advance to ensure all of them get published before the election.

In the 2006 fall election season, the *Morning News* published ninety-three recommendations for public office, with about 70 percent of them for Republican candidates. The newspaper took great care to analyze the pattern of its recommendations. While the recommendations were still heavily Republican, the staff

was conscious of the percent breakdown. However, no recommendations were altered because of the high number of Republican recommendations.

The high number of candidate recommendations (no longer termed “endorsements” by the paper) required a substantial amount of newsprint space, or newshole, on the editorial pages. That limited the editorial board’s ability to write about a variety of local, state or national policy issues more regularly in the fall 2006 election season. But as Porter (2004) notes, editorial boards can have a major effect on local races because “[w]hen the hometown newspaper is the primary source of preelection information for a particular race, its endorsement can and does sway voters positively and negatively” (60).

While the editorial page’s obligations to make recommendations on many races limited its ability to tackle a variety of other issues in the weeks and months leading up to election, the editorial board was committed to its mission of recommendations for all electoral contests of interest.

4.3.1.1 Effect on Immigration Coverage

Limited space on the editorial pages affected a number of coverage decisions by the editorial board. Among them were decisions on immigration. But limited newshole was only one factor at play in the editorial board’s immigration discussions. Congress also faced an Oct. 6 recess deadline before leaving for the mid-term elections campaign season. But a deadlocked Congress made little progress on immigration reform before adjourning, choosing only to pass a bill that calls for construction of a fence along 700 miles of the United States-Mexico border.

In talking tough on the border and on illegal immigration, Republican candidates can be said to be running against themselves. After all, they control the White House, along with both chambers of Congress, which so far this year have produced two irreconcilable pieces of legislation and therefore a stalemate. The cleavage in the party is between those who want to systematize the country's widening dependence on foreign labor (the Senate version) – to try to take the “illegal” out of illegal immigration – and those who want to slam the door (the House version). (Lelyveld 2006, 43)

So while immigration showed promise as a major election-year campaign issue, its complexity and hot-button nature led it to fizzle as a defining national issue. That, in turn, led to little progress on legislation. Without new bills or proposals to write about, the editorial board did not consistently discuss immigration, but often found reason to press Congress on the issue before lawmakers broke for the fall recess. Still, about half the editorial board meetings featured some immigration discussions, and seven editorials on the subject were written during the two-month observational period. Even without legislation to monitor, the extent of coverage was similar to the pace of editorial coverage earlier in the year. Thirty-three immigration editorials were written in the first seven and a half months of the year, a fairly high number that shows the significance the editorial board attached to the subject.

Both of those figures include editorials written as what the paper calls “Hits and Misses” in its Saturday editorial page. Those items, usually no longer than a paragraph, offer quick takes on items that may not deserve a full editorial but deserve some acknowledgment. “Hits and Misses” usually has about six to eight separate topics, and it fills the space where two average-length editorials would typically run.

4.4 History of Immigration Topic on Editorial Page

The *Morning News* editorial page has had a fairly consistent stance on immigration. But it has moderated its stand somewhat in the last decade. Some editorial board members attributed the shift to the ascendance of George W. Bush to the governorship of Texas. Rather than have a rancorous debate like California did in the mid-1990s about restricting government services to undocumented immigrants, Bush argued for a less drastic approach. That had an effect on the editorial board's position, and that more moderate position grew over time (Tatum 2006).

As far back as the 1950s, editorial writers argued that Texas needed Mexican workers, at that time commonly called *braceros*, to help farmers with crops and shearing sheep. In a column about a television special that highlighted the migrant work issue more than four decades ago, editorial writer Wayne Gard (1960) makes a pointed distinction between the legal *braceros* and others who enter the United States illegally seeking work. "Texas farmers and ranchmen prefer the lawfully entered *braceros* because they are better workers and are dependable. One who hires wetbacks never knows when immigration officials may pick them up, thus leaving him without essential help at the peak of the cotton picking" (Gard 1960, Sec. 4, p.2).

By the 1990s, the editorial page staff still had concerns, specifically about the costs associated with immigration. While those concerns are still reflected today, they played a much more prominent role in some editorials in the late 1990s. "[T]he savings enjoyed by employers and consumers as a result of the immigrants' inexpensive labor is not the only issue. The benefits also must be weighed against the cost of publicly

funded services for the families of those workers” (“Mexican Migration,” 1999, 14A). Today, the *Morning News* editorial page considers undocumented immigrants as more of a human rights issue and demographic issue. It argues for policies that address the demographic challenges rather than make scapegoats of undocumented immigrants.

4.4.1 One Writer’s Impact

Editorial pages often employ a beat structure resembling that of news reporters who cover areas such as city hall, school districts and transportation. In developing the formal position of the newspaper, it helps to have writers with expertise on complicated issues. But that expertise requires a large amount of trust among editorial writers, because it allows one person to have a large role in developing the newspaper’s institutional voice on a specific issue or set of issues.

With reliance on a beat writer, debate on an issue may be driven by a single person in the early stages of editorial policy discussions. Although editors have ultimate say at editorial board meetings, deference is given to a writer with special knowledge of a topic, Pederson said. “I tried to be sensitive that it wasn’t Rena all the time. I had great respect for Henry [Tatum]’s expertise. Sometimes, I might personally feel a little different, but if I felt he knew what he was talking about, I would often defer” (Pederson 2006).

On immigration, former editorial writer Richard Estrada often drove the debate with his brusque style and occasional harsh words, Tatum said. “He felt very strongly about it and he felt people who did not take a strong position on it really were just taking a pass” (Tatum 2006). Debate sometimes could be limited because writers not

covering a specific beat did not want to be seen as challenging the expert, Barta said. Some writers also would hesitate to counter a beat writer's opinion because they didn't want to be considered ignorant about a topic.

There are different dynamics that work in an editorial board that you wouldn't ordinarily think would work. You would think that people get in there and they say what they think. Sometimes they're reluctant ... if they think they're going to be ridiculed by their colleagues or be told they don't know enough about a particular issue. (Barta 2006)

Estrada often would make the case for an immigration editorial that his colleagues, including Barta, would not support. As a compromise, he often was told to write a column with his byline on it, while someone else would write an editorial that took a different tone. "That's a good way of disposing of something that was a little bit too controversial. Then it's you saying it, and not the institution saying it. We [the editorial board] would take a more moderate position on it. I can recall that happened quite a bit with Richard Estrada" (Barta 2006). When Estrada died suddenly in late 1999, he was remembered as a tough but fair-minded editorial writer who "defended his beliefs with a passion" and a writer whose stance for strict immigration laws was seen as a way to improve wages for Hispanic workers ("Richard Estrada," 1999, 28A). Those positions occasionally angered some in the Hispanic community who disagreed with Estrada, and their concerns occasionally led to modified editorials written by someone other than Estrada (Barta 2006). Ultimately, Estrada's voice became just one of several that were considered as the paper formulated its stance on immigration.

Initial deference to an editorial writer with expertise should not be mistaken for the ability of one person to control an issue exclusively, Pederson said. "You might

defer to them because they obviously are supposed to be the person who has the portfolio in it, the education in it and the experience in it. But they wouldn't always win the day. It was a collegial process" (Pederson 2006).

4.5 Immigration Discussions and Editorials

The *Morning News*' editorial page ran seven editorials about immigration during the case study's two-month observation period. Each is highlighted briefly in this section, along with a brief characterization of the discussions that preceded them. While the editorials reflect the discussions among the board members, they also reflect reporting done by the writers. Their information comes from many sources, including journals, think-tank reports, and reports in other media about immigration debates in places such as Pennsylvania and Illinois. In the editorial board discussions, board members have cited work from the New York-based Immigrant Defense Project. Other sources cited in previous opinion columns by Hernández vary from the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services office to the Texas Border Volunteers, a citizen group that patrols the Texas border looking for unauthorized crossings. Editorial writer and columnist McKenzie, in particular, interviews members of Congress regularly on immigration issues. Sources come from all sides, McKenzie added. "Sources in the pro community, I talk to all the time. The antis I hear from all the time. I hear from them in columns. I hear from them when I talk to members of Congress. I try to talk to them regularly about the issue" (McKenzie 2006). In addition, at least one board member attended the immigrant rights rallies in Dallas in spring 2006 and interviewed participants.

Another primary source for *Morning News* editorial writers is the office of the Texas State Demographer. The demographer has painted a picture of a more crowded and less educated Texas in 20 years, with a substantially higher immigrant population. That prediction was quoted several times by Willey and editorial writers.

For purposes of clarity, publication dates are listed in subheadings. Quotes from and paraphrases of editorial board discussions are noted in square brackets, with the source of the quote and the abbreviation *obsv.* (for observation), along with the date of the editorial board meeting. For example: [Dreher, *obsv.*, Aug. 14, 2006]

Overall, most of those editorials reflected the staff's strong belief that Congress must deal with the issue head-on rather than attack it piecemeal. As one editorial stated, "America can't solve its immigration challenge without a comprehensive answer" ("Memo of Understanding," 2006, 22A).

4.5.1 Aug. 23, 2006

The first observed editorial board discussions about immigration resulted in two editorials on the subject published on the same day. The first dealt with the Dallas suburb of Farmers Branch and council member Tim O'Hare's attempts to pass ordinances cracking down on immigrants. The second dealt with an upcoming meeting of governors from the border states of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Both came around the time that Congress was holding hearings on immigration reform and casting an eye toward passing a bill before their fall recess.

In the Farmers Branch case, the editorial board stuck with its message that immigration was a subject for federal lawmakers, and local officials should wait for

comprehensive reform from Washington. “We understand the anxieties that propelled the city to this point and acknowledge that some of Mr. O’Hare’s concerns may be legitimate. But we hope his proposal never sees the light of day” (“Attention, Washington,” 2006, 16A).

In the border governors editorial, the paper urged them to use their gathering in Austin as a platform to press Congress for immigration reform. “Govs. Rick Perry, Janet Napolitano, Bill Richardson and Arnold Schwarzenegger can suggest – in the strongest possible terms – that Congress get going after Labor Day and finally pass a bill” (“Border Governors,” 2006, 16A).

The editorial board spent twenty minutes discussing the issues before determining what to write. Much of the tone struck familiar themes with previously-written editorials. Most members of the editorial board seemed to be in agreement with the overall tone the editorials should take, pushing for something will prevent people in Farmers Branch or other cities from taking the law into their own hands. However, several related topics also were discussed, including how much responsibility landlords should have to verify renters’ citizenship status. Editorial writer Rodger Jones questioned the how much impact local cities could have by simply requiring landlords to pay close attention to local codes but without anyone attempting to verify residents’ citizenship.

It puts landlords in a hard way to become adjunct immigration policy officers to make sure they’re somehow not renting to an illegal immigrant. I think you just don’t ask landlords to do that. They’re in business. Why would you tell people in McDonald’s that they have to check immigration status before serving hamburgers? [Jones, obsv., 21 August 2006]

But another editorial board member, assistant editor Mike Hashimoto, spoke about the frustration of Farmers Branch residents. While not arguing for a different tone to the editorial, he urged his colleagues to consider the views of longtime Farmers Branch residents who have seen their city change.

