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Investigating Potential Anti-Catholic Bias in Southern Media

by
John Cooper Lawton

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

University, Mississippi
May 2017

Approved by

Advisor: Dr. Bradley Schultz

Reader: Professor Joseph Atkins

Reader: Dean Douglass Sullivan-González

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Special thanks to my parents, Jack and Lisa Lawton, for their never-ending support and determination to push me forward.

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And, lastly, to my friends and fraternity brothers, thanks for all the good times that prevented me from turning this in months earlier.

ABSTRACT

JOHN COOPER LAWTON: Investigating Potential Anti-Catholic Bias in Southern Media (Under the direction of Dr. Bradley Schultz)

This thesis researches newspapers in effort to find anti-Catholic bias particularly in the South. It also studied if the bias had changed over time. The study looked at five categories: “Nature of Headline,” “Presentation of Headline,” “Supportive Picture or Not,” “Body Text Content,” and “Tone of Story.” The “Tone of Story” category refers to the types of sources, which sources are placed where in the article, the location of where harsh and supportive words were placed within the article, and the “taste in the mouth” the researcher was left with upon completing the article. This category proved to be the biggest sign whether an article was bias or not. “Nature of Headline,” which took into account the words used in an article’s headline, also proved to be a good indicator of bias. The results suggested that northern and southern newspapers did not vary much at all. Ultimately, the research suggested that there was no bias in either the northern or southern newspapers examined. The study also suggested that anti-Catholic bias has lessened over the years.

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I. Introduction

This thesis sought to discover if reporting on Catholic news through newspapers is biased in the Southern United States as opposed to the North. The researcher chose papers from the North (north of the Mason-Dixon Line) and the South (south of the Mason-Dixon Line) due to the large gap in population numbers of Catholics from those regions. The number of northern Catholics vastly outnumbers the number of southern Catholics with only six of the 30 largest dioceses coming from the South (“USA,” 2005). This fact could lead one to assume that there may be some bias in one region compared to another based on the discrepancy of representation.

The news media in America have always been under scrutiny. The media are often portrayed as trying to push alternative agendas instead of merely presenting the facts on a story (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997). When the media reports on a religious topic, the perception of bias can be magnified. Often readers and listeners feel attacked when their own religion is the subject of the reporting. This is especially evident in today’s media with Islam (Said, 1981). Due to the coverage of radical Islam in connection to terrorism across the world, readers and listeners often automatically relate terrorism with radical Islam. This perception of a topic can occur in other topics as well, which is why this study tried to determine if this phenomenon had happened with Southern and Northern newspapers reporting on Catholic news.

A news article — not an editorial or opinion article — is intended to present the reader with facts and proper context. It is supposed to be left to the reader to decide how he or she feels about the topic after receiving all the facts on a subject. This is news in its purest form, and it allows the general population to conclude its own opinions and make its own educated decisions (“Journalists’ ethics,” 2016). Without unbiased reporting, the danger of the population becoming swayed and molded into one mass that cannot think for itself is heightened (Druckman & Parkin, 2005).

If bias against the Roman Catholic Church is present in newspapers in America, the American public could be misled about the basic tenets of the religion, which could possibly lead to intolerance or even persecution. This thesis focused on the possibility of Southern newspapers having bias present in their reporting of Catholic news due to the South’s small Catholic population. With a small population, the general population has little other than what the media reports on these topics to form their opinions on the Church. If the number of Catholics in the region were larger, the general population would have more understanding of the belief system since they would have more interaction with the religion. With limited interaction between Catholics and the general population, stigmas and false information are allowed to develop in the absence of counter arguments. The North has a far better chance to avoid this danger because of its large Catholic population. Due to the increased population of Catholics, the general population has far more opportunities to learn about Catholicism.

II. Literature Review

News bias

Studies on bias in the media are not new and have been around for years. There are numerous studies on religious bias and media bias, but there are not many studies on the presence of bias on Catholic news — meaning articles written about Catholic events, Catholics, or events that may affect Catholics — in the media.

News bias has been studied in many forms. Kaplan and DellaVigna (2006) studied the cable news markets that Fox News, a conservative news channel, had reached between 1996 and 2000 to discover if the votes for Republican presidential candidates had increased due to the introduction of Fox News. In fact, over 70 percent of America believes there is a great deal or fair amount of bias in the media. Pertaining to print media from 1996 to 2004, the general trend of Americans was to believe less of what was printed in newspaper or magazines each year (“News audiences,” 2004). Kaplan and DellaVigna (2006) discovered that media bias does affect the public. They found that towns with Fox News had “a 0.4 to 0.7 percentage point higher Republican vote share in the 2000 Presidential elections, compared to the 1996 elections” (p. 3). They also found that 3 to 8 percent of non-Republican viewers voted Republican after the introduction of Fox News.

