H.R 4437 (2006)
(In the News: 2005–2006)

Media Storm? **YES**

Week of highest news coverage: May 20–26, 2006
Number of news articles week before: 89
Number of news articles that week: 124
Number of news articles during peak month coverage: 294

On December 16, 2005, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 (H.R. 4437) passed the U.S. House by a 57% majority. It required harsher penalties for undocumented immigration, requiring immigration officials to deport any suspected undocumented immigrant within 100 miles of the border without due process; requiring employers to check employees' citizen status and criminalizing businesses that would not comply; and making it a crime to assist an "illegal alien" to remain in the U.S. The bill expired at the end of the congressional session with no Senate vote and provoked delayed but widespread protests. These protests, in turn, prompted a media storm in the spring of 2006.

HEAT

VERY HIGH

- The bill was inherently newsworthy for the harshness of its policies.
- It was also highly partisan; 88% of House Republicans supported it, while 81% of Democrats opposed it.
- The resulting protests in 2006 were newsworthy because they were widespread and had a clear message (e.g., on May 1 organizers used the slogan "A Day Without an Immigrant" to mobilize an immigrant work boycott to draw attention to their contributions).

FUEL

VERY HIGH

- From 1990 to 2007, the U.S. experienced a spike in immigration, from 3.5 to 12 million unauthorized immigrants with many efforts at reforms and enforcement on the federal and state levels.
- Notable previous policy initiatives included CA Prop 187 in 1994 and President Clinton blocking all immigrants from receiving healthcare and social services in 1996 (both later reversed by the courts).
- The 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001 had adverse effects on how all immigrants were viewed in the U.S., heightening xenophobia.

OXYGEN

VERY HIGH

- Citizen activism mobilized hundreds of protests across 39 states, culminating on May 1, 2006, when about a million people, mostly of Latino descent, conducted a general strike ("A Day Without an Immigrant").
- Activist and advocacy groups like the ACLU and Human Rights Watch heavily criticized the bill.
- Protests sparked backlash from conservative politicians, like Pat Buchanan, and comments from President Bush and other politicians, including the future presidential candidate Barack Obama, who supported the protests.

OUTCOMES RELATED TO THE **H.R. 4437 MEDIA STORM:**

- **Blocked Policy** ***(the bill did not pass the Senate):*** Widespread protests and grassroots efforts helped prevent the Senate from voting on the bill.
- **New Policy** ***(a milder bill passed soon thereafter):*** The Secure Fence Act (the non-media storm in this comparison) was signed into law in 2006 with little fanfare and most of the stricter regulations around immigration dropped; the bill was framed less in terms of criminalizing immigration and more in terms of national security.
- **Voting Patterns Changed:** Arguably influenced by this media storm, two-thirds of Hispanic voters voted for

Secure Fence Act (2006)
(In the News: 2006)

Media Storm? **NO**

Week of highest news coverage: July 15-21, 2006
Number of news articles week before: 2
Number of news articles that week: 7
Number of news articles during peak month coverage: 12

Less than a year after H.R. 4437 passed the House and barely five months after the widespread protests, the Secure Fence Act (H.R. 6061) passed Congress and was signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 26, 2006. The Act directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to install two layers of secure fencing at the U.S.–Mexico border, as well as new surveillance technology to ensure there would be fewer, if any, illegal border crossings. The fencing would stretch nearly 700 miles across the border.

HEAT

MEDIUM

- The idea of a 700-mile-long border fence was inherently news-worthy, being both interesting and confounding.
- Unlike H.R. 4437, the Secure Fence Act made it to the president's desk and was signed into law.
- This bill had no policies that heightened the risk of deportation for U.S. residents; the fact that this bill focused more on border security than on direct policing and deportation of immigrants made it less newsworthy.

FUEL

HIGH

- The same immigration debates and legislation that served as fuel for H.R. 4437 also worked as fuel for the Secure Fence Act.
- Yet attention fatigue following the spring protests likely dulled the role of fuel in this case.
- Small segments of fencing were built on the southern border by previous administrations, like *Operation Gatekeeper* under the Clinton administration, which saw the construction of fencing at one of the busiest border crossing points: the San Diego-Tijuana border.

OXYGEN

LOW

- Whereas H.R. 4437 received a lot of attention from multiple advocacy groups opining on the bill's potential to cause harm, the Secure Fence Act did not receive this attention.
- There were no widespread protests or demonstrations against H.R. 6061.
- Likewise, there was relatively little public discussion about the policy by politicians.

OUTCOMES RELATED TO THE **H.R. 4437 MEDIA STORM:**

Democratic candidates in the 2006 midterms, whereas in 2000 41% of Hispanic voters had voted for President Bush. In 2008 this number increased further, with 73% of Hispanics voting for President Obama, a trend which endured until the presidential election of 2024.

- **Rise of Latino/a as a Political Identity:** The protests framed immigrant rights through the lens of workers' rights, human rights, and civil rights, helping to forge a more politically cohesive identity for the diverse population of Latino/as in America, with two-thirds of Latino/as surveyed reporting that they believed the 2006 marches represented a new U.S. social movement.