
NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANS, 1980-2000

By Peter A. Kerr and Patricia Moy



In light of evidence indicating that political attitudes are driven in part by attitudes toward fundamentalist Christians, this study examines the potential role of media coverage in influencing these attitudes. A content analysis of a probability sample of 2,696 articles drawn from Lexis-Nexis indicates a relatively stable and slightly negative portrayal of fundamentalist Christians since 1980. The amount and type of depictions differed by geographical region as well as by type of newspaper article. Also emerging from the data was a trend toward the meshing of religion and politics. Implications of such coverage are discussed.

Introduction

Despite survey data indicating that Americans have long felt strongly about separation of church and state,¹ there is evidence that citizens' attitudes toward religious groups have a bearing on their evaluations of politicians, political parties, and policies. Using data from the American National Election Studies (ANES), Bolce and de Maio conclude that public antipathy toward fundamentalist Christians has "joined ideology as a predictor of presidential vote choice, and its impact surpasses the effects of traditional economic variables, such as attitudes toward government activism and retrospective assessments of the economy."²

What are the sources of such sentiment toward fundamentalist Christians? Obviously, personal experience through religious beliefs or interaction with fundamentalist Christians can have an impact on attitudes toward this particular group. But the media presumably play an equally, if not more, important role in shaping public understanding and attitudes by virtue of their framing of fundamentalist Christians.

After all, journalists' frames provide audience members a predefined perspective on news topics that they then can employ in processing information. By employing a perspective based on recognizable cultural cues, journalists offer their audiences familiar "road maps" by which to process and integrate new and potentially complex information. As "heuristics," frames offer a "basic tool kit" for "thinking and talking about [a given topic]."³ In other words, frames

J&MC Quarterly
Vol. 79, No. 1
Spring 2002
54-72
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Peter A. Kerr is a graduate student and Patricia Moy is an assistant professor in the School of Communications at the University of Washington. The authors thank Brigid Canning, Maria Castro, Ashley Kolberg, and Ansgar Gessner for their assistance with coding and data entry. This study is funded by the William Test Trust at the School of Communications at the University of Washington.

provide readers and viewers a shorthand method to process information.

Because little, if any, research has addressed how the media have framed fundamentalist Christians, this study examines how newspapers have covered this religious group from 1980 to 2000. We begin by presenting the literature on media framing and providing an overview of Christian fundamentalism. We then present the results of an extensive content analysis of newspaper coverage of fundamentalist Christianity and discuss the implications of such coverage.

Prevailing journalistic standards dictate that news be presented as objectively as possible.⁴ Even though news is understood to be a "social construction of reality," to maintain its credibility, news must be reported with as little intentional bias and framing as possible.⁵ Facts are verified not only to prevent libel litigation, but also to maintain credibility. Journalists also maintain credibility by questioning sources and cross-checking witness accounts. Furthermore, realizing not all facts can be confirmed, journalists use attribution when information reflects a viewpoint and not objective fact. When statements are made that run counter to other observable facts, the counter position should be mentioned and sources cited.⁶

Objectivity "implies being truthful, unbiased, fair and balanced," but at the same time should not detach the journalist from an issue.⁷ Some scholars see objectivity itself as a negative "ideology" that favors the status quo and "undermines the personal integrity of journalists who are required to set aside their consciences."⁸ Reporters are trained to understand the issue of objectivity, in the hopes that awareness of the difficulties may in itself prevent some of the abuses.⁹ The seeking of an objective journalistic standard can be seen as a professional norm established to combat framing effects. Still, journalists' objective stance has been criticized and even called "strategic ritual protecting newspapermen from the risks of their trade."¹⁰

According to Tuchman, framing in a journalistic context is broadly defined as organizing events due to personal subjective involvement with them.¹¹ This means framing is inevitable, and it "ignores the possibility that order is an intrinsic characteristic of the everyday world." Frames can turn "amorphous talk into a discernible event," and while the frame organizes everyday reality, it is itself "part and parcel of everyday reality."¹²

The meta-concept of framing can best be understood as occurring in four cyclical stages, described by Scheufele's process model.¹³ "Frame building" occurs as journalists construct stories, followed by "frame setting," when those frames are "set" upon the public by mass dissemination. These frames enter our cognitions in a stage called "individual-level effects framing," which results in the final stage, dubbed "societal frames." Societal frames in turn act upon journalists' frames and influence their constructions at the original "frame building" stage. This model links micro- and macro-level effects, as individuals interpret media messages and societal norms shape these media messages.