Assuming that the media are unbiased, Eveland and Shah (2003) sought to understand why people perceived a bias. Vallone, Ross, and Leper (1985) found that most people believe the news media are biased against their own viewpoints calling it the “hostile media phenomenon” (p. 1). Additional studies (Eveland & Shaw, 2003; Perloff, 1989; Gunther 1992; Duck, Terry, & Hogg, 1998) supported the presence of this phenomena. Eveland and Shah (2003) found that the perception of media bias was unaffected by the total amount of discussion; instead, the perception of media bias was influenced by “conversations with ideologically like-minded individuals” (p. 1). In fact, Eveland and Shah discovered that this positive influence was stronger between Republicans than Democrats. This means that “ideologically concordant communication” reinforces the idea among Republicans that the media are biased against conservatives more than it reinforces the opposite idea among Democrats” (p. 2).

While many studies suggest a liberal bias toward news (Sutter, 2000), others (Alterman, 2003; Lee, 2005) argue that it is not as prevalent as many would believe. Lee (2005) supported the idea that there was indeed no media bias but rather a perceived bias, and that the perceived media bias often occurs when one believes his or her political ideologies are not represented well enough by the media, especially for conservatives. If both conservatives and liberals accuse the media of being biased against their political beliefs, can there truly be a bias at all? Moreover, what would unbiased coverage look like? According to the Code of Ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists, “Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity” (“SPJ Code,” 2014). This means that

unbiased coverage would present all relevant facts of a story and provide context to the facts.

The Southern media are no strangers to bias. During the Civil Rights Era, the media were usually congratulated on helping force the much needed changes in American society due to the wide coverage done by television networks (Thomas, 2003). However, Southern media were also guilty of bias against the civil rights movement; for example, Jackson, Mississippi television station WLBT lost its broadcast license in part because it “worked hard to defend segregation and deny access to opposing voices, both local and national” (Thomas, 2003, ¶ 1).

While there is little argument that the national coverage of the Civil Rights movement helped influence the change in America, “Recent histories have stressed a crucial difference between national and local television news and suggested that local television in the South helped perpetuate segregation” (Thomas, 2003, ¶ 5). Many suggest that newspapers and television stations did their best to ignore news stories involving racial issues (Watson, 1994). Afro-American newspapers, such as the *Richmond Afro-American* and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, worked to tell the untold stories of the fight for civil rights (Thomas, 2003).

Meanwhile, much like local news channels, local newspapers were often owned by prominent business owners who used their power in the media to push their personal political agendas. “Throughout the South many white newspapers followed a similar pattern—they restricted information and encouraged white resistance to desegregation” (Thomas, 2003, ¶ 33). The lack of coverage and misinformation reported

by Southern local newspapers showed a clear bias against desegregation. For example, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* did little to mention Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham City Jail* and protestors being hosed down by firehouses (Thomas, 2003). If the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* did choose to cover a civil rights event, the white editors often elected to portray it in a negative light, such as running a picture of a women being sprayed with a firehose captioning it as "Negro woman gets wet down by a fireman's hose as protest marches were broken up" ("Dogs, Fire Hoses," 1963). "White editors used specific language and images to disparage the protests and encourage resistance" (Thomas, 2003, ¶ 36). When national papers and news stations began covering the civil rights events, they were widely the only way many local citizens could receive the truth about what was happening (Thomas, 2003).

Bias against religions can show itself in many forms in life, including religious bias in the media. Alterman (2003) raised the concern that journalists are often secular and for them covering religious events as news proves a difficult task, since these events are a "matter of faith" rather than news. A possible example of religious bias in the media would be the portrayal of Islam. The news coverage on Islam "has given consumers of news the sense that they have understood Islam without at the same time intimating to them that a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material." (Said, 1981, p. 81) Said goes on to show that the intense news coverage on Islam, which has been "presumed to be fair, balanced, responsible coverage of Islam," (p. 81) has skewed the general public's perception of the religion. The coverage of Islam in the media is just one example of religious bias in the media and its effects. Just as a vote

may be influenced by a news outlet's coverage of an event (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2006), an opinion on a religion can be just as easily changed.

Anti-Catholic Bias

Anti-Catholic bias in America “runs through American history” according to Martin (2000, ¶ 5). The earliest settlers were predominately Protestants whose ideas on religion had been shaped by the Reformation. These settlers came from a vast population of Europeans that strongly disagreed with the Catholic Church (Ellis, 1956). By 1850, however, Catholicism became the largest denomination in America and that number continued to grow with the influx of immigrants from 1860 to 1900 (Martin, 2000). The rising numbers of Catholics in America prompted the growth of anti-Catholic groups such as the American Protective Association. Such resistance continued throughout the 20th Century, and was especially prominent in the 1960 presidential election as John F. Kennedy faced many questions regarding his Catholic faith. “Catholics and Catholicism are at the receiving end of a great deal of startling vituperation in contemporary America” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 13). Martin (2000) asserts that anti-Catholic bias remains today in that the Church's form of governance could be considered “anti-American,” and its call for community stifled the American ideal of individuality, and its embrace of mystery and transcendence could be seen as “old-fashioned.” (¶ 13,15)

Religious groups are just like many other social groups in America. They follow the “tendency to perceive media bias as directed toward themselves” (Perl & Bendyna, 2002, p. 655). In fact, it is shown that people often see the media as biased when the news is directed to the reader or viewer's personal affiliations and beliefs (Perl & Bendyna,

2002). Martin (2000) opined that the advertising and entertainment industries, however, seemed to focus on the Catholic Church quite often. He stated that advertisements that wanted to shock or express daring views could target the Church in order convey these messages.