Think about why a city council member in Farmers Branch would think to propose these sorts of laws. It's the frustration of people who have lived here five years, 20 years or 50 years. They have lived here their whole lives. Their neighborhood is changing for good or ill, to their minds. The city won't do anything about it. My two choices are what? Do nothing and like it, or move. [Hashimoto, obsv., 21 August 2006]

As an illustration of the collaborative nature of many editorials, Hashimoto's concerns were reflected in the published editorial: "Without a doubt, illegal immigration is changing neighborhoods in ways that some longtime residents are right to find unacceptable" ("Attention, Washington," 2006, 16A).

The editorial board debated the immigration issue on Aug. 21. The board debated whether to publish an editorial about the Farmers Branch issue the following morning. Instead, it chose instead to wait an extra day, so that it could get results of a Farmers Branch City Council meeting. That allowed the board to publish two editorials on the same subject on Aug. 23. That resulted in a one-two punch aimed directly at Washington. The pairing was suggested by lead immigration editorial writer McKenzie. In arguing for the governors editorial, he echoed some of the same sentiments that were stated in the Farmers Branch debate. That editorial should urge governors to do something "so we don't continue living with these frustrating situations like Farmers

Branch where people are taking the law into their own hands” [McKenzie, obsv., 21 August 2006].

On the same day as the editorials’ publication, former editorial board member Barta published her own blog item about the Farmers Branch debate titled “Farmers Branch Isn’t Crazy”. In it, she argues that if federal officials won’t enforce immigration laws, cities like Farmers Branch have no choice but to take matters into their own hands. Barta said such an editorial statement, drastically different from what ran in the *Morning News*, never would have been published by the paper. “That certainly would not have been permitted as an editorial. Whether a column like that would have passed muster, I don’t know” (Barta 2006).

4.5.2 Aug. 26, 2006

The *Morning News* published two immigration-related accolades in its “Hits and Misses” section on Aug. 26. In the first, the paper commended the Texas Association of Business and the Mexican-American legislative caucus for meeting during a border governors’ conference. There the groups jointly pushed Congress on the need for immigration reform. “[W]e hope the significance of the Republican-leaning TAB and the Democratic-dominated Mexican-American caucus singing the same hymn was not lost on the governors or Congress” (“Hits and Misses,” 2006, 22A). In addition, the paper lauded U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas for her fact-finding tour of the border as part of an immigration reform bill she sponsored. Both of those received little attention in the regular meetings, but the editorial board convened again one

morning outside of the regularly scheduled meetings to further discuss some items, including its “Hits and Misses” for that week.

4.5.3 Aug. 28, 2006

One of the paper’s most dramatic efforts to focus public attention on the immigration issue occurred on Aug. 28, 2006. The *Morning News* paired its institutional voice with another powerful voice -- business interests. In an unusual move, the paper ran both an editorial pushing for comprehensive reform and an open letter to Congress from thirty-six well-known Texas business leaders urging Congress to pass an immigration reform measure. The letter and another syndicated column took up two-thirds of the *Morning News*’ accompanying Viewpoints page for that day. The two editorials appeared on the previous page in their customary place. The second editorial run by the paper lauded the Department of Homeland Security for ending a controversial program that allowed illegal immigrants from countries other than Mexico to be released (and not deported) after simply promising to show up for a court date.

In that one day, the *Morning News* editorial pages highlighted two separate factors in policy making. First, there is the leading role that business can play in the immigration debate. Second, there is the agenda-setting role media can play in an issue such as immigration. By pairing with business leaders, the paper was able to lend even more weight to its message and push it to an even larger audience. The open letter urges Congress to remember the reason for immigration reform:

Often, in the middle of heated debate, people forget exactly what they’re arguing about. But we employers on the front lines of American business cannot forget – we know why the nation must come to grips with illegal immigration. We know that Americans must face up to the

reality of the foreign workers we need to help keep the economy growing and bring them under the rule of law, for their sake and ours. (“Pass immigration reform,” 2006, 13A)

In its accompanying editorial, the paper echoes many of the business leaders’ statements, arguing that prices for necessities like groceries could rise without cheaper labor provided by immigrants. But the editorial also encourages lawmakers to hold businesses accountable. Overall, the letter and editorial combined to make the paper’s point about immigration reform even more clear. The editorial states: “These businesspeople don’t want a free pass, either. They believe employers must be forthcoming about who they hire. They do, however, recognize immigration is a boon to America. And they have data to support it” (“Forward on the Border: Texas business is right,” 2006, 12A).

Before the editorial and business leaders’ letter ran together, there was some discussion in the full editorial board meetings about the benefits businesses receive from immigration. McKenzie noted that major business leaders Bob Perry, Bo Pilgrim and Harold Simmons all signed the letter, which drew a quick response from a colleague.

Hashimoto: “Self interest, self interest, self interest.”

McKenzie: “Sure. And they’re labeling themselves as employers. But they’re trying to make the case why they think we need this labor force.”

Hashimoto: “If they’re straight about that, I’m fine” [Obsv., 23 August 2006].

As part of its agenda-setting role, Willey said the editorial board also had extensive discussion and collaboration with the conservative-leaning Manhattan

Institute before the letter was published. “We worked with the Manhattan Institute quite closely. We’re hoping it will get picked up nationally. I think they’re purchasing an ad in *Roll Call* to run this and we’re hoping the *Morning News* gets a little publicity as a result” [Willey, obsv., 28 August 2006].

The business leaders’ letter and editorial also had the desired effect of setting the agenda, McKenzie said, because it was picked up by other media outlets that then attributed it to the *Morning News*. “We hope that this is something that North Texas members in our delegation pay attention to” [McKenzie, obsv., 23 August 2006].

4.5.4 Sept. 11, 2006

In an editorial at the bottom of the page, the paper urged both houses of Congress to do something about comprehensive immigration reform. Due to Labor Day schedules the week before the editorial ran, the editorial board staff met at irregular hours. Therefore, the meeting immediately before the Sept. 11 editorial ran was not observed as part of this study. However, the editorial sticks with common themes, and it uses the business leaders’ letter to continue to hammer Congress to do something. It acknowledges that a comprehensive reform bill is unlikely before the fall recess, and it warns that patchwork attempts at border security may come attached to spending bills. “[T]he Senate bill the House keeps ignoring contains lists of spending requests to tighten up the border.” The editorial goes on to mention the business leaders’ letter. “They [business leaders] urged legislators to do more than simply tighten the border so Americans can finally have a sane way of dealing with illegal immigration” (“Immigration Countdown,” 2006, 10A).

4.5.5 Sept. 28, 2006

The final editorial published during the two-month observation period made the best of the difficult realization that Congress would not pass a comprehensive reform bill before the fall recess. But just getting the editorial published was the first topic for debate on the editorial board. Elections endorsements left few spots open for other issues. Discussion centered on McKenzie's background-only interviews with members of the Congressional delegation. McKenzie's interviews found that at least one member of Congress wanted President George W. Bush to extract an understanding that, if he gave in to Congressional pressure and signed a bill allowing construction of a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexico border, he also expected progress later from Congress on a more comprehensive immigration bill. That led to an exchange among McKenzie and several of the more conservative members of the editorial board that highlights the paper's agenda-setting goals. The exchange also highlights the considerations a board must face during election season.

McKenzie: "I will argue that immigration is an issue that is coming to the fore, and we want to have a voice before they do something so that we can instruct our senators on this and other security measures."

Dreher: "Isn't immigration kind of a done deal this year? I heard a lot of stuff over the weekend. The Republicans seem to have given up on it as any sort of comprehensive reform. They see this as a way to push their base, even if long-term, it's going to cost them Hispanic voters."

McKenzie: “I think it’s definitely a done deal between now and November. But there is a split opinion about after November” [Obsv., 25 September 2006].

Two days later, the editorial board came back in its meeting to the immigration issue and agreed to run an editorial encouraging the president to sign the border fence bill (“Memo of Understanding,” 2006, 22A). Doing so, assistant editor Michael Landauer said, would advance the issue and keep lawmakers focused on providing a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants. “By not signing it, you run the risk that Lou Dobbs can stand up every night and say ‘They refuse to do anything to enforce our laws.’ That’s going to resonate” [Landauer, obsv., 27 September 2006].

His colleague Jim Mitchell agreed a short time later. “If we want a comprehensive plan, you’ve got to lay down the marker. You may not get it six months from now, but you’ve got to lay down the marker. Otherwise, you will get border security and nothing else” [Mitchell, obsv., 27 September 2006].

During those discussions, the primary influence on the editorial board was its desire to move the political agenda toward the board’s goal of a comprehensive reform bill. The issue cut across political leanings on the editorial board, as both conservative and liberal members agreed that the board should publish such an editorial. As with many issues that the editorial board discusses, the debate began with the personal perspectives of the editorial board members, but ended with all board members working on a unified editorial position. Often, the debate comes from new reporting by one or several board members. But it also involves the personal opinions of the other board members based on their varied backgrounds.

Above all, the debates on all the editorials about immigration show how important the topic is for readers of the *Morning News*. Notably, the paper follows the same message as President Bush on the issue, but against many of the people who correspond with the editorial board. The paper receives many letters to the editor about immigration, and most letter writers are against comprehensive reform said Hashimoto, who reviews most submitted letters to the editor. “Nothing sparks up the letters like immigration. People admittedly are pretty mad at our position by and large, but they’re reading it. I think it is on their minds, and people want to know where the hell we are on this” [Hashimoto, obsv., 25 September 2006]. His colleague Dreher pointed out that reporters are saying that Republicans on Capitol Hill are getting letters 19-to-1 against the president. “It’s fired up a narrow segment of the base. The people opposed to the administration are really, really opposed. And to the people who aren’t opposed, it’s not as emotional” [Dreher, obsv., 25 September 2006].

4.6 Analysis of Current Editorial Position

The *Morning News*’ current editorial position on immigration, like the positions of many elected leaders, attempts to address two thorny issues at the same time: first, how to secure the U.S.-Mexico border; and second, how to deal with the estimated twelve million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. Many times, the debate centers on whether the newspaper supports increased border security. But it doesn’t have to be that way, Willey said.