Media Framing and Standards

Media frame building occurs as journalists "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described."¹⁴ This is accomplished in a text by the "presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments."¹⁵ Frames provide context that is communicated with the text, and also can shape the way text is received. While frames typically have a common effect on large portions of the receiving audience, their effects are not necessarily universal; they may be subtle and difficult to locate.¹⁶

In fact, journalists may even unwittingly construct frames when they seek expert opinion and advice. Looking to enhance their stories, journalists will often rely on quotes, insight, and analysis from "individuals eager to promote a certain perspective to a broader public audience."¹⁷ At the same time, journalists may have an agenda they wish to propagate, and while such an agenda may be acceptable and even lauded when it is for things such as world peace or to combat hunger, it can be deceptive when subtly applied to news as a frame.

Because frames typically diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe, they are capable of exerting great social power when encoded in terms or phrases, and once the term or phrase is widely accepted, communicators cannot use other words without risking being misunderstood or lacking credibility.¹⁸ In this way a frame can actually influence language. Indeed, "the power of a frame can be as great as that of language itself."¹⁹

The media may exert tremendous power in shaping public perceptions of fundamentalist Christianity. Syndicated columnist Cal Thomas has lamented "the incorrect, and often pejorative, use of the word 'fundamentalist,' which has come to mean anyone behaving in a fanatical manner."²⁰

Fundamentalism: The Past and the Present

Fundamentalism began in America immediately after World War I as an effort to defend traditional Protestant Christianity against challenges posed by liberal theology, higher (textual) criticism, and Darwinism. Fundamentalism was not a new sect, but an entrenching of belief in historic mainline Protestant theology. Christian leaders from around the globe, such as R.A. Torrey from Chicago and James Orr from Glasgow, set about defining what is essential to the Christian faith, eventually publishing the twelve-volume *The Fundamentals*.²¹

Fundamentalist sentiments gained adherents, and by the 1940s many mainline Protestant denominations had to deal with fundamentalist views within their circles. The fundamentalists refused to "succumb" to liberal theology and rejected Karl Barth's "new orthodoxy." As a result, many fundamentalists distanced themselves from their parent organizations.²² In this way the General Association of Regular Baptists, the Presbyterian Church of America, and many other organizations were formed. An unrelenting commitment to resist liberal interpretation of the

Bible contributed to the perception that fundamentalists were intolerant and anti-intellectual.²³

As this stereotype arose, many within the fundamentalist groups tried to distance themselves from the fundamentalist title and to regain strong ties with mainstream Protestant Christianity. Beginning in the 1940s, they began calling themselves "evangelicals," and while they shared the same beliefs and promoted the same values as the fundamentalists, they were more tolerant of liberalism in the mainline Protestant denominations.²⁴ Fundamentalists are often now considered a subset of evangelical Protestants,²⁵ but many fundamentalists would resist being associated with the "new evangelicals."²⁶

By the 1970s and 1980s, fundamentalism arose more prominently on the political scene. To take a stand against secular humanism, fundamentalists fought against evolution, "loose" personal morality, sexual "perversion," and communism. Leaders attempted to pool Christian resources to influence politics toward a more conservative stance. For example, in 1980, the Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, totaling four million members,²⁷ rallied support and finances to assist in electing morally conservative politicians in local, state, and national elections. As the political clout of fundamentalist Christians grew, even Ronald Reagan was seen as pandering to its leaders in his 1984 bid for reelection.²⁸ As one enthusiast in 1984 put it: "In 1980 we were a fringe. If we are a fringe now, it is a mighty big fringe."²⁹

In 1989, a slightly more eclectic organization called the Christian Coalition was formed. Founded by Marion G. (Pat) Robertson, it calls itself a "pro-family citizen action" group, with membership of more than 1.7 million.³⁰ One key activity is sending its members "voter information" reports detailing congressional votes in areas considered germane to Christian morality.