As for the entertainment industry, “The Catholic Church is supremely visual, and therefore attractive to producers and directors concerned with the visual image” and “still seen as profoundly ‘other’ in modern culture and is therefore an object of continuing fascination” (Martin, 2000, ¶ 28-29). Jenkins (2004) noted that since the entertainment companies are often connected with the same companies that control the news, the entertainment industry is also guilty of anti-Catholic bias. According to Bill Donohue (2014a, ¶ 1), the CEO of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, “Every demographic group can cite instances of media bias against them, but no group is more unfairly covered, on a consistent basis, than Catholics” (¶ 1). Fingleton (2014) blamed anti-Catholic bias for the media’s handling of a 2014 story regarding nuns who had been accused of dumping hundreds of orphaned babies into a cesspit. Many media outlets had run the story as fact without checking any sources. The facts were not clear as the event had occurred in the mid-20th Century (Donohue, 2014b). The Catholic League has done extensive research that suggests an anti-Catholic bias in the media (Donohue, 1998; Donohue, 2010; Donohue 2016a).

In one research study (Perl & Bendyna, 2002), 31 percent of the participants (all of whom were Catholic) said there was anti-Catholic bias in the United States. Of the remainder, 56 percent said there was no bias while 11 percent said they did not know.

However, when the participants were asked to identify if several groups were biased against Catholicism, there were a few groups that were labeled as being “hostile.” “Hollywood and the makers of TV entertainment shows,” “news reporters and the news media,” “evangelical Protestant groups active in politics,” and “liberals” all had more responses for “hostile” than “friendly” (Perl & Bendyna, 2002). It should be noted, though, that for each one of these groups, a significant portion of responses were “neutral.” For the sake of this research, the “news reporters and the news media” is the most important category. In this category, 17 people said the group was “friendly,” 52 responded with “neutral,” 20 with “hostile,” 9 with “don’t know,” and 2 with “both.” The general consensus among American Catholics seems to be that the media is neutral towards the Roman Catholic Church (Perl & Bendyna, 2002). For more information on this study, see Table 1 in the Appendix.

III. Methodology

Based on the literature, the following research questions were tested:

RQ₁: What is the level of anti-Catholic bias in selected U.S. newspapers?

RQ₂: Does this level of bias vary by area of the country, specifically in terms of southern newspapers vs. northern newspapers?

RQ₃: How has this level of bias changed over time?

These research questions were analyzed with a content analysis of selected U.S. newspapers within the context of two Catholic news events. The two Catholic news events this thesis studied are Pope Paul VI's encyclical of 1968, *Humanae Vitae*, and articles written on Pope Francis' visit to the United States of America in 2015.

Humanae Vitae received much scrutiny at the time because Pope Paul VI said the Church was standing firm in its belief against contraception, specifically birth control pills. This encyclical came at a time in many American Catholics were encouraging the Church to accept contraception (Worthen, 2012). The Catholic Church had been engaged in a lengthy discussion on the issue as many Protestant churches had allowed the use of contraception. Most Catholics believed that it would follow suit with the other churches in America, and thus *Humanae Vitae* shocked many people when it refused to accept contraception (Worthen, 2012). The scrutiny the encyclical faced brings an important aspect to this thesis because the articles written on this topic were likely to be written in a

critical way. These articles were also likely to include some context as to how other churches handled the issue of contraception.

Originally, the researcher was going to focus on articles written about the Supreme Court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. This was chosen as a possible research area since it was timely and a controversial event for the Catholic Church. The ruling, which sanctioned same-sex marriage in the United States in 2015, goes against the Church's belief in a traditional marriage, but it also came at a time when the pope was calling for Catholics to show more acceptance to those who may have different views from Catholic doctrine (Greene, 2016). While Pope Francis did not agree with the Supreme Court's ruling, he was certainly less critical about it than people expected, saying "Jesus teaches us that the masterpiece of society is the family," he said. "The man and the woman who love each other" (Wofford, 2015). This combined with the pope's "Who am I to judge?" (Allen, 2013) attitude pertaining to homosexuality would have led to an interesting dynamic to research.

Unfortunately, there were not enough articles to adequately study media coverage of this event. Instead, the researcher chose to find articles written about Pope Francis' visit to the U.S. The pope's visit was chosen because it was a timely topic and often portrayed in a positive light by the media, but it did experience its fair share of controversy. The researcher decided that he needed a recent newsworthy event that faced less controversy than Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*. The difference between when the chosen news events occurred and reporting tactics by the media proved as a good contrast. Pope Francis' visit to America occurred from Sept. 22 to Sept. 27, 2015, and it

was the first visit from a pope since Pope Benedict XVI's trip in 2008. Pope Francis visited Washington D.C., New York City, and Philadelphia, and met with government officials, spoke at a joint session of Congress, and performed Mass and prayer services several times.