This board feels very strongly that the two need to be intertwined to be effective. The only way you can have security -- where you can tell who is crossing your border -- is to have some kind of a biometric card

program or some kind of better documentation. The only way you're going to get better documentation is if you figure out what you're going to do with the twelve million people who are living here. (Willey 2006)

Although the editorial debates observed during the course of this research often were cordial, board members can differ greatly in their viewpoints. Many of the more difficult discussions that helped set the course for the *Morning News* editorial board occurred well before the fall 2006 observation period for this study. For example, Jones said he earlier tried to get the board to agree to an editorial thanking the Minutemen. The Minutemen are loosely-formed citizen groups that regularly patrol the border looking for people crossing illegally. Those crossings are then reported to border patrol agents. When Jones raised the topic of the Minutemen editorial, "I couldn't get my second sentence out" (Jones 2006b). The issue for the rest of the editorial board, he said, was one of balance, and that the board didn't want to look too "right-leaning" (Jones, 2006b). He went on to say that, while a border fence may not be a good idea for the entire border, it might be good in certain locations where local law enforcement wants them. "We're so squeamish about building a wall anywhere. We keep blinders on and say a wall wouldn't do any good" (Jones 2006b). But issues like that have been debated previously, and editorial writer McKenzie said board members learn to move on and wait for the next development. "There certainly have been some big discussions. But an editorial board is like Congress. If you resolve an issue, you don't want to keep opening it. We've set our course. And there are times you don't necessarily want to bring up a subject for a debate, just for the sake of debate" (McKenzie 2006).

4.6.1 Analytical Framework

Lindblom and Woodhouse's (1993) framework describing obstacles to effective policy making, although developed as a diagnosis of defects in the national political arena, can be applied to the *Morning News* editorial formation process. The latter is itself, in a generic sense, a policy-making process. Moreover, it is embedded, both directly and indirectly, in the larger policy-making processes of Texas and the United States and in the political economy that shapes policy making at all levels.

Their framework provides a foundation for exploring the challenges facing an editorial board on a complex issue such as immigration. The five obstacles described by Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) are: the power of business in making policy; dysfunctional aspects of government; limits of analysis; political inequality; and impaired inquiry. Only one obstacle, the dysfunctional aspects of government, which deals with the bureaucratic nature of government processes, will not be addressed in detail here because of its limited parallel to the editorial formation process at the *Morning News*.

The obstacles to effective policy making can be used as an analytical frame to evaluate the *Morning News* editorial board as it considers its editorial positions. The obstacles also can be used to evaluate whether writers and editors formally recognize the obstacles to the policy formation process, and then account for those obstacles when it writes editorials about immigration.

This study will use the obstacles to effective policy making as a theoretical framework for assessing and analyzing the editorial board discussions. It will analyze

Lindblom and Woodhouse's descriptions of the five obstacles to effective policy making and show how each applies to the editorial process at the *Morning News*.

Because of the nature of a twelve-person board, and the difficulty in characterizing the thought processes of some or all of the editorial board members during deliberations, this study will not delve into what the editorial board members think about each of the obstacles. Nor will it delve into how the board formally evaluates and addresses each of the obstacles when it takes editorial stances.

In addition, Schneider and Ingram's (1997) work on the policy-making process also sheds light on how immigrants are viewed both by politicians and by those who attempt to shape public opinion in the media. The authors make seven recommendations for more democratic policy designs, and this study uses each of those to evaluate editorial page processes. Those editorial page processes are designed to foster a wide range of public debate on important issues, and many of them have traits of Schneider and Ingram's recommendations.

The question for the researcher is: How do Lindblom and Woodhouse's (1993) obstacles to effective policy making apply to the editorial process at the *Dallas Morning News*?

4.6.1.1 Limits of Analysis

Analysis never solves any policy debate completely. As Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) note, even "the very best professional analysis never rises to infallibility" (17). In its attempt to answer policy questions with specifics, analysis often raises more questions than it answers, the authors add. Therefore, attempts at

quantifying the costs and benefits of immigration prove difficult even under the best circumstances. The question for the researcher on the limits of analysis is: Given its inability to provide concrete answers in the immigration debate, does technical analysis have a large amount of influence on editorial positions taken by the *Morning News*?

Groups on all sides of the immigration debate have tried to determine the costs and benefits of immigration in hopes of quantifying the issue more clearly. The *Morning News* interviews experts regularly, and some of them provide research to the editorial board about the costs and benefits associated with immigration. But immigration lends itself to a more visceral debate rather than an analytical discussion, and the board's actions support that.

Expert research, at times, has made its way directly into the pages of the *Morning News*. But that analysis almost certainly has bias, according to a characterization of analysis by Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993). They note that “[a]nalysis rarely can find policies unequivocally good for all” (19) because analysis is inherently biased and is best used as a starting point for political debate.

At the *Morning News*, the editorial board has worked closely with Tamar Jacoby and the conservative Manhattan Institute because of the quality of its research (Willey 2006). But one should note that, as a conservative think tank, the Manhattan Institute may defer to business or economic interests in its recommendations. On another part of the political spectrum, the board also listens to the Pew Center for Hispanic Studies, which writes more from an informational point of view and occasionally an immigrant advocacy point of view. While the debate has many facets that can be analyzed, costs

and benefits are less important than to Willey and the editorial board than dealing with the political issues surrounding the twelve million undocumented immigrants already here.

Influences come from other sources less concerned about quantifying the costs and benefits of immigration. One of the prime sources of information and influence is the state demographer, who predicts that Texas will double its population in 20 years, but will have trouble maintaining even current educational attainment levels. That pushes the editorial board toward a more pragmatic approach, which supports leaders who “get Texas” and who are willing to adopt policies that address the state’s future challenges.

Human rights concerns also illustrate the limits of analysis dealt with by the editorial board. The editorial page stance is fueled in part by human rights concerns regarding medical care for all people living and working in the United States, including undocumented immigrants. Therefore, the editorial board does not focus solely on quantitative data. Pederson recalls speaking with Ron Anderson, the president and chief executive officer at Parkland hospital, Dallas County’s publicly-funded hospital. “Ron Anderson would come in and say ‘Look, a [pregnant] woman comes in and she is ready to deliver. Are we going to ask her for her citizenship papers or turn her away? Or are we going to see that this human being gets born in a clean, safe environment?’ I would agree with that” (Pederson 2006).

Those questions are more difficult to quantify, and there are competing studies about the costs of immigrant health care and the costs to society when many of its

workers are uninsured and uneducated. “The numbers are there, and I don’t think they’re going to stop” (McKenzie 2006). The flow of immigrants might slow somewhat in the future, but there will always be more Mexicans and Central Americans seeking to come to Texas and the United States and establish roots like the twelve million undocumented immigrants already in the country, McKenzie added. “Folks who are here are not just going to pick up and leave the longer they have been here. They have families. It is in our best interest to have them and their kids educated.” Health care is another important part of that, McKenzie said. “It’s in our interest that they, particularly along the border, have health care. If they’re going to be in our communities, and they will continue to be, then it’s our best interest to have an educated population and a healthy population” (McKenzie 2006).

Members of the editorial board interviewed agree that expert analysis will not resolve the issue completely – and analysis cannot help the *Morning News* produce an editorial that will provide the ultimate solution to the immigration challenge. As Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) point out, the key to using analysis in a policy debate is to realize that it will not exclude the use of politics and persuasion, and that “there is no realistic prospect of substituting analysis for political interaction on any wholesale basis, and efforts in that direction are misguided, even dangerously misleading” (22). The authors call for analysis to serve as a precursor to informed debate, and the *Morning News* editorial board actions mirror that. The editorial board mentions human rights questions, border security questions and demographic questions as subjects requiring attention in the immigration policy debate.

Media can no longer trust a statistic just because it is published by a so-called expert, Willey said. “While it is instructive to familiarize yourself with the studies that are out there, there is a pantheon of studies out there. You have to wade through them pretty carefully” (Willey 2006). Without competing quantitative data to provide a clear answer, much of the debate on immigration enters the arena of emotion. Editorial writers prefer to have all their facts before writing, but without hard and fast figures, they must be on guard for emotional manipulation of the issue, Landauer said. “Very smart people know how to play that for their own purposes. This is not a good example of a policy debate. It’s a political debate” (Landauer 2006). As Linblom and Woodhouse (1993) note, analysis “cannot wholly resolve conflicts of values and interests” (22).

As it deals with immigration issues, the *Morning News* editorial board attempts to move beyond a strict analytical approach to immigration. It consults various experts, but also calls for a political discussion that relies less on quantitative data and more on practical issues stemming from the influx of hundreds of thousands of immigrants to the United States each year.

4.6.1.2 Business Influence

With its money, organization and political access, business has a dominant, privileged role in the policy formation process (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993). Business and government are so intertwined, the authors say, that “business constitutes something of a rival system of public policy making, one in partial competition with the governmental system” (90). Elected officials often defer to business because they

believe a good economy is the best way to keep voters happy and keep themselves in office. As Linblom and Woodhouse (1993) state, “[n]eglect of business brings stagnation or unemployment, at great peril to elected officials in power; in contrast, citizen and interest-group demands often can be evaded or deflected, given the looseness of popular control over officials” (93).

The question for the researcher in this study is: How much influence does the business community have on the editorial board’s position on immigration?

Historically, business has played a large but mostly silent role in the national debate on immigration and undocumented immigrants (Willey 2006). Many businesses have come to rely on the cheap labor provided by undocumented immigrants. They tacitly make the point that, without cheap labor, costs will rise and product prices will rise, thereby dragging down the economy. Economics will then play a major role in the debate on immigration, given the privileged nature of business in politics and the desire by politicians to keep the economy growing. And recently, businesses have used their clout to start arguing publicly for immigration reform.

The best example of business’ influence on the editorial board’s immigration stance can be seen on the Aug. 28 editorial and Viewpoints pages of the *Morning News*. In an open letter to Congress that day, thirty-six Texas business leaders took an unusually public stance and urged lawmakers to pass a comprehensive reform bill.

The board also published its own editorial that morning calling for comprehensive immigration reform. Deliberately pairing the *Morning News*’ institutional voice with the voice of business interests was “highly unusual,” but it was

an attempt to keep the immigration issue at the forefront of congressional debate, Willey said. “There aren’t too many public policy issues that you can get business leaders to unite around. Often, from a business person’s perspective, the best place to be is under the radar” (Willey 2006). The confluence of business and editorial page interests illustrates a leading role that business plays in the editorial formation process. Editorial board members say they keep business interests in check. They point out that the editorial board has taken more of an oppositional role to business interests on other topics, including public school finance. While Dallas leaders supported higher business taxes for public education, many other Texas business leaders opposed it, Willey said. “The business community does have a role to play. But it is one of many communities we listen very closely to” (Willey 2006).

Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) ask if business privileges are unique (95). While business may have no equal in the policy-making process, it does have countervailing forces on the *Morning News* editorial board. The board solicits input from other community sources, some of whom present findings directly at odds with business interests, such as when clean-air activists are given a forum on the editorial pages directly opposite electric companies wanting to build more coal-fired power plants (“Gasping in North Texas,” 2006, 1P).

On the immigration issue, the editorial board chose to align itself with business interests in getting out its message about undocumented immigrants, but that message already had been formed through months or years of debate. The use of business on the

immigration issue does not indicate deference to their wishes, according to Willey, but rather a strategic alliance in furthering the same message (Willey 2006).