Other events have cast an unfavorable light on fundamentalist Christians. Most notably, David Koresh led a fifty-one-day stand-off against the government in Waco, Texas, in 1993. This conflict resulted in the fiery death of nearly eighty Branch Davidians and several FBI agents, and has been termed the "apocalypse in Waco."³¹ Although the Branch Davidians adhered more to Seventh Day Adventist doctrines, the group was often mistaken as being in the theologically fundamentalist Christian camp. The siege and tragic ending left an indelible mark on America's perception of cults.³²

More recently, concerns over the Y2K millenium bug drew attention to fundamentalist Christians. The speculation about Y2K ignited debate about the return of Christ and the events predicted in the book of Revelations. While many Christian books warned about the imminent rise of the anti-Christ and the political unification of the earth, others downplayed the event and offered a more Biblically based view of the end-times.³³

Such recent events point to the potential for fundamentalists to be confused with cults and viewed as, among other things, intolerant, conservative, violent, and suicidal. Correlated perceptions may include the questioning of fundamentalists' intelligence, their patriotism, and willingness to abide by the laws of the land. Similarly, fundamentalists'

strict stand on tenets of the Bible may lead to charges of intolerance. These possibilities raise the question of how the media have portrayed fundamentalists.

Methods

The sampling frame for this content analysis comprised the population of articles generated by Lexis-Nexis based on a search of the term "Fundamentalist" or "Fundamentalism" in combination with the term "Christian." A systematic sample of articles ($N = 2,696$) was coded by five trained, advanced undergraduates and graduates; intercoder reliability was .82.³⁴

Each article was coded for various stereotypes (intolerance, intelligence, responsibility, sincerity, law abiding, patriotism, racism, forcing views on others, potential to be suicidal, political involvement, and violent nature) that potentially arise from mediated coverage of fundamentalists, and many of which appeared in recent American National Election Studies. ANES respondents were asked, for example, the extent to which fundamentalist Christians should live peacefully without imposing their beliefs on others, and the extent to which they are untrustworthy, intolerant, and extremely conservative.³⁵ When violence was identified, coders also indicated whether it was presented as provoked or unprovoked. In addition, a 0-100 thermometer rating question, also derived from ANES measures, was included in the content analysis to gauge the article's overall impression of fundamentalist Christians.

Coders also coded each article for the newspaper in which it appeared, its placement in the publication, the type of article (e.g., news story, editorial, letter to the editor, columnist), and general focus of the article (e.g., economic, social, political, religious). The coding scheme is illustrated in Appendix 1 and variable definitions are presented in Appendix 2.³⁶

Results

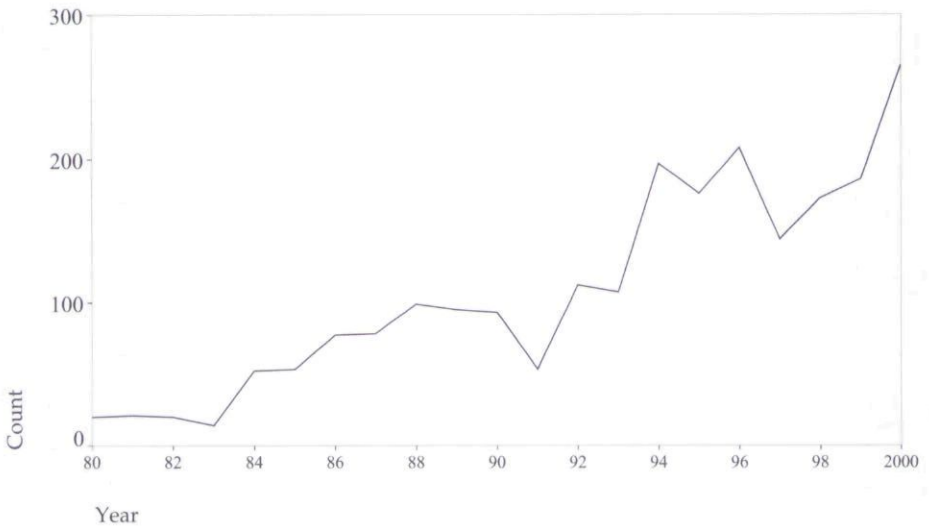
Of the 2,696 articles in our sample, 453 (or 16.8%) included the terms "Fundamentalist/ism" and "Christian" but did not address fundamentalist Christians. The majority of the 453 referred to Christians clashing with fundamentalist Muslims in the Middle East. All analyses therefore are based on a final sample of 2,243 articles.

As shown in Figure 1, the number of articles increased almost steadily between 1980 and 2000, with substantial gains between 1983 and 1984, 1991 to 1994, and 1997 to 2000.