The researcher elected to not study articles that focused on the sexual abuse scandal within the Catholic Church. The sexual abuse scandal was a major news event within the Church and, therefore, was reported on very closely. However, the researcher did not believe the difference between critical statements and facts could be easily identified on this subject matter. This would potentially skew the final results towards the media being more critical.

The study included nine newspapers (three from north of the Mason-Dixon Line and six from south of the Mason-Dixon Line) as to allow the content to be consistent and manageable. The Mason-Dixon Line has long been considered the dividing line between the North and the South. It is defined as the border between Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware. This border continues west as it follows the Ohio River. It stops at the northeast corner of Missouri ("Mason," 2000).

News was defined as any article written about Pope Paul VI's encyclical of 1968, *Humanae Vitae*, and articles written on Pope Francis' visit to the U.S. These articles are news stories. The researcher refrained from studying opinion articles or commentary pieces which by definition contained bias and opinion. These specific news events were chosen to contain the content of the research in a manageable way. Limiting the articles that were written on two specific events allowed identifying bias easier as it narrowed the

information taken into consideration while researching. The two events are purposely from two time periods as to compare and contrast whether media bias has changed over the years.

The time period of articles taken into consideration was two months before through two months after the news event occurred. In the case of Pope Paul VI's encyclical, that was July 25, 1968 to November 25, 1968 as *Humanae Vitae* was published on July 25, 1968. The articles written between July 22, 2015 and November 22, 2015, on the pope's visit were taken into consideration. The four month time span was chosen to make sure the articles were written while the news was still timely. The articles were chosen based on a relevance to the topic, meaning that if the article specifically mentioned Pope Paul VI's encyclical or Pope Francis' visit then the article was chosen. Articles written by wire services were generally avoided. The papers were chosen based on the quantity of articles written on these subjects and if the paper was commonly regarded as a good news source.

The individual stories from the selected newspapers were the units of analysis for the research. The entirety of the story was taken into account in order to decide if it was a "biased" or "unbiased" story. According to Allen (2015), bias in the media can take eight different forms: commission, omission, story selection, placement, selection of the experts, spin, labeling of activists, organizations, and ideas, and policy recommendation. Media bias was defined as "a political bias in journalistic reporting, in programming selection, or otherwise in mass communications media" (Garner & Black, 2009). Unbiased was defined as the lack of bias.

Within the individual stories, the study took into account the headline, any pictures used, and the amount of “supportive” or “critical” words used. Supportive words are words that are used with no intent to promote a biased agenda. Critical words are words used to obviously influence the reader’s opinion to see the issue as the journalist saw it. Each of the three aspects of the unit of analysis was measured on a scale from 1 to 7. The entire headline was read and coded. If the headline consisted of any critical or supportive words, they were taken into consideration. The headline’s typeface was also considered as a typeface could be used to convey a certain connotation towards a news event. If any pictures accompanied the article, they were investigated to find out if they were used to promote the reporter’s agenda or to enhance the reader’s understanding of the article. The whole article was coded by having the coders count the number of “supportive” and “critical” words used. The total amount of words used would be used to determine if the body copy was biased or unbiased.

The articles are coded on a Likert scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing a story that was not intended to criticize the Catholic Church and 7 representing a story meant to criticize the Church. If the number of critical words outnumbered the number of supportive words, then the article was coded somewhere from 5 to 7. If the article had less critical words than supportive words, it was coded between 1 and 4. If the number is the same, it will be 4. The number 4 represented an article that could not be determined if it was biased or unbiased. If the article was given a 1, it was completely unbiased. If it was given a 7, it was blatantly biased.

Examples of critical and supportive words are defined in a table on the coding sheet at the end of the study. These words were evaluated by a second coder and deemed appropriate. The second reader also had the ability to deem words that did not appear on the coding sheet supportive or critical. The coding was partially done by a second reader as to clarify that the researcher was not letting his own bias affect the outcome of the study. The second reader was chosen because he did not have previous knowledge of the thesis and was not Catholic. Inter-coder reliability (ICR) was determined by training another coder and giving him roughly 10% of the articles from the study to code. The training involved explaining the unit of analysis and answering any questions that arose from that. Ideally, an acceptable ICR is greater than .80 (Neuendorf, 2017). After coding the five articles, the second coder had very similar results to the researcher. The two readers agreed on 23 out of the 25 coding decisions. Using Holsti's Formula, the inter-coder reliability was determined to be .92.