The business leaders' open letter to Congress might also provide a glimpse into how newspapers hope to further their agenda-setting role in the future. Such strategic alliances with business and other interest groups may become more common in media or on editorial boards. As Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) point out, "[t]he problem of how to bend business to better serve society is one of the fundamental challenges facing those who desire more intelligent and more democratic policy making" (103).

Judging from its discussions about the open letter, the board and McKenzie hoped to leverage business interests to spur the more conservative members of Congress to action before the fall recess. "Part of the significance is you have some conservatives who are making this argument for it" [McKenzie, obsv., 23 August 2006].

The role of business is prevalent on editorial pages. But when business assumes a public role in a policy debate as it did on immigration, the editorial board still balances that role against other interests, such as community groups and policy makers. But business will always play a role, McKenzie said. "As we become more of a competing democracy with more voices, whether it is at the city council or whether it's something like clean air, business should be there" (McKenzie 2006).

4.6.1.3 Impaired Inquiry

Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) also show that policy making on complex issues can encounter the obstacle of impaired inquiry. When that occurs, citizens are not able to deeply consider the crucial questions before them. Instead, they are socialized

from early ages to consider only a narrow range of options, none of which addresses the issue completely (115). That leaves policy makers able to define both the issue and the options available.

Impaired inquiry is an area where the *Morning News* editorial page can flourish in providing new or unheard ideas for policy makers' consideration. The *Morning News* editorial board can lead the fight against impaired inquiry, or, in some cases, foster impaired inquiry by failing to consider or report on all options available to policy makers. The question for the researcher on impaired inquiry is: Does the *Morning News* editorial board solicit input from an array of sources who can raise new questions and options for policy makers' consideration?

Theoretical opportunity and newsroom reality differ greatly in addressing impaired inquiry on editorial pages. The media have great potential for shaping how people think about an issue (McCombs 2005). But the expectations and professional obligations of daily journalism inhibit the *Morning News* editorial board's ability to address the obstacle of impaired inquiry. What Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) call a "gentle tyranny known as the deadline" (119) often requires writers to consult with regular sources for the latest information, discounting or not consulting more divergent viewpoints. Daily journalism, and the definitions of news judgment and objectivity, according to Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993), mean that "journalists rarely can afford the time and expense of extended research...." (119). The challenge for reporters and editorial writers is to seek out new sources. When they don't, Lindblom and

Woodhouse (1993) say, “the effect of continual quoting of persons in positions of authority is that their opinions often come to circulate as fact” (119).

On average, *Morning News* editorial writers must report and write two to three editorials a week. Given such deadlines, the editorial board occasionally attempts to overcome impaired inquiry in its own ways. Writers, on occasion, leave the editorial-writing rotation for several weeks to focus on and report on a single topic. Editorial board members also get time to travel so that they can fully research topics, such as public school finance (Pederson 2006). But there are limits to the number of topics the editorial board can focus on so intently. Therefore, the editorial board also consults as many outside experts as possible to help it formulate its editorial policies. In doing so, it hopes to move beyond the inflammatory rhetoric that some involved in the immigration issue use to frame the debate.

But the rhetoric often remains. Some immigration proposals have attempted to broaden the range of options considered by policy makers. One of them is rather extreme: the theoretical deportation of twelve million undocumented immigrants. That proposal, while popular with vocal segments of society who argue for criminalization of illegal immigration, did not sit well with editorial board members interviewed and was not advanced by the *Morning News* editorial board. Editorial board members viewed it not only as an impossibility because of its potential cost to the government, but also as an impracticality that would leave employers desperate for workers. Human-rights questions about mass deportations and the potential of splitting up families also were

weighed by editorial board members who sought their own ways of addressing the issue.

One could argue that ideas at the other end of the immigration debate also fall victim to impaired inquiry. For example, the idea that North America should open its borders to allow freedom of movement between countries has not gained much traction in the immigration debate. While an example of open borders exists in the European Union, and while such a move could make sense in an increasingly global economy, it apparently has yet to enter the policy debate or the *Morning News* editorial policy formation process.

The editorial board has accomplished some measures that presumably can reduce -- but not eliminate -- impaired inquiry. It publishes letters to the editor daily, although most of them are only a few sentences long and are edited for clarity and accuracy. Letters to the editor don't offer much room to express a viewpoint, and many are not selected for publication. The editorial board also has opened its op-ed page, providing a forum to publish a larger number of columns from readers. While that provides a voice to others in the policy-making process, Lindblom and Woodhouse say that elites will always have an advantage in the "competition of ideas" (122). They point out that media goals of balance and objectivity "tend to converge around the society's modal opinions, so media 'impartiality' really implies a certain conformity to dominant opinions" (118).

In dealing with impaired inquiry, it is important for an editorial board to move past the emotional arguments like those made by Colorado Congressman Tom Tancredo

and CNN anchor Lou Dobbs and deal with fundamental questions on a more pragmatic level, said Landauer. “I feel like people like Tancredo and the doofus on CNN – Lou Dobbs – they’re trying to make it an emotional debate, and that just drives me nuts” (Landauer 2006). But as in the political world, the editorial board has divergent views on immigration that make it difficult to consider more fundamental questions related to impaired inquiry. In observing some of its discussions, the editorial board was obviously divided on certain aspects of framing the immigration issue. Deputy editorial page editor Sharon Grigsby tried to get a sense of the board’s views two days before the paper published its editorial that questioned Farmers Branch’s consideration of an anti-immigrant ordinance.

Grigsby: “Are we comfortable saying we just don’t like this kind of thing because it sends a bad signal about what America is? I know the board is split on this, but what’s the language on that?”

McKenzie: “There is a ‘these people’ element to what’s going on in Farmers Branch” [Obsv., 21 August 2006].

A short time later in the same editorial board discussion, Dreher recalled interviewing Irving officials who failed to respond fully to neighborhood concerns about code enforcement problems brought about by new residents, most of whom appeared to be recent immigrants. “Nobody wanted to do anything. However elitist or racist some of these people no doubt are, people are frustrated because the law is not being enforced, and they don’t know what to do” [Dreher, obsv., 21 August 2006].

Rather than raise new fundamental questions, the editorial published soon after that meeting took a stern tone with the federal government because it has not offered solutions. It also took a stern tone with Farmers Branch for considering such a divisive measure (“Attention, Washington,” 2006, 16A).

Here we may also apply Schneider and Ingram’s (1997) framework. The Aug. 23 editorial also painted undocumented immigrants as borderline dependent-deviant in the policy process, raising the possibility that others – including the editorial board – must advocate for them. Ultimately, the editorial about Farmers Branch moved beyond the visceral debate and into a more pragmatic realm of offering potential solutions to the immigration issue – but the recommendation remained within the narrow confines of the mainstream political debate. The editorial urged Congress to provide a pathway to legal status for current undocumented immigrants, border security, employer sanctions and the ability for businesses to check the legal statuses of those who apply for jobs. “Twelve million people already in the United States illegally need to come out of the shadows – not be pushed to another dark corner in another town” (“Attention, Washington,” 2006, 16A).

Editorial boards may offer forums to raise new ideas that would reduce impaired inquiry. But recent examples show that, rather than propose new ideas to try to resolve the immigration issue, the *Morning News* consistently pushes for comprehensive immigration reform. The paper has chosen not to support different ideas, such as the deportation of immigrants already in the United States and the opening of its borders. In today’s deadline-driven media climate, the *Morning News* editorial board will always

face the challenge of whether to adopt ideas outside the mainstream that could help resolve the issue of what to do with immigrants in the United States.

4.6.1.4 Political Inequality

Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) define political inequality as the ability of certain people or groups to regularly exercise more political power than others (104). For example, voting patterns differ among educational and socioeconomic levels. Working class and poor people also have greater difficulty mobilizing politically. As Lindblom and Woodhouse state, “[d]espite their great numbers, the poor can afford only a few, relatively impoverished political organizations, while the well-off have a much wider variety of well-financed endeavors” (110).

The question for the researcher on political inequality is: Does the *Morning News* editorial board attempt to compensate for the difference in the ability of groups to exercise power, or does the *Morning News* consult the same sources who have the most power in the policy process?

Several examples exist of how the *Morning News* has tried to reduce political inequality. In the 1970s and early 1980s, political inequality also meant inaccessibility to the editorial writers at the *Morning News*. With the Cold War still raging, editorial writers focused much of their attention on national and international affairs, heavily consulting policy makers such as North Texas’ congressional representatives. Editorials about bond elections, mass transit or other local matters were rare (Pederson 2006). A search of a *Morning News* archive database found that immigration coverage also was hit-and-miss, with numerous columns by editorial writers but no formal editorial

positions taken by the *Morning News*. By focusing on international affairs, the editorial board bypassed valid concerns of local communities on issues such as immigrant rights. For years, those who needed a voice on issues such as immigration were not given a forum at the *Morning News*. In addition, policy makers were not held accountable in the paper's editorials either for avoiding the immigration issue or for developing immigration regulations that targeted disadvantaged groups in a way that Schneider and Ingram diagnose as dysfunctional.

All of that began to change when former publisher Osborne joined the *Morning News* in 1986. One of Osborne's first changes to the editorial board was to create a Viewpoints page where community leaders were invited to write their own opinion columns (Pederson 2006; Barta 2006). After that, the editorial board had many meetings on immigration, said Hank Tatum, who was one of the first new editorial writers hired under the Osborne regime. "You're really encouraged and almost required to bring in voices, people to come and sit before you and argue the points. You don't just wake up in the morning and get an idea for an editorial and just write it. You actually want to know what the community is thinking on it" (Tatum 2006).

That differs greatly from previous experience in the 1970s and early 1980s, when the paper had a more "unstructured environment" in its editorial page staff, Pederson said. "Sometimes [former editorial page editor] Jim Wright would go around from door to door and ask people what they wanted to write on that day. They would talk about it and they would do it. Each person was clearly independent" (Pederson 2006). That quickly changed under Osborne, and even community leaders were

surprised. The paper attempted to give a more prominent voice to groups as varied as the League of Women Voters and the Asian-American and Black chambers of commerce. When people called to complain about an editorial, they received an invitation to come talk to the editorial board. Soon, the editorial board was averaging about 400 community-group interviews a year, Pederson said. “Some of them were so surprised. They had never been in the *Morning News* before. We wanted to hear from them. It was real interesting. Some of them were just terrified. I would really have to take great pains to try and put them at ease” (Pederson 2006). Over time, simply opening the doors to the editorial board offices paid dividends to the paper and its staff. It also gave groups that had been marginalized a more prominent role in the debates that directly affected their communities.

Even if marginalized groups get their issues placed on the political agenda, Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) predict that they will have further obstacles because “[o]nce an issue has been taken onto government’s agenda, inequality can affect how a social problem comes to be defined” and established bureaucracies define issues much differently than those with direct experience dealing with them (112). That presents an opportunity for media, including the *Morning News* editorial board, to push for accurate portrayals of issues rather than relying on those in power to frame the debate. Immigration is one of the topics that the *Morning News* editorial board regularly pushes for a broad consideration of the issue rather than rely on those in power to devise their own solution.