While Figure 1 depicts overall trends, Table 1 provides a more finely nuanced picture. Specifically, the data reflect a higher frequency of articles in Southeastern and Western newspapers (30.7% and 36.7%, respectively) than either Midwestern (10.1%) or Northeastern newspapers (22.5%) during the last two decades.

Coverage of fundamentalist Christians varied by region, as shown in Figure 2. Between 1984 and 1995, Western newspapers published more than newspapers in other geographic regions. Not until 1996 did coverage in the Southeast exceed that in the West. Despite mild fluctua-

FIGURE 1
Frequency of Articles, 1980-2000



tions, Southeastern newspapers have maintained higher levels of coverage of fundamentalist Christians since then.

The articles appeared more often in the main section of the newspaper (34.9%) than in the local section (21.8%), and a non-negligible proportion was found in the church/religion section of the newspaper (7.4%).

Of the articles coded, a majority (55.3%) were news stories. Feature stories and letters to the editor accounted for 13.7% and 11.6%, respectively. Editorials amounted to 8.9% of the articles, and "other" types of articles (such as listings and round-ups) made up 7.4%. Finally, weekly columns generated 2.9% of the articles. The focus of the articles tended to be religious (34%), social (30.1%), or political (24.3%).

As shown in Table 2, sampled stories' portrayal of fundamentalist Christians averaged 2.45 (S.D.=.75) in overall favorability, somewhere between the rating scale's "balanced" and "somewhat negative." Fewer than 5% of the articles implicated fundamentalist Christians in their headlines, and the average favorability rating in headlines was 2.68 (S.D. = .62).

During the two decades studied, newspapers have portrayed fundamentalist Christians as somewhat intolerant ($M = 1.96$, S.D. = .71) and somewhat criminal-minded ($M = 2.16$, S.D. = .83). However, these stories depicted fundamentalist Christians in a nearly neutral manner in terms of patriotism ($M = 2.62$, S.D. = .95), intelligence ($M = 2.48$, S.D. = .90), and responsibility ($M = 2.48$, S.D. = 1.04).

On average, this religious group was shown as being somewhat forceful in imposing its views on others ($M = 2.84$, S.D. = .82), somewhat involved in politics ($M = 3.10$, S.D. = .78), and somewhat violent ($M = 2.78$,

TABLE 1
Newspaper Coverage of Fundamental Christians, 1980-2000

Variable	%
Region in which the Newspaper Article Appeared	
Midwest	10.1
Northeast	22.5
Southeast	30.7
Western	36.7
Section in which the Article Appeared	
Main Section	34.9
Local Section	21.8
Church/Religion Section	7.4
Type of Article	
News Story	55.3
Editorial	8.9
Letter to the Editor	11.6
Weekly Columnist	2.9
Feature	13.7
Other	7.4
Focus of Article	
Economic	.6
Social	30.1
Political	24.3
Human Interest	7.0
Religious	34.0
Other	3.9
(N)	(2,243)

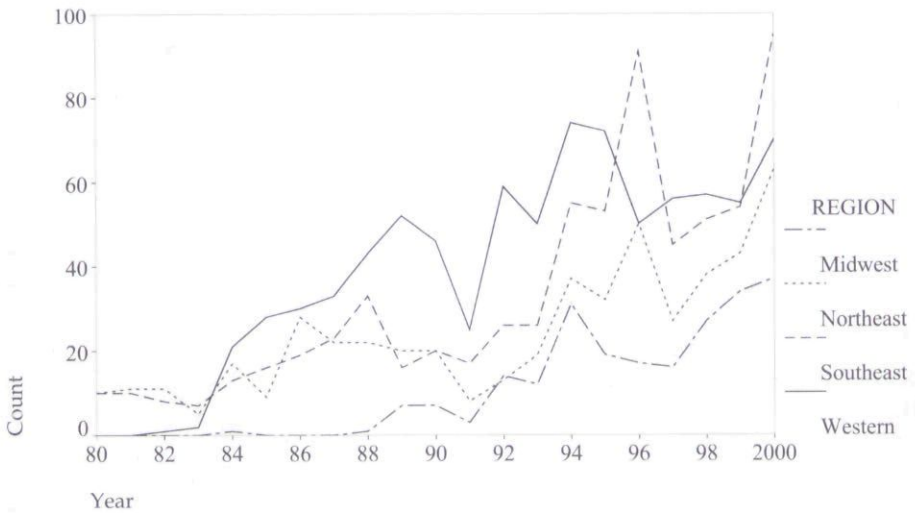
S.D. =.84). The violence was often unprovoked (61.5% of the cases where violence was observed). The average thermometer rating given to fundamentalist Christians by newspapers over the last two decades fell on the "cool" side, at 41.80 (S.D. = 11.70).