IV. Results

The study ultimately suggested there was no significant observance of anti-Catholic bias for the two topics studied based on region of the country. Overall, northern and southern newspapers did not vary enough to suggest a bias in the South. Using the original measurement where 1 represented supportive and 7 represented critical in the 5 categories of “Nature of Headline,” “Presentation of Headline,” “Supportive Picture or Not,” “Body Text Content,” and “Tone of Story,” the newspapers examined had an mean of 3.99 (3.99 for northern newspapers and 3.99 for southern newspapers). This suggests an overall neutral view of Catholicism by newspapers in America. Table 1 in the Appendix shows the averages of all five categories for every newspaper examined. Table 2 breaks down the averages for the topics, regions, and overall outcome.

The “Tone of Story” category showed the largest variance between northern and southern newspapers. Southern newspapers had a mean of 3.65 and standard deviation of 0.23, and northern newspapers had a mean of 4.28 and standard deviation of 0.16. “Tone of Story” was the only category that showed significance when the researcher ran an independent samples t-test comparing regions, $t(61) = 2.21, p < .02$. When an the same test was run comparing the topics, $t(61) = 3.97, p < .001$. The mean for articles written about *Humanae Vitae* was 4.51 with a standard deviation of .11 while articles written about the pope’s visit had a mean of 3.54 and standard deviation of .24.

“Presentation of Headline” $t(63) = 1.52, p < .07$, and “Body Text Content” $t(61) = 1.47, p < .08$, were not statistically significant when an independent samples t-test was conducted comparing articles by region, but they were both close. For “Presentation of Headline,” the northern newspapers examined had a mean of 4.00 and standard deviation of 0.00 while the southern newspapers had a mean of 3.95 and standard deviation of .22. “Body Text Content” had means of 4.14 ($SD = 0.12$) and 3.80 ($SD = 0.21$) for northern and southern newspapers respectively. However, “Presentation of Headline” did not show any significance when compared by topic in an independent samples t-test, $t(63) = 1.15, p = .13$. *Humanae Vitae* had a mean of 4.00 ($SD = 0.00$), and the pope’s visit had a mean of 3.96 ($SD = 0.04$). “Body Text Content” showed great significance when compared by topic, $t(61) = 3.88, p < .001$. The means for *Humanae Vitae* and the pope’s visit were 4.37 ($SD = 0.10$) and 3.61 ($SD = 0.18$) respectively.

By topic, articles about *Humanae Vitae* had a mean of 4.24 while articles about Pope Francis’s visit to America had a mean of 3.70. An independent sample t-test showed many significant results for comparison by topic. As previously stated, the largest variance between means was again under the “Tone of Story” category. “Nature of Headline” $t(63) = 3.77$, “Body Text Content” $t(61) = 3.88$, and “Tone of Story” $t(61) = 3.97$, all were $p < .001$. “Supportive Picture or Not” was nearly significant, $t(34) = 1.50, p < .08$. Results for the comparisons of by topic and by region can be seen in Table 3 of the Appendix.

The New York Times was most supportive under the “Supportive Picture or Not” category for the northern papers with a mean of 3.64. *The Charleston Post and Courier*

had the overall most supportive pictures with a mean of 3.50. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* had the most supportive headlines with a mean on 3.57, and *The Post and Courier* had the most supportive headlines between all newspapers with a mean of 3.50. *The Post and Courier* was the only newspaper that did not have a mean of 4.00 for “Presentation of Headline.” It had a 3.50 mean. *Post-Gazette* had the most supportive body text content with a 3.86 mean. *The Post and Courier* again had the lowest mean out of all newspapers with a mean of 3.00. For “Tone of Story,” the *Post-Gazette* had the lowest mean for northern newspapers with 3.57, and *The Post and Courier* had the lowest mean out of all newspapers with 2.50.

For “Nature of Headline,” *The New York Times* was the most critical northern newspaper with a mean of 4.29. Both the *Charleston Gazette* and the *San Antonio Express-News* were the most critical newspapers for this category with means of 5.00 *The Boston Globe* had the most critical average for northern papers in the picture category with a neutral average of 4.00 *The Orlando Sentinel* was the most critical of all papers examined for pictures with a 4.50 average. *The New York Times* had the most critical wording of northern newspapers with a 4.26 average, and the *Charleston Gazette* had the most critical wording of any newspaper examined with a mean of 5.00. *The New York Times* also had the most critical tone of the northern newspapers studied having a 4.48 mean for the “Tone of Story” category. The *Charleston Gazette* was again the most critical of all newspapers for this category with mean of 5.00.

The Charleston Post and Courier was the most supportive newspaper examined. It had an average of 3.20 for all categories examined. The average for southern

newspapers when considered without *The Post and Courier* was 4.16, and the mean was 3.99 with *The Post and Courier*. The *Post-Gazette* was the most supportive northern paper with a 3.73 mean for the 5 categories. With the *Post-Gazette*, northern papers had a mean of 3.99, but northern papers had an average of 4.11 without it.