Today, the role of the editorial page in addressing political inequality in immigration is much as it was when the board began meeting with community groups regularly more than twenty years ago. It gives a voice to groups that otherwise may not have a prominent voice in public affairs. In addition, the inclusion of competing views helps outline complex issues for the hundreds of thousands of readers who pick up the newspaper each day, Willey said. “First and foremost, we have a role to explain to readers the dimension of the problem. And the fact that, even though it sounds really good to say ‘Let’s just build a fence’ or ‘Let’s just deal with security,’ our role is to explain the repercussions of that and the cascading effect of that” (Willey 2006). The educational role of the editorial board therefore takes on more importance. Because “people differ in their capacity to understand and use information,” (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993, 107), the *Morning News* editorial board also has an opportunity to educate people about complex issues and show why their input is important.

Political inequality has its roots in socialization, community organization, group funding and political access (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993, 108-111). In dealing with political inequality, the *Morning News* editorial board can support policies that would improve education, encourage voting and reform campaign finance laws. But a more direct role of the editorial board is to provide a variety of different points of view on the op-ed page that can enliven debate and give new voices to an issue.

The editorial board regularly meets with virtually any community group that requests it, including all minority chambers of commerce, the League of Women Voters or other groups interested in the immigration debate or any other issue. Often a group

may either meet with members of the editorial board or be asked to write a guest column for the paper's Viewpoints, or op-ed, page.

In 2006, the paper has published guest columns about immigration by various interested parties. Those authors include conservative radio host Lynn Woolley and Thomas Howell, a senior fellow at the conservative Hoover Institution. On the other end of the political spectrum, the guest columnists include James Horney and Robert Greenstein, two officials with the more liberal Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Woolley (2006) argues that cheap immigrant labor results in more people living in poverty. Horney and Greenstein (2006) write that the Senate proposal to eventually grant residency or citizenship to undocumented immigrants would be beneficial to the economy because more workers would pay income taxes.

The Viewpoints page, in giving a voice to regular citizens, also publishes columns from interested residents on immigration issues. Farmers Branch resident David Escamilla (2006) argues that undocumented immigrants should be registered and allowed to pay taxes in the United States as part of a comprehensive immigration package. In another column, published just days after the immigrant-rights march in downtown Dallas, Irving resident Rosalva Haro Lannen (2006) writes about the struggles one undocumented immigrant faces in getting a college degree. Lannen works with at-risk youth, especially undocumented immigrants. In yet another column, Irving high school student Rebecca Ibarra (2006) urges her fellow student protesters to organize better and protest more peacefully if they want to get their message across.

All are examples of the *Morning News*' efforts to give a voice to those who otherwise may not have the political power or political ability to get in front of a major policy debate, giving a forum for new ideas that may have been overlooked. Providing interest groups a major media forum in which to air their opinions also benefits the newspaper, Willey said. "That's an important role. The better we do that, the more credibility our voice will have over here [on the editorial page] as we try to prescribe solutions or offer some guidance or set the agenda" (Willey 2006).

4.7. Potential Process Improvements

Lindblom and Woodhouse's recommendations for improving policy making suggest possibilities for improving the editorial process. The challenge Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) present is to uncover ways to increase the "competition of ideas" (7) on policy formation questions -- the same challenge faced by the *Morning News* editorial page as it seeks to offer the best forum for informed debate on the immigration issue. The authors make several recommendations for improving the policy-making process and taking advantage of the "potential intelligence of democracy" (23). Those recommendations are to seek agreement in lieu of complete understanding, to fragment analysis and to perform strategic analysis.

The questions for the researcher are: First, how do those recommendations apply to the editorial policy formation process at the *Morning News* as the paper shapes its position on immigration? Second, how accountable is the editorial board to community perspectives? The answers often can be found in how well the editorial board includes as wide an array of opinions as possible.

In dealing with the preceding questions, the researcher encountered gaps in the methodology and research that cannot be fully addressed. First, the researcher focused primarily on the editorial page process and the formation of the editorial stance of the newspaper. After conducting the research, it became apparent that the role of the editorial page in enhancing public debate and increasing the competition of ideas was closely intertwined with that of the op-ed, or Viewpoints, page. Therefore, these pages should be considered together in an examination of attempts by the *Morning News* editorial page to include more voices in public debate. The researcher later conducted a brief examination of the role of the Viewpoints page and its content, and included it in the analysis of potential process improvements for the editorial board. A second gap arises because the study does not attempt to analyze whether the editorial page process, on its own, should be more open to community input. This study instead merges the roles of the editorial page and the Viewpoints page together.

4.7.1 Agreement in Lieu of Complete Understanding

Lindblom and Woodhouse define an agreement in lieu of complete understanding as a way to resolve a policy question, even without having full answers provided by technical analysis. They say that “political interaction achieves a form of understanding that cannot be produced through analysis alone” (26).

The editorial board can easily provide a forum for that political interaction. Editorial board members acknowledge that they prefer not to rely on technical analysis on the immigration issue because competing cost-benefit analyses don’t lead to any firm conclusion. But when the editorial page pairs opposing viewpoints or op-ed pieces

together, or quotes competing viewpoints in an editorial, readers benefit with more information and better understanding of a policy issue.

As the editorial board presents those competing viewpoints together, it also lowers other potential obstacles to the editorial policy-formation process such as political inequality and the privileged role of business. Presenting competing viewpoints together provides readers with more information about the policy process, and it gives readers an opportunity for greater understanding of the issues. Although the viewpoints and editorials may not resolve all questions related to a policy issue like immigration, the editorial board's efforts can enhance Lindblom and Woodhouse's (1993) goal of increasing the potential intelligence of democracy by educating readers more fully about the issues.

Publication of competing op-ed columns and the quoting of varied sources in an editorial are not only attempts at facilitating agreement in lieu of complete understanding; they also can be considered attempts to reduce political inequality. That occurs when, as this thesis highlights earlier, the editorial board presents sources as varied as high school students, conservative radio talk show hosts and Washington, D.C., policy experts on both ends of the political spectrum. Publication of competing viewpoints also can be viewed as a way to counter the privileged role of business, as is the case when the editorial board presents columns from citizens opposing coal-fired electric plants on the same page as an electric company official ("Gasping in North Texas," 2006, 1P). But the challenge for the editorial board is to overcome the effect of impaired inquiry, or the inability of those in the policy process to consider all potential

solutions, no matter how extreme people perceive them to be. The *Morning News* editorial board can address that concern by seeking as wide an array of sources as possible for its op-ed columns.

Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) say that analysts have the ability to improve political debate, but they call it a “naïve” notion that analysts can provide “nonpartisan, comprehensive solutions for social problems” (127). Analysis sets the agenda for political debate and it helps improve political debate, but it can’t take the place of political interaction. Similarities to analysts exist for *Morning News* editorial board writers as they seek to highlight ignored causes.

The competition of ideas about what should be on the political agenda is enhanced when analysts turn attention toward issues they believe deserve higher priority than they are receiving. By way of contrast, the odds are not very high of making a difference when policy professionals align with affluent and well organized causes supporting the status quo... (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993, 130-31)

4.7.2 *Fragmentation of Analysis*

To address the recommendation of fragmentation of analysis, Lindblom and Woodhouse argue that politics succeeds when all participants can play a useful role, even if that role is limited. “Each [participant] speaks for some few angles on a complex problem, with the interplay of ideas and suggestions from diverse participants representing a fuller range of relevant considerations” (31). The *Morning News* editorial board follows this recommendation with its constant efforts to seek new voices and sources, as well as with its policy of meeting with all community groups interested in sharing their opinions. That inclusiveness can pay dividends for policy makers, and by extension, the newspaper. As Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) point out, “[t]here

rarely is enough diversity in democratic political systems as presently set up, and some issues are badly neglected year after year...” (31).

The editorial board’s attempts to seek out and quote marginalized groups can help reduce political inequality. It can lead to the inclusion of more voices and sources on the editorial page. It also can raise new issues and solutions that may not have been on the policy agenda previously, addressing concerns of political inequality. The challenge is to continue finding those new sources. Some of those sources, with ideas outside what is considered the usual range of policy options, may even be found within existing partisan or community organizations. As Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) point out, those voices used most often in media generally represent only a narrow range of options that reflect the status quo, and “business as usual in the media reinforces historically inherited patterns of elite advantages” (118). Therefore, overcoming impaired inquiry at the *Morning News* will continue to be a challenge. But there have been attempts at addressing that issue with fragmentation of analysis.

To get fresh, new voices, newspaper editorial boards including the *Morning News* have started publishing their own blogs. Those blogs, featured on web sites for newspapers nationwide, allow more room for full debate. However, the *Morning News* blog, like most others, does not offer a way for readers to simply post their unfiltered thoughts or their own editorials on a subject. Several years ago, a handful of newspapers seeking to expand the diversity of opinions on editorial pages offered their own version of an electronic billboard for editorials. The *Los Angeles Times* even briefly allowed computer users to edit the paper’s editorials online in a new form of opinion journalism.

The experiment failed miserably as “jerk swarms” descended on some of the first community editorials on the newspaper web site, filling them with foul language. The *Washington Post* suffered a similar setback when partisans posted persistent attacks against the paper, leaving no room for general policy discussions. The *Post* quickly ended its experiment (Palser 2006). The *Morning News* has embraced a more standard blogging role, with editorial writers and editors able to post their own observations or e-mail comments on the newspaper web site throughout the day. As Willey (2005) pointed out in an article in *Masthead*, a journal of the Canadian magazine industry, about the use of web sites for enhanced discussions, “[w]hile blogging will increase the number of e-mails you receive, it also will increase the number of readers who engage with your page. Who wants to argue with that?” (70).

The *Morning News* has taken another step toward giving a more prominent voice to people in the community. In the Collin County edition of its Metro section, the paper regularly publishes “Voices of Collin County,” which features volunteer columnists who write about topical issues that affect their communities. The newspaper publishes several columns a week from the volunteers, and it rotates the assignments every few months so that readers get new perspectives on a regular basis.

4.7.3 Strategic Analysis

According to Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993), complex problems often require strategic analysis, which is a methodical approach that calls for focusing on “small variations from present policy,” “focusing on a few policy options,” and focusing on “ameliorating the most pressing problems” (29). Sometimes, those

solutions can come through intelligent trial and error, the avoidance of unbearable errors, and flexibility in the policy process, all of which are part of strategic analysis.

But those recommendations for strategic analysis run counter to the editorial board's recommendation for a comprehensive immigration reform bill. In its editorials, the *Morning News* argues for an all-or-nothing approach that could be considered the opposite of strategic analysis. The editorial board supports a proposal that would be a major departure from existing policy, and it would deal with several major issues at the same time. Those issues include giving existing undocumented immigrants a way to eventually attain citizenship, dealing with border security issues, and considering new workplace requirements for employers who may regularly hire undocumented immigrants.