Differences over Time. Of the various dimensions of fundamentalist Christian coverage coded, most were relatively neutral and stable over time, had insufficient numbers to warrant comparisons over time, or both (e.g., portrayals of the group as racist, suicidal, law-abiding). But two dimensions warrant mention. First, newspaper coverage of fundamentalist Christians consistently depicted them as "somewhat intolerant" over the course of the past two decades (see Figure 3), even as the amount of coverage had increased.

Second, there was no clear trend in portrayals of fundamentalist Christians as politically involved. As reflected in Figure 4, newspaper coverage showed this group to be somewhat involved between 1980 and 1986, and again between 1992 and 1994.

Differences by Region. One-way analysis of variance results show that newspapers in the four regions differed significantly in their favorability rating ($F = 3.72$, $d.f.=2,242$, $p = .01$) and thermometer rating ($F = 4.40$, $d.f.=2,242$, $p = .004$) of fundamentalist Christians. Post-hoc

FIGURE 2
Coverage by Region



Scheffé tests on the two criterion variables reveal that Western newspapers were significantly less favorable and “cooler” than Midwestern newspapers. In addition, Western newspapers were significantly cooler than Southeastern newspapers in their coverage of fundamentalist Christians. Figures 5 and 6 depict the differences in coverage. Similarly, Western and Southeastern newspapers differed in the extent to which they portrayed fundamentalist Christians as imposing their views on others; the former portrayed this group as being more forceful.

Differences by Article Type. Significant differences in portrayals of fundamentalist Christians emerged across article type, as noted in Table 3. Specifically, editorials, letters to the editors, and pieces by weekly columnists were significantly more negative toward fundamentalist Christians than feature stories or “other” articles, comprising round-ups, lists, etc. Compared to news and other types of stories, letters to the editor described this religious group as less tolerant; similarly, compared to news and other stories, weekly columnists tended to paint them as less intelligent. News and feature stories (as well as “other” types of stories) portrayed fundamentalist Christians as significantly less forceful in imposing their views on others. Editorials and weekly columnists were the types of article to depict this group as being most politically involved, significantly higher than any of the other four types. No differences emerged among article types with respect to fundamentalist Christians’ levels of violence.

The study undertaken here is rooted in the striking juxtaposition of religion and politics in contemporary society and the role that religious attitudes have on political evaluations.³⁷ While a large corpus of litera-