The *Charleston Gazette* was the most critical newspaper with a 4.60 mean. Southern newspapers had a 3.88 mean in the 5 categories when the *Charleston Gazette* was not considered. *The New York Times* had the most critical average of northern newspapers. Without the *New York Times*, the northern newspapers had an average of 3.88. Without both the most supportive and the most critical newspapers, the overall average for all other newspapers was 4.02, showing that the most critical and supportive newspapers did not skew the results much.

V. Discussion

This study suggested that anti-Catholic bias in newspapers, including those in the South, was not as pronounced as some suggest (RQ₁). It was also found that there was not much difference between northern and southern newspapers (RQ₂) and that anti-Catholic bias seems to have lessened over time (RQ₃). The major difference between newspapers was observed for the “Tone of Story.” This category refers to the types of sources, which sources are placed where in the article, the location of where harsh and supportive words were placed within the article, and the “taste in the mouth” the researcher was left with upon completing the article. Therefore, this category was the most beneficial in identifying whether a newspaper was bias or unbiased.

It is possible that anti-Catholic bias has decreased over time, which would explain why the articles written about the pope’s visit were more supportive than those written about *Humanae Vitae*. The first ever Catholic presidential nominee from a major party was Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York in the 1928 election. “Smith’s 1928 campaign was dogged by claims that he would build a tunnel connecting the White House and the Vatican and would amend the Constitution to make Catholicism the nation’s established religion” (“John F. Kennedy,” ¶ 1). John F. Kennedy’s campaign in 1960 faced similar issues, especially from the media. However, following his presidency, Carroll (2015) says that the anti-Catholic bias began to dwindle. According to the Pew

Research Center, 7 out of 10 U.S. adults found Pope Francis either “very” or “mostly” favorable (Gecewicz, 2017). In fact, the Pew Research Center found that Catholics are regarded more “warmly” than many other religions in the United States (Wormald, 2014).

Another explanation of the lack of anti-Catholic bias in the more recent articles could be that only 31 percent of Catholics from a 2002 believe there is an anti-Catholic bias in the U.S. (Perl & Bendyna, 2002). While this study showed more Catholics labeled “news reporters and the news media” as being “hostile” towards the faith than those that labeled them “friendly”, most participants in the study found “news reporters and the news media” are “neutral” towards the Catholic Church. These findings could explain why the mean for articles written about the pope’s visit was more supportive.

Another important note is the presentation of letters in newspapers written by priests, bishops, and cardinals as well as the printing of the Pope’s encyclical as a whole. These were not studied because they are not news articles, but it was noted when the researcher came across them. These types of articles were predominantly found in northern newspapers. Most notably, *The Boston Globe* printed a letter written by Cardinal O’Boyle that explained his reasoning for punishing dissenting priests under the headline “O’Boyle Says He Had to Punish Priests,” and *The New York Times* ran Pope Paul VI’s encyclical in its entirety on July 30, 1968 under the headline “Text of Pope Paul’s Encyclical Reaffirming the Prohibition Against Birth Control.” The researcher noted that the headlines used here were unbiased as they simply explained the content of the pieces. The newspapers refrained from influencing the reader by running biased headlines.

There was a lack of southern articles written about Catholic news. There were 45 articles from northern newspapers compared to only 20 from southern newspapers. This could suggest a bias in itself as southern newspapers may not prioritize Catholic news. Instead of using up its own resources, southern newspapers seem to rely on articles from larger northern papers or the Associated Press and similar organizations for Catholic news. This alone could point to an anti-Catholic bias in southern newspapers that northern newspapers do not have because they do not value Catholic news as important. However, this could simply be a consequence of the fact that southern states do not have a large Catholic readership because 24 of the 30 largest Catholic dioceses are in the North (“USA,” 2005).

The researcher noted that northern newspapers also relied on the Associated Press and similar organizations but not to the same extent as southern newspapers. Northern newspapers outside of household names, such as *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, seem to rely on AP and similar organizations to report on Catholic news as well as the southern newspapers. The reliance on news agencies such as the Associated Press could be a product of the corporatization of news. Most research suggests that “the world's media is being concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer companies” (“TBS,” ¶ 1). Since the publishing of *Humanae Vitae*, newsrooms and newspapers have significantly downsized due to the growth of television and online media outlets (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2005). Due to this, many newspapers were sold to larger companies to increase funding, which caused articles to become shared between newspapers owned by the same company and caused smaller newsrooms (“MSG

management”). As newsrooms lose funding and continue cutting departments and employees, newspapers must rely on other people to do their reporting when the story is not in their immediate area or when they do not have the resources to cover the story.

In 2015, newspapers saw their largest drop in advertising revenue since 2009 and circulation for daily newspapers also declined sharply (Barthel, 2016). With this significant drop in revenue and decline in circulation, newspapers may be less willing to write polarizing articles that may offend minority groups for fear of losing more advertisements and readers. This may explain the southern newspapers’ hesitation to write about Catholic news as they do not want to offend the few Catholics within their circulation area. It would also explain their overall neutral reporting on Catholic news.