Although the editorial board urges comprehensive reform, it is in the area of policy-making flexibility that the editorial board can exert influence. It can encourage the public to have patience with immigration reform. As Lindblom and Woodhouse (1993) point out, harnessing the potential intelligence in the policy-making process calls for "informed and reasoned persuasion" (129). The *Morning News* can play a role in achieving that goal. Until now, the goal of comprehensive immigration reform has been stymied in Congress because of the seemingly intractable debate between penalizing undocumented immigrants and providing them a path to citizenship or residency status.

Rather than continue pushing for comprehensive immigration reform, the editorial board could consult with community groups and policy makers to determine their primary objectives of immigration reform. It could then offer its editorial pages as

a forum where the issue is addressed in a way that the most pressing problems are debated first. The editorial board has done the same thing in the past, such as with its complex proposals for the future of downtown Dallas that were segmented into specific proposals that could be adopted separately, with some of the most pressing issues getting individual attention as needed.

On immigration, policy makers in the past have essentially adopted immigration regulations on a trial-and-error basis. In 1986, passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act provided a path to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants, but it also provided more teeth for enforcement of immigration laws. Those new laws, which provided stiff penalties to employers, are seldom used, indicating that the agreement reached 20 years ago was able to address some of the issues but not answer all questions. In fact, the question of what to do with employer sanctions remains a large, unresolved issue today. It therefore offers a lesson that, while policy makers may attempt to resolve all immigration policy questions simultaneously, they may accomplish more by focusing on some problems first. Once those are resolved, they then can come back to other, more difficult issues such as enforcement of immigration laws.

Backing off a previous editorial stance urging comprehensive immigration reform is difficult, but it may be the only way to achieve progress. It also can entice community groups and policy makers to sit at around the community table provided by the editorial page and contribute new, incremental recommendations for immigration policy. Doing so would lessen the feelings of political inequality that immigrant-rights

groups feel in the current climate. It also could produce fresh, new ideas that would address the issue of impaired inquiry. In addition, it would not require an over-reliance on technical analysis that could bog down the issue. And attacking the immigration reform issue on a piecemeal basis also would reduce the previously outlined privileged role that business has in the *Morning News* editorial board's coverage of the immigration debate.

4.7.4 Democratic Policy Design

In a policy-making process, advantaged groups commonly seek to create or perpetuate policies that burden groups with less political standing. Such a degenerative policy-making process usually occurs in the immigration debate because advantaged groups see a political benefit in targeting disadvantaged groups – especially immigrants themselves – that have little or no political standing. Schneider and Ingram (1997) offer worthwhile guidance that can be followed by editorial boards such as the *Morning News*. In their “principles of good design” (202), the authors spell out seven recommendations for more democratic policy designs. Those recommendations also provide a parallel for the editorial policy formation process. In both the policy-making and editorial formation processes, the goal is the same: improving participatory democracy. The *Morning News*' processes mirror some of Schneider and Ingram's (1997) recommendations for enhancing the policy-making process.

First, Schneider and Ingram (1997) call for the construction of target groups in such a way as to “cut across lines of longstanding social, racial, economic and other cleavages” (203). Under current policy designs, immigrants often have little standing to

lobby for policies that benefit themselves. As borderline dependent-deviant target groups, they must rely on others. Policy makers therefore must avoid stereotypes of target groups when determining the distribution of policy benefits and burdens. The *Morning News* editorial board argues that undocumented immigrants living in the United States play a vital role in the economy, conferring greater status on them as emergent contenders rather than dependents or deviants. The *Morning News* also argues that undocumented immigrants have a right to remain here and be provided an eventual path to citizenship or resident status, paving the way for the political process to confer new benefits on them that they otherwise may not receive.

Second, Schneider and Ingram call for policy design “to ensure public involvement and avoid overly complex and technical designs that empower narrow scientific and professional interests” (203). The authors call for less technical input and more community input in decision-making. The *Morning News* editorial board avoids an over-reliance on analysis. The editorial board also has advanced this recommendation by seeking community input via Viewpoints contributions from people on both sides of the immigration debate. The inclusion by the editorial board of new participants in the debate, and granting those new participants a voice, could shift those new participants and immigrants from a dependent classification into the authors’ contender or emergent contender classification.

Third, Schneider and Ingram call for policy designs that “encourage and strengthen communicative ethics and communicative rationality across all policy-making contexts in government, the workplace and civil society” (204). According to

the authors, policy designs should encourage civility and openness, and policy designs should enhance participation from people other than those in the deserving target groups. The *Morning News* adopts the basic tenets of this recommendation by rejecting the dramatic calls from some to automatically deport all undocumented immigrants, a political stand that seeks to keep immigrants in the dependent or deviant category. In addition, the *Morning News* plays a valuable role in communicative rationality with its ability to call out and question the motives of those who seek to capitalize on the immigration debate by targeting immigrants and otherwise following degenerative policy designs. By refusing to follow the degenerative policy designs and by giving marginalized groups a louder voice, the editorial board encourages more civility and openness in the policy discussion.

Fourth, Schneider and Ingram recommend cultivation of “a sense of community through designs that favor the creation of civic organizations” (205). The authors note that the number of civic organizations is declining, and that more civic organizations could be used to create a “common stake” among residents (205). The *Morning News* editorial board cannot directly lead in creation of new civic groups, but it attempts to cultivate a sense of community in several ways. It promotes the efforts of existing community groups, it gives those groups a forum to share their opinions and it encourages all citizens to vote by publishing candidate recommendations and a voter registration form. By its nature, the editorial page provides a meeting place for the exchange of ideas, which can improve the sense of community. And by interviewing all

candidates for public office and meeting with all community groups that request it, the board is exposed to a wide variety of opinions that it then uses in writing its editorials.

Fifth, Schneider and Ingram urge policy efforts that “design for context, draw from multiple theories, and analyze from multiple perspectives” (206). In essence, the authors call for “real-world” input and “real-world contexts” (206), pointing out that policy-making participants should come from all levels of bureaucracy and the community. This recommendation follows the goals of journalists to seek stories and information from all sources, not just the deserving target groups or those who confer policy burdens and benefits. The *Morning News* editorial board attempts to include new and different sources. That can be seen by its inclusion of varied voices on its Viewpoints page and in its firsthand reporting of the immigrant rights marches in Dallas in spring 2006. The efforts to cover the immigrant marches thoroughly on the editorial page helped boost the immigrant-rights groups, at least for a short time, into Schneider and Ingram’s emergent contender category in the political process. That gave them greater standing to demand policy benefits or at least political recognition, but their effect at the ballot box in the November 2006 elections is still being debated, and they likely have fallen back into the borderline dependent-deviant classification.

Sixth, Schneider and Ingram call for officials to “design policies that build capacity, inform, empower and facilitate self-governance and learning rather than policies that manipulate through slogans or symbols” (206). This recommendation requires engaged citizens who “grasp the complexities of public policy and engage one another in finding the most appropriate designs taking into account all relevant

interests” (206). The *Morning News* editorial board provides a forum for engaged, interested groups on all public policy matters. While it doesn’t connect groups directly, simply providing the editorial forum offers the possibility for increased learning and participation in the democratic process.

Finally, Schneider and Ingram recommend that policy makers “avoid designs that rely on deception for support” (206). With its coverage of issues such as immigration, the editorial board attempts to break through complex policy debates to give its readers a better understanding of how policy decisions may affect them. It also can call out policy makers who rely heavily on manipulation of an issue and attempt to unfairly heap burdens on disadvantaged target groups.

As part of their final recommendation, Schneider and Ingram also state that political leaders should avoid making deals in secret or make deals with hidden meanings that only other politicians recognize. It is questionable whether politicians will follow this advice. And the *Morning News*, in one of its editorials, acknowledges that reality and encourages President Bush to make a secret deal, if necessary, to get a comprehensive immigration reform bill passed. The editorial encourages the president to sign a bill authorizing a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexico border if it means he can get back-room deals that will improve his chances to rally support later for a comprehensive immigration bill. The president signed the bill. But no decision has been made on comprehensive immigration reform. At the editorial page, the *Morning News* can still effectively use its public forum to call out politicians using secret deals, but it

may have lost some of its effectiveness to do so after publicly encouraging a secret deal between President Bush and Congress.

4.8 Current Policy, Future Efforts

Any good newspaper – and any good editorial page – must be advocates for change. But with that role comes a price, Willey said. “By definition, you are banging your head against the status quo because you’re advocating for change” (Willey 2006). Writers must keep in mind that their audience changes every day, and this requires newspapers to regularly revisit worthwhile topics, constantly seek new angles to write about and include fresh, new voices. Someone who reads a potent editorial about comprehensive immigration reform one day may not pick up the paper again when the next editorial appears on the subject. And many who read the paper regularly may miss editorials on immigration reform one day but, one hopes, open to the last inside pages of the A section when the next immigration editorial runs, Willey said. “These things take such time and patience and diligence. That’s probably the most difficult aspect, is staying with it. Anything worth accomplishing takes time” (Willey 2006).

Sometimes, a sense of accomplishment comes with word that a state or federal lawmaker has clipped a *Morning News* editorial or e-mailed an editorial about immigration to his or her colleagues, Willey said. “That’s always nice to hear because you feel like your efforts have been noticed. Many people may want to argue with what’s in the editorial, but at least they’re taking your editorials seriously. That’s what you want” (Willey 2006).

The *Morning News* editorial pages have a long history of providing a forum for community debate. The paper's editorial page voice has evolved over the years, from tackling national issues almost exclusively in the past to now addressing a host of local, state and national policy questions facing North Texas. One of those issues the editorial board now writes about regularly is immigration. The editorial board members see the need for undocumented immigrants to provide labor. They also see the impracticality of arresting and deporting everyone here illegally.

The board has written dozens of editorials on immigration in 2006. As in the state and national policy-making process, there are obstacles to the editorial policy-formation process. Those include the leading role of business on editorial board considerations; the limits of technical analysis on an issue as complex as immigration; political inequality among interest groups; and the inability or unwillingness of policy makers and editorial writers to consider a wide array of policy questions and policy options. The editorial board has taken steps to address those obstacles, from the inclusion of more community groups to the editorial board meeting agenda, the creation of blogs, the creation of the "Voices of Collin County" community columnist feature, and the avoidance of stereotyping immigrants as dependent or deviant in the policy-making process. However, the editorial board still offers business a leading role in the debate, and it has taken few, if any, steps to broaden the debate and address the issue of impaired inquiry. The challenge for the *Morning News* editorial board will be to include as many voices as possible to broaden the debate, a challenge in today's business-oriented media climate.