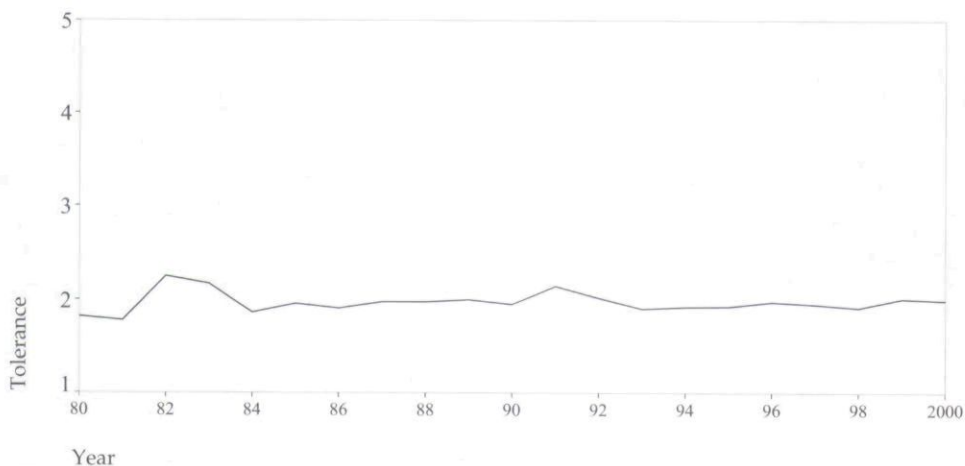
Discussion

TABLE 2
Portrayals of Fundamentalist Christians, 1980-2000

Variable	%	Mean	S.D.	N*
Overall Favorability toward FC in Headline (1-5)		2.68	.62	(110)
Overall Favorability toward FC in Article (1-5)		2.45	.75	
Portrayals of FC				
Tolerant (1-5)		1.96	.71	(1,091)
Intelligent (1-5)		2.48	.90	(442)
Responsible (1-5)		2.48	1.04	(520)
Law-abiding (1-5)		2.16	.83	(167)
Patriotic (1-5)		2.62	.95	(192)
Forceful in Imposing Their View on Others (1-4)		2.84	.82	(857)
Suicidal (1-4)		2.50	.76	(8)
Politically Involved (1-4)		3.10	.78	(810)
Violent (1-4)		2.78	.84	(92)
Unprovoked Violence	61.5			(92)
Thermometer Rating (0-100)		41.80	11.70	

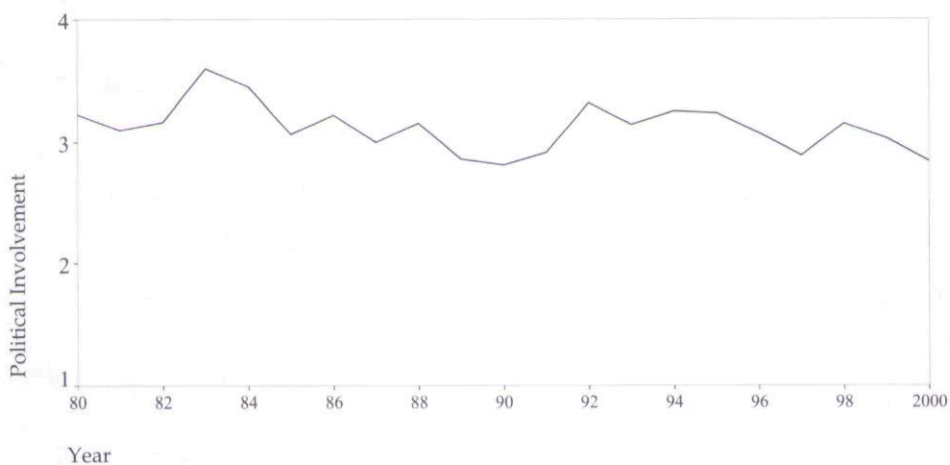
Note: All figures, unless otherwise noted, are based on a full sample of 2,243 articles. Possible ratings are noted in parenthesis: 1-5 scales are Likert-type items; 1-4 scales range from "not at all" to "very."

FIGURE 3
Portrayals of Tolerance



1=Very intolerant; 2=Somewhat intolerant; 3=Balanced;
4=Somewhat tolerant; 5=Very tolerant

FIGURE 4
Portrayals of Political Involvement



1=Not at all politically involved; 2=A little politically involved; 3=Somewhat politically involved; 4=Very politically involved

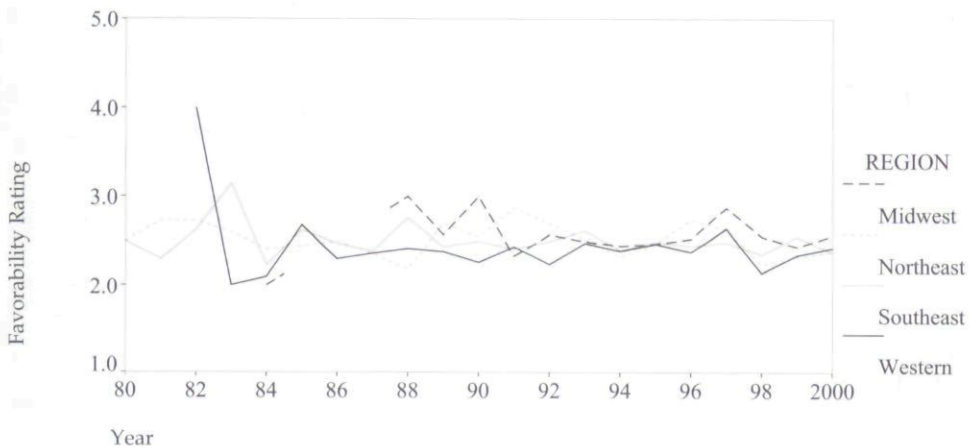
ture has documented the vast array of media effects on political attitudes, the process by which this occurs differs greatly depending on the content and orientations of audience members.³⁸

The results of our content analysis indicate that newspapers in the United States consistently have been slightly cool, but not cold, toward fundamentalist Christians, with much of the stronger antipathy (specifically regarding general favorability and tolerance) found in letters to the editors and weekly columns. Features, on the other hand, have tended to take a less negative stance, perhaps because they appear more often in religious sections of newspapers. Individuals motivated enough to write letters to the editor may be prone to express more extreme—and potentially negative—opinions, while weekly columnists may focus on negative aspects of fundamentalist Christians, perhaps to engage their audiences. News stories tended to fall “in between” in their portrayal of this group.