VI. Limitations and Future Research

The results of this study were possibly skewed due to the small dataset. While many newspapers were relatively neutral in their reporting of Catholic news, a few newspapers with drastically more supportive or harsh articles could easily affect the results of this study. For example, *The Charleston Post and Courier* had an overall mean of 3.20 for the two articles studied. This is 10% of the overall southern newspapers researched. “Tone of Story” had the largest discrepancy between the means of the southern newspaper.

The pope’s visit to the U.S. could not have been polarizing enough to return any significant findings. The *Humanae Vitae* articles were clearly more polarizing as the ban on contraceptive was a tough pill to swallow for many Catholics and Protestants alike. With Pope Francis’ high approval and the country’s overall warm feelings towards Catholic in recent years, the pope’s visit likely did not cause enough controversy to lend itself to bias articles.

Newspapers relied very heavily on AP News and similar organizations to report on the topics chosen for this study. Since those articles were not considered, the number of articles coded was limited. Southern newspapers’ lack of self-reported articles on the chosen topics of *Humanae Vitae* and Pope Francis’ visit to America also limited the number of articles considered. Southern newspapers had far fewer articles than northern

newspapers (45 northern articles as opposed to 20 southern articles), and therefore, the research was done with a small dataset.

Considering that there are a significant amount of studies suggesting an anti-Catholic bias in the media, more research should be done to identify the specifics of that bias. The researcher suggests that further studies be conducted on the southern media in order to increase the data set. This further research would need to broaden the topics and newspapers considered. Topics such as different encyclicals, the Church's standpoint on gay marriage, and the Church's child abuse scandal could be considered. In order to increase the data set, newspapers further west may than Texas need to be considered.

Further research on specific newspapers could also prove important. Seeing as *The Post and Courier* seemed to be more supportive than the other southern newspapers studied, it would be interesting to further study what could be the cause of that or whether that was simply an anomaly.

Another area of research is identifying whether the possible anti-Catholic bias has changed over the years. Articles written about different popes' encyclicals would be a possible subject of study to identify if the bias has changed. For example, a study could be done on articles written on Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* compared to Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* which discussed humans' moral duty to protect the environment. A study focusing on this should note how the Catholic population in America has changed.

VII. Conclusion

Although the literature suggested an anti-Catholic bias in the media, particularly in southern media, the results of this study did not find any. The results suggested many newspapers were reporting without any bias either positive or negative when discussing Catholic news topics. The significance of this is that many studies done on this topic before have suggested an anti-Catholic bias. It appears that such bias has been on the decline over the years and has mostly been removed from the media. This means that the quality of reporting on Catholic news events has apparently increased since the 1960s.

However, such conclusions are not definitive, especially when considering the story that has dominated media coverage of the Church for decades—the priestly sexual abuse scandal. While the abuse began several years ago, the first media stories did not appear until 1985 (Fox, 2015), and the issue did not gain wide spread media attention until the early 2000s when the *Boston Globe* printed a series of stories exposing both the activity and the Church’s role in a cover up. Such stories were extremely critical and damaging to the Church, and later to Pope Benedict XVI himself (“The Pope,” 2010).

The media’s coverage of this event was understandably critical, but some believe that the coverage went too far. Donohue (2016b) notes that the media’s treatment of other religions with sexual abuse scandals are not treated with the same fervor as Catholic priests. Many people point out that while the scandal has passed, newspapers continue to

write articles about sexual abuse within the Church (Goodstein, 2016). Goodstein notes that *The New York Times* writes many articles about other sexual abuse cases but those that involve the Catholic Church often more newsworthy due to the size of the Catholic population worldwide and the Church's history with the issue. In 2002, the Pew Research Center conducted a study that showed the clergy sexual abuse scandal was the eighth largest story topic covered by the mainstream media from mid-March to late April (Liu, 2010, ¶ 8). It is clear that many stories continue to be written about this issue although the original scandal has passed, which may lead people to believe that the media is anti-Catholic.

The researcher noted that in casual conversation about this study those he spoke with, including Catholics and non-Catholics, often agreed that there was an anti-Catholic bias in the media and particularly in the South as a whole. There may still evidences of anti-Catholic bias in the media and a general consensus that a bias remains present, but there is not enough evidence from this study to suggest that the media is overwhelmingly anti-Catholic. The researcher certainly notes that much more research could be done to further these findings and better explain how this may have come about over time.

APPENDIX

Table 1

Perceived Affect of Sociopolitical Groups Toward Catholics (Perl & Bendyna, 2002, pg. 659)

Group	Response Frequencies (Percentages)				
	Friendly	Neutral	Hostile	Don't Know ^a	Both ^a
Democratic Party	31	46	10	11	2
Republican Party	28	47	11	12	2
Hollywood and the makers of TV entertainment shows	13	49	27	10	1
News reporters and the news media	17	52	20	9	2
Evangelical Protestant groups active in politics	14	38	28	18	1
Liberals	17	43	24	15	1
Conservatives	29	45	11	14	1

N = 746

Question Wording: "I am going to name several types of groups or organizations. For each, please tell me whether you feel that group is generally friendly toward Catholics, neutral toward Catholics, or hostile toward Catholics."