Because of a gap in the research methodology, this study cannot adequately address whether the editorial board fully incorporates an array of community voices within the editorial page process itself. The researcher, in attempting to draw parallels between the policy-making process and the editorial formation process, did not gather data on the number and variety of sources consulted on each editorial published. The researcher focused more on the deliberations among the editorial board members to analyze the editorial formation process. The study also attempted to distinguish between the editorial page and the Viewpoints page when reviewing the editorial board's processes. The researcher later discovered that, in addressing the obstacles to effective policy making, the roles of the editorial page and the Viewpoints page are closely intertwined. The researcher did not analyze the Viewpoints page closely, but a brief examination of the Viewpoints page shows that the editorial board regularly opens its op-ed page to community leaders.

CHAPTER 5

OTHER FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Empirical Findings

In addition to studying the role of the *Morning News* editorial board on immigration policy, the researcher also had the opportunity to explore other major policy questions and issues surrounding the editorial formation process. Those issues include the role of business and the role of newspaper management, as well as how the editorial board has used its agenda-setting function in the past. The study finds that the publisher and the owner of the *Morning News* generally take a hands-off approach toward operation of the editorial board, except in certain cases involving political recommendations. The study also finds that the editorial page editor possesses great authority over the final product of the editorial page. That discretion is greater now than in the past. Business also plays a prominent role in editorial board discussions. In addition, the *Morning News* editorial board regularly uses its agenda-setting role to promote legislative or policy agendas it deems appropriate. The study also finds that editorial board members, in reporting on an issue before publication, regularly rely on the work of blogs, published policy reports and the work of other newspapers. Ultimately, the study finds that editorial board members remain optimistic about the

future of their profession because of the role they play in fostering informed, public debate.

5.2 Top-down Approach?

A key question that arises when examining the nature of editorial pages is whether they operate independently of ownership and whether they feel free to pursue whatever topics the editors choose. Research has produced mixed results on the management style of publishers and owners and the influence they exert on editorial pages. In an analysis of editorial page content, Demers (1996) sought to determine whether locally-owned or chain newspapers have more vigorous editorial pages. The author reviewed 17 previous studies on the effect of corporate ownership, and states “[m]ost studies have found few differences between corporate and entrepreneurial newspapers, and a fair number even suggest that corporate newspapers are more, not less, vigorous editorially” (857). The explanation is that corporate newspapers are often found in larger cities with more pluralistic communities that foster open debate. With open debate fostered by a pluralistic society, newspapers have more opportunities to write critical editorials.

In conducting his own study, Demers (1996) went on to compare editorial positions taken by corporate-owned newspapers to editorial positions taken by locally-owned newspapers. Corporate-owned newspapers, he finds, generally hire more college graduates, have codes of conduct and have more structural complexity as defined by the number of levels of reporters and editors. Demers (1996) finds that “the more a

newspaper exhibits the characteristics of the corporate form of organization, the greater the number and proportion of editorials critical of mainstream groups or sources” (870).

The *Morning News* is corporate-owned and has many of the characteristics of a corporate newspaper as defined by Demers’ (1996) study. But parent Belo Corp. has grown with the longtime family ownership of the *Morning News*. The paper is the anchor of the corporation. Belo also is based in Dallas, across Young Street in downtown Dallas from the newspaper and its local television station, which gives the *Morning News* some traits of a locally-owned newspaper. In the two-month observation period at the *Morning News*, editorial page editors claimed they were free to make virtually all content decisions. On immigration, top company officials let the editorial board decide what to say and when to say it, said editorial writer Jim Mitchell. “That issue started here. I feel they’re really at arm’s length” (Mitchell 2006). On other issues, he added, the publisher and board chairman almost always let the editorial board do its job without any interference (Mitchell 2006).

But there were a few key exceptions. Any editorial page mention of the campaign for “signature bridges” across the Trinity River near downtown Dallas required consultation with corporate officials, although no editorials were written on the subject during the two-month observation period. But several other issues did arise as the November elections approached. Some editorial recommendations in local races were “walked across” the street to corporate offices for review and input.

One recommendation involved a race in which the editorial board wanted to recommend one candidate over another candidate who is the childhood friend of a

company executive. In that case, the editorial page published a recommendation for the person opposing the company executive's childhood friend.

In another electoral contest, a three-member panel on the editorial board interviewed both candidates and unanimously recommended one candidate. That recommendation was then approved by the full editorial board and forwarded to newspaper management. Corporate officials reversed the board's recommendation. That decision was not a surprise, Willey said. "We knew we had an uphill climb with that. This is an example where those of us on the ground covering these issues nitty-gritty every day have a different perspective from those who run the store" (Willey 2006). The editorial, however, also gave praise to the candidate the board initially recommended. In several close races, the board decided to give qualified praise to one candidate while formally recommending another.

The possibility of higher-ups reversing editorial board positions is something that all writers and editors acknowledge. Some handle it better than others. Journalists prize their independence and freedom of thought, and some clash with newspaper management and ownership even after joining an editorial board. But it helps to be realistic, Willey said. "I don't like it when the editorial board's or my recommendation is reversed. As long as it happens rarely, it's a fact of life. If it were happening every month or several times a year, somebody would be in the wrong job. And since I would be the lower man on the totem pole, that would be me" (Willey 2006).

In some cases where editorial positions have been altered, the management and ownership have provided keen insight that writers and editors close to the situation may not have, former editorial page editor Rena Pederson said.

People like to think of this specter of the business office meddling. In truth, any business considerations were very, very rare. When I did hear from them, it was usually helpful because they would have access to some high level of information that I didn't. Robert [Decherd, the Belo chairman] and Burl [Osborne, the former publisher] are both very smart men. Usually their contributions were very helpful. (Pederson 2006)

In one case in the mid-1990s, however, the editorial board was told to stop writing editorials favoring a proposal for high-speed rail service among Texas' largest cities of Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas and Fort Worth (Barta 2006). The change was likely a result of pressure from locally-based airlines that saw the rail proposal as a business threat, former Viewpoints editor Carolyn Barta said. "I remember very clearly at one meeting Rena told us we were not going to be able to support the high-speed train. I thought it was short-sighted and we were bowing to the will of our advertisers and to big-shots in the community" (Barta 2006). Pederson also said the issue was a frustrating experience for the editorial board. She did not know why the issue encountered difficulty, but said that the editorial board was still able to write some editorials on the subject (Pederson 2006).

In the last twenty years, the newspaper's owners and management have loosened their oversight of the editorial page, giving freer rein to the editorial board. In the past, editorials had to be written by noon, and copies were left with former publisher Osborne by mid-afternoon. On occasion, he would require changes to editorials right up to the first-edition deadline (Pederson 2006; Barta 2006). Now, the publisher, board chairman

and a few others receive a list up to a week in advance of the topics of upcoming editorials. Willey said that only a handful of times in her four years has management steered the editorial board in a direction different from the editorials budgeted in advance. “We don’t do anything secret. We are completely out front and open. It’s a very transparent process. If there is something in the look-aheads [editorials budgeted in advance] that you don’t understand or that gives you concern, reach out. Otherwise, we’re off to the races” (Willey 2006).

5.2.1 Democracy, Oligarchy or Dictatorship

Current and former editorial board members all agree that writing as the voice of a major newspaper is not a democratic process. Most pointed out that important distinctions exist between independent news reporters and editorial writers. News reporters, like those on the Metropolitan desk, are supposed to operate free of most interference other than what occurs in the typical editing process. Editorial writers, on the other hand, should expect some input and direction from the editorial page editor, management and ownership. Editorial writers are hired as advisors to the editorial page editor, and the editor is an advisor to the publisher and owner, Willey said. “We represent the opinion arm of the paper which, after all, reflects the owners of the paper. So what do you expect? Everybody has to know that coming in” (Willey 2006).

When he first arrived on the editorial page in the early 1980s, former editorial writer Hank Tatum said the editorial page operated more like a dictatorship, but that evolved over time. “We have probably a lot of lively debate on the page and people really fight their issues, but people are more apt now to say ‘I can’t write that if I don’t

believe it' ” (Tatum 2006). That correlates with longstanding findings from Wilhoit and Drew (1973), who found in a national survey that “a majority of the editorial writers said they seldom or never were compelled to write editorials contrary to their own ideas about an issue” (642).

Current editors and writers say they now feel comfortable pushing for an issue, even if it meant changing the *Morning News*' historical editorial position. Assistant editorial page editor Michael Landauer said the board successfully lobbied management and ownership to drop its support of the Wright Amendment, a federal law that prohibited long-haul flights from Love Field airport in favor of D/FW Airport. “On any issue, we can debate the heck out of something. And if we are united behind something that doesn't jibe with the longstanding philosophy at the top, we have every opportunity to persuade those at the top that this is the direction we should go in” (Landauer 2006). Added his colleague, editorial writer Rodger Jones: “It has to be evolutionary. Our newspaper has to be pragmatic, as most mature institutions do” (Jones 2006a).

5.2.1.1 Editorial Board Voting

Rather than poll its board members for every issue, the *Morning News* editorial board almost always found a way to arrive at a consensus without having to take a vote during the observation period. On several occasions, a question went around the table and editorial board members responded, but no formal vote was taken. However, votes were taken for editorial board recommendations in upcoming elections. On one other occasion, every member was asked whether he or she supported the government's

ability to suspend some civil rights for people suspected of terrorist activity, a process that amounted to a vote. That vote helped chart the course for an upcoming editorial.

Such methods probably are typical throughout most of the news industry. But that does not mean that every newspaper operates in exactly the same manner. The *Morning News* editorial board closely follows a central set of beliefs, and votes probably would not make a difference. In fact, it might make an editorial board's job more difficult because of a possible lack of consistency, Landauer said. "I have seen editorial boards operate like a democracy, and that gets confusing" (Landauer 2006).

5.3 Role of Business

Although newspapers reflect a pluralistic society, some voices are heard more often on editorial pages than others. As Demers (1996) points out: "[M]ass media are highly responsive to political and economic centers of power and promote values generally consistent with capitalist ideals and elite interests" (864).

The editorial board discussions revealed some leeway given to business interests, particularly with companies based in North Texas. On Sept. 20, 2006, for example, the editorial board discussed whether to lend its weight to American Airlines' bid for a nonstop flight from D/FW Airport to Beijing. American Airlines was competing with several other airlines for the route, and the decision was to be made by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). American Airlines officials requested a meeting with the editorial board to make their case. Such a request is common practice among many business and community groups since the editorial board adopted a more open-door policy in the 1980s. But transportation department deadlines and *Morning*

News publication deadlines dictated that the board make a quick decision on whether to write anything about the proposal. The board spent seven minutes on the discussion, which alternated between finding a good angle on which an editorial could be written and questions about what level of support a newspaper should show for a business-related request.

Mitchell: “This is a business decision of American, and it’s a business decision of the DOT. I’m not sure how much influence we’re going to have. They’re looking for a high-profile clip they can pass around.”

McKenzie: “If we have to write something about it, there is a reason D/FW should get it. There is a lot of traffic that goes from D/FW to China. There are businesses in our back yard that are very international” [Obsv., 20 September 2006].