This particular finding may very well be grounded in journalists’ professional norm of objectivity, dictating stories be balanced by reporting more than one side of an issue. This notion is bolstered by the fact that the level of antipathy is mild and constant even though the number of articles mentioning fundamentalist Christians is increasing. Furthermore, journalists’ perceptions of the “watchdog” role may be one reason editorials most frequently paint fundamentalists as politically involved. In this case editorials may be patrolling the much-contested “wall of separation” between church and state.

These findings, taken as a whole, suggest that news stories by journalists tend to be balanced, with more divergent or extreme views presented by readers and weekly columnists and, to a lesser extent,

FIGURE 5
Favorability Rating by Region



1=Very negative; 2=Somewhat negative; 3=Balanced/neutral; 4=Somewhat positive; 5=Very positive

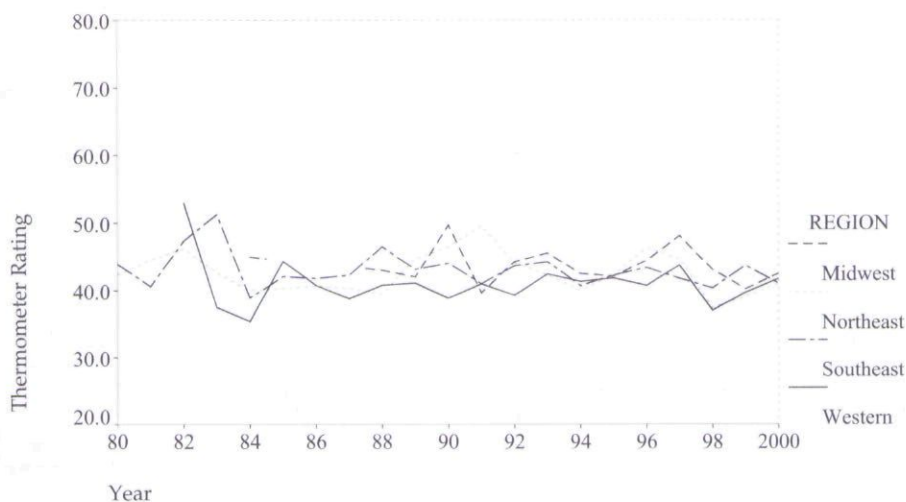
editorials. Thus newspaper readers who read "just the news" presumably are less likely to be exposed to inflammatory language used to describe fundamentalist Christians, e.g., as "anti-intellectual bumpkins from a bygone era."³⁹

Regional differences that emerged in the data may be grounded in historic events, as America's "Great Awakening" religious revival was in the Northeastern states in the mid 1700s, and the "Second Awakening" greatly impacted the "Bible belt" south and Midwest in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Western states were mostly untouched by these sweeping movements and have not experienced a large-scale religious revival of their own.⁴⁰

Variations in newspaper portrayals of patriotism reflect a steady pattern, with fundamentalist Christians rated slightly negative in odd-numbered years and a bit more negatively in even-numbered years. This pattern presumably is due to presidential and congressional election years occurring in the even-numbered years, but additional research would be needed to further confirm this effect.

Particularly noteworthy is the preponderance of articles relating fundamentalist Christians to politics, with nearly a quarter of all articles having a political orientation. The number of articles more than tripled between 1983 and 1984, when the presidential re-election of Ronald Reagan prompted speculation about the power of fundamentalist Christians. Indeed, some articles even portrayed Reagan as pandering to the right in order to be endorsed by fundamentalists.⁴¹ One article characterized Reagan's presidency as being pro-fundamentalist, stating: "In 1984, they [fundamentalist Christians] are vociferously supporting the re-election of Ronald Reagan because he has for four years consistently

FIGURE 6
Thermometer Rating by Region



used the Oval Office to advance their religious and governmental views."⁴² Labeling a political topic as "fundamentalist" may effectively label that viewpoint as extremist, thereby delegitimizing it.