Note: Due to rounding error, rows may not add to 100 percent.

^aVolunteered the response of "both" (i.e., both friendly and hostile) is coded with "neutral" in later analyses.

Table 2

Newspaper Means

Newspaper	Nature of Headline	Presentation of Headline	Supportive Picture or Not	Body Text Content	Tone of Story	Overall Average
<i>The New York Times</i>	4.29	4.00	3.64	4.26	4.48	4.13
<i>The Boston Globe</i>	4.07	4.00	4.00	4.08	4.31	4.09
<i>Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</i>	3.57	4.00	3.67	3.68	3.57	3.73
<i>Orlando Sentinel</i>	4.24	4.00	4.5	4.25	4.25	4.25
<i>AL.com</i>	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
<i>Charleston Gazette</i>	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.60
<i>Abilene Reporter-News</i>	3.67	4.00	3.60	3.67	3.50	3.69
<i>San Antonio Express News</i>	5.00	4.00	n/a	4.00	4.00	4.25
<i>The Charleston Post and Courier</i>	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.00	2.50	3.20

Note: Means reported on a Likert Scale of 1 to 7 with 1 representing supportive, 4 representing neutral, and 7 representing critical.

Table 3

Means by Topic and Overall Means

Topic/Region	Nature of Headline	Presentation of Headline	Supportive Picture or Not	Body Text Content	Tone of Story	Overall Average
Humanae Vitae	4.32	4.00	4.00	4.37	4.51	4.24
Pope's Visit	3.75	3.96	3.62	3.61	3.54	3.67
Southern Newspapers	4.24	3.92	3.92	3.99	3.88	3.99
Northern Newspapers	3.98	4.00	3.77	4.01	4.12	3.99
All Articles Examined	4.08	3.72	4.03	4.08	3.98	3.98

Note: Means reported on a Likert Scale of 1 to 7 with 1 representing supportive, 4 representing neutral, and 7 representing critical.

Table 4

By Topic and By Region T-test Values and p-Values

Variable	By Topic			By Region		
	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>
Nature of Headline	3.77	63	< .001	0.62	63	0.27
Presentation of Headline	1.15	63	0.13	1.52	63	0.07
Supportive Picture or Not	1.50	34	0.07	-0.30	34	0.38
Body Text Content	3.88	61	< .001	1.47	61	0.07
Tone of Story	3.97	61	< .001	2.21	61	0.02

Table 5

Examples of Supportive and Critical Words

Critical Words	Supportive Words
Fail	Reiterates
Mindless	Traditional
Distressing	Restates
Condemns	Reaffirms
War	Hero
Torment	Popular
Upheaval	Awesome
Bust	Praises
Bars	Advocates
Mistake	Awes

Code Sheet Description

This is used to analyze the content of an article. Using a scale from 1 (supportive, not intended to insult the Catholic Church) to 7 (critical, intended insults) with 4 being undeterminably. An example list of critical and supportive words is listed in Table 4 in the Appendix.

The coder must first list what newspaper the article came from, when it was published, and whether it was written on *Humanae Vitae* or the pope's visit. Then he or she must write down the article's headline. This is the first unit of analysis. This coder must decide if the headline is supportive or critical. He or she may consider the number of supportive or critical words used in the headline to help determine the ranking. A brief explanation of why the coder chose the number is helpful as it explains why he or she thought the headline justly deserved that ranking. The presentation of the headline refers to the headline's typeface. If the headline's typeface is used in a way to convey a certain connotation, the coder will judge it accordingly. An explanation section is provided for the coder to explain why the presentation was ranked as it was. Any pictures used in the story are considered as to determine if they were used to enhance the reader's understanding of the article or if they were used to promote the journalist's opinion on the news event. The explanation section is provided again as to give the coder a chance to defend his or her choice in the ranking he or she gave. Next, the coder must write the number of supportive and critical words used in the article. This will be used to determine if the overall body copy is supportive or critical. Lastly, the tone of the article is considered. The tone involves how the journalist constructed the body copy, meaning if

the facts and/or quotes of the story are ordered in a fashion to lead the reader to a certain conclusion or not. The explanation section is provided again to give the coder a chance to defend his or her ranking.

Code Sheet

Newspaper _____

Date _____

I. General Information

- 1. Region: North or South
- 2. *Humanae Vitae* or Pope Francis' U.S. Visit

II. Headline Content

3. Headline _____

4. Nature of headline

A. Headline:

<u>Supportive</u>			<u>Critical</u>			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Explanation:

B. Presentation:

<u>Supportive</u>			<u>Critical</u>			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Explanation:

C. Picture:

Description:

Supportive

Critical

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Explanation:

III. Body Content

D. Number of supportive words _____

E. Number of critical words _____

F. Content:

Supportive

Critical

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Explanation:

G. Tone:

Supportive

Critical

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Explanation:

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