Later, editorial board members alternated between the notion that the newspaper should support its local businesses and a news angle that it would bring better air service to China from an airport in the southern United States.

Mitchell: “It’s a gateway for the southern United States.”

Jones: “You gotta root, root, root for the home team.”

Mitchell: “That’s all it is” [Obsv., 20 September 2006].

The *Morning News* has deep roots in the community. Its editorial page has historically catered to business interests, Barta said. “I don’t know if that’s as true today. But some people are more influential than others” (Barta 2006). In the past, the Dallas Citizens Council, a group of powerful community leaders with ties to business interests, dictated many of the goals for Dallas. Today, Decherd chairs a committee

designed to improve downtown Dallas. This case study did not attempt to draw parallels between editorials about downtown and Belo corporate interests. But having an owner like Decherd has great benefit, Pederson said. “One of the good things about having somebody like Robert is that there were few business people bigger than him. If he felt it was the right thing to do, we would do it. People did not dictate to him. The idea that the business community would dictate to him is wrong. He did what he thought was right” (Pederson 2006).

5.4 Agenda-setting Role

In some cases, the editorial board has used its agenda-setting power to dictate to government and business interests when difficult times warranted it. Pederson recalled the economic crash in the late 1980s that left banks and the government to foreclose on much of the property in downtown Dallas. “Literally, there was little leadership downtown because all the businesses went down and all the banks went down” (Pederson 2006). That prompted the editorial page to launch its “Get Dallas Moving” campaign in 1988, which advanced a specific policy agenda for policy makers by making recommendations to improve the downtown Dallas area. Among them were improvements to Farmers Market; a downtown Dallas university; improvements to mass transit; more parks in the central business district; infrastructure improvements to attract businesses and tourists to the West End Historic District and Deep Ellum; and zoning changes to allow people to live in downtown. “Until then, you couldn’t do it. It was illegal to live in downtown” (Pederson 2006). Ultimately, the city adopted most of

the recommendations, although some like the ideas, such as improvements to Farmers Market, were not followed closely enough to have a lasting effect (Pederson 2006).

The agenda-setting function of the *Morning News* editorial page has not been without complications. Editorial board support for the creation and expansion of Dallas Area Rapid Transit in the 1980s led to death threats lodged against members of the editorial board, including Pederson. “We just got hammered. I had death threats. I had to put an emergency button under my desk. Robert [Decherd] knew that to be a great city, you had to have good transportation. But at the time, there were some very conservative elements who thought it would be a boondoggle” (Pederson 2006).

Around the same time, the editorial board fought for change on another major local issue. It was a 1993 Pulitzer Prize finalist for its series on the problems facing West Dallas, a historically neglected area of the city that required a massive toxic cleanup due to lead smelters in the neighborhood.

Today, the editorial page uses its agenda-setting role on several topics. It has worked with the newsroom on a series of new recommendations for Dallas known as the “Tipping Point” series. And for several years, the *Morning News* has editorialized that the Legislature should record each member’s vote on all bills it considers. Currently, many bills are decided by voice vote only. The paper’s stance has led to legislative hearings, and a bill passed the state senate in 2005. This year, the board and some lawmakers expect a bill to pass both houses of the Legislature and be signed by the governor (Hill 2006; Willey 2006).

In addition, the editorial board has joined with the editorial board of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* to lobby local policy makers to create a regional commuter rail network. The papers jointly sponsored a regional transit summit in 2003, seeking to obtain regional consensus on the need for an expanded commuter rail network. Since then, both papers have written regular editorials encouraging state lawmakers to listen to the will of local residents. The efforts may be paying off in 2006 and in the upcoming 2007 legislative session, as lawmakers consider amending state law to allow new sales tax elections for mass transit in North Texas (Hartzel 2006). Lawmakers have been slow to move because of the potential political liabilities of higher sales taxes, but they know that the Dallas and Fort Worth newspaper editorial boards are watching and will keep pushing the issue (Hill 2006).

Sometimes, the challenge for editorial boards lies in outlasting politicians who hope that ignoring an issue will allow it to fade with time. Although both the transit and recorded vote issues have been on the agenda-setting list for several years, the editorial board is not discouraged, Willey said. “Anything worth accomplishing takes time. The challenge sometimes is motivating us on the board to stay with it” (Willey 2006).

5.4.1 Intermedia Agenda Setting

Journalists, by their nature, have an abundance of curiosity about many topics. That leads them to regularly consult other media both for new story and editorial ideas and to see what their competitors are writing. That intermedia agenda setting has become a major source of communications research in recent years (McCombs 2005). It also was common in *Morning News* editorial board discussions during the observation

period for this thesis. Writers and editors regularly cited sources ranging from the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* to scholarly journals on foreign affairs. The increasing prevalence of blogs also had an effect on editorial board discussions as they became regular sources of information for some writers. McCombs (2005) cautions against over-reliance on other media to help the news process, saying that “journalists routinely look over their shoulders to validate their sense of news...” (549). While the *Morning News* occasionally looked over its proverbial shoulder at what other newspapers wrote during the observation period, many times it was only to start a discussion at the editorial board and not to parrot what another institution says. On local issues, the situation was reversed as the editorial board often drove the discussions that other local media followed.

5.5 Future Role of Editorial Pages

When asked, editorial board members say their first mission is to provide a forum for informed debate. By extension, that provides a forum for democracy itself. As the age of electronic media kicks into high gear, editorial pages must evaluate their role in the policy-making process. Ironically, the abundance of media may help editorial pages well into the future, Pederson said. “People are barraged by all this opinion. I think there is a role for steady, informed, responsible community voices. Newspapers can offer that. They can be a go-to place” (Pederson 2006).

Editorial board members take their role very seriously, Barta said. “With a reasoned approach, it is not overly dictated by the business interests of the community. If you can give voice to different segments of the community, you want to do that”

(Barta 2006). Above all, the editorial page must continue to spark lively debate and keep people writing or e-mailing their opinions to the newspaper, even if they disagree with you, Willey said. “Because people disagree with you is not a negative. You want them to disagree with you because they have taken your arguments seriously. They’ve given you credibility, and that’s important. If people aren’t engaging you, you’re irrelevant” (Willey 2006).

This chapter shows the generally hands-off approach that newspaper management has to the *Morning News* editorial page, with rare exceptions to political coverage. It also shows how the editorial page editor possesses a large amount of discretion over the editorial content, but that she realizes the benefit of giving writers their own voice on a subject. Business also plays an important role in topics other than immigration. Editorial board discussions and interviews indicate that business interests are part of the editorial formation process, but that they are not the only interests considered. The *Morning News* also uses its institutional voice successfully on occasion to focus attention to an issue, thereby promoting policy change that benefits groups as varied as downtown Dallas interests, mass transit users and those who simply want to know how their state legislators vote on every issue. Such examples offer a blueprint for editorial pages well into the future, even in a more crowded media marketplace.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This case study offers a glimpse into the complex, deliberative world of one newspaper editorial board. While much has been written about what editorials say after they have been published, little attention has been paid to the editorial policy formation process leading up to publication. On many complex issues that newspapers address daily, the influences that lead up to an editorial board decision vary greatly. And because of the complexity of the issues featured on the *Morning News* editorial pages, editorials almost always are the result of myriad factors.

As shown, the *Morning News* editorial board must consider many variables as it considers how to present the institutional voice of its newspaper. Those influences can be political, as illustrated by the pull of interest groups and elected policy makers. The influences also can be institutional, as illustrated by personal dynamics among editorial board members and the relationships between corporate newspaper owners and other business interests.

This explanatory case study of the deliberations of the *Morning News* editorial board draws parallels between Lindblom and Woodhouse's (1993) framework and the editorial policy formation process. It shows that the *Morning News* editorial board, and by implication other editorial boards, face the same obstacles confronted by policy

makers on issues as complex as immigration: limits of analysis; the privileged role of business; impaired inquiry; and political inequality. Some or all of those factors also play a role in almost every judgment that editorial writers and editors make. This case study also shows the delicate balancing act that editorial writers face daily. While they are free to take a stand on the issues before them, they must weigh the issues carefully, chart their course and let their positions evolve over time, if necessary.

At the *Morning News*, the editorial position on immigration has proven fairly consistent over time. Currently, the newspaper is lobbying Congress to pass a comprehensive reform package. The paper might want to consider an editorial policy that backs off its push for comprehensive immigration reform. As illustrated by its work with Texas business leaders on immigration, the *Morning News*' current editorial position can be viewed in part as a product of the prominent influence of business on the political and editorial process. However, editorial writers have taken a thoughtful approach to the issue by considering many other sides, including the public health and human rights issues related to immigration and the practicality of making criminals out of undocumented immigrants who come to the United States seeking a better way of life.

With the onset of Internet-based media and countless blogs on almost every issue imaginable, the future of newspapers and newspaper editorial boards appears challenging. But editorial pages, with their name recognition, can be a primary source for people seeking informed, rational debate on topics such as immigration. In addition, editorial pages like the *Morning News* can expand their agenda-setting role, particularly

on community issues and immigration. Indeed, the future success of editorial pages may lie in their ability to set the agenda for their communities with keen insight that information consumers can get nowhere else. By taking more editorial stands and defining issues for policy makers, the editorial boards will continue to play a key role in society.

6.1 Topics for Further Study

The first area of future study is to explore the gaps in the research involving the processes of the *Morning News* editorial board. Future research should explore how the editorial board incorporates community and other outside voices into the editorial policy formation process itself. That could entail documenting the number and type of sources contacted as editorials are being drafted. Another area of future study is to conduct a more systematic review of the Viewpoints page and its content to how inclusive it is in highlighting community voices.

The role of business and the business-oriented Dallas Citizens Council in the political agenda of Dallas is legendary. As an area for future study in the relationship between the newspaper and business interests, it is suggested that researchers investigate the community power structure of Dallas. In particular, researchers could look at any connection between the *Morning News*' editorial positions taken in the middle decades of the 20th century and the top priorities of the Dallas Citizens Council around the same time. While anecdotal evidence indicates the Dallas Citizens Council and the *Morning News* did not agree all the time, a study into possible agenda-setting

correlations between the two could provide insight into development of both the newspaper and the city.

It also would be productive to use Lindblom and Woodhouse's (1993) framework for improving the policy-making process to extend the analysis further and analyze the actions of another editorial board. Such an analysis would address whether editorial boards adequately address the obstacles to effective policy-making, and if so, what measures they take specifically to overcome those obstacles. In doing so, research could also provide a detailed analysis of the voices included on an op-ed page to determine whether the pages take enough action to reduce impaired inquiry, specifically when editorial pages highlight or feature new or different viewpoints. Such a study could take steps to determine how inclusive – or exclusive – those op-ed pages are on various issues.

It also would be productive to apply the framework of this case study to other newspapers. By using a community power structure technique on a national or regional scale, the study could prove helpful in determining how different newspapers – and how many people in those newspapers -- set the agenda for editorial board coverage of an issue such as immigration.

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