The second substantial increase in articles occurred between 1991 and 1992, when another presidential election was at the forefront. One of the more frequent issues discussed in 1992 involving fundamentalist Christians was the debate over acceptance of homosexuality in society. Indeed, this issue was brought to a prominent position especially after Bill Clinton took office and took steps toward allowing homosexuals (but not homosexual activity) into the military with his "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

The steep rise in the number of articles about fundamentalist Christians between 1993 and 1994 is noteworthy. Much political news coverage in 1994 focused on Republicans' "Contract with America," which was labeled "pro-family" and endorsed by the Christian Coalition. Of the Christian Coalition efforts to rally the Christian vote, one article stated: "The Christian Coalition will distribute 33 million election guides to voters this weekend and already is facing criticism from Democrats who say their views are being distorted in an effort to help Republicans."⁴³ Other prominent debates that year centered around the pro-life movement vs. abortion,⁴⁴ fear of the new age movement,⁴⁵ home schooling,⁴⁶ and whether evolution should be taught in schools.⁴⁷

Whether "political involvement" of fundamentalist Christians is interpreted positively (e.g., as political engagement) or negatively (e.g., as religion trying to influence the political process), the fact remains that there is a "diminishing divide" between church and state.⁴⁸ Since the formation of the Moral Majority in 1978, the "Religious Right" has included a large number of fundamentalist Christians, making the terms

TABLE 3
Differences in Portrayals by Article Type

	News Stories (a)	Editorials (b)	Letters to Editor (c)	Weekly Columnists (d)	Features (e)	Other (f)
Favorability Rating in Article*	2.46	2.34 ^{e,f}	2.23 ^{a,e,f}	2.17 ^{e,f}	2.62	2.63
Tolerance	2.00	1.86	1.70 ^{a,f}	1.76	2.15	2.00
Intelligence	2.52	2.32	2.46	1.89 ^{a,f}	2.67	2.57
Forcefulness of Views	1.64 ^{c,d}	1.88	2.00	2.18	1.60 ^{c,d}	1.46 ^{b,c,d}
Political Involvement	1.79 ^b	2.15	1.67 ^b	2.08	1.61 ^b	1.37 ^{a,b,d}
Violence	1.08	1.06	1.07	1.09	1.06	1.06
Thermometer Rating	42.15	39.29 ^{e,f}	38.19 ^{a,e,f}	38.21 ^{e,f}	44.49	44.33

Note: *The favorability rating of Fundamentalist Christians as portrayed by headlines was deleted from this analysis due to a small *N*.

Superscripts denote significantly different means from: (a) news stories; (b) editorials; (c) letters to the editor; (d) weekly columnists; (e) features; (f) other.

inseparable in many minds. There is evidence that Evangelicals (including fundamentalists) are stronger proponents of mixing religion and politics than the general public. While 73% of evangelical Christians reported thinking laws and policies would be better if the "elected officials were deeply religious," only 47% of the general public concurred.⁴⁹

Our study lends support to the notion that news coverage has the potential to influence political attitudes by virtue of influencing attitudes toward fundamentalist Christians. The larger picture shows a consistent increase in the number of articles mentioning fundamentalist Christianity during the past two decades, despite a relatively mild but constant level of antipathy found in the media. This phenomenon may stem from the fact that as America continues to move toward a post-modern pluralistic society, more values of fundamentalist Christians are being challenged, and, as a result, this group is mentioned more often as it pleads its case for the more traditional value structure. A good example of this would be homosexuality. In 1977, 56% of the United States said homosexuals should have equal rights in the work place, whereas in 2001 85% agree with this notion.⁵⁰ As new issues in contention with fundamentalists' religious values enter the public sphere, they in turn generate debate, with seemingly lingering effects. These value debates are of course quickly subsumed into the political arena, and thus election years tend to have slightly more coverage of fundamentalists than nonelection years.

In general, the media are successful in bringing to the fore various issues to be incorporated into public discourse. Certainly additional research could broaden our understanding by examining how religious groups are portrayed in other forms of media and making specific links

between media content and public attitudes. Our study shows that in newspapers alone, coverage of fundamentalist Christianity has been rising steadily, increasing more dramatically in presidential election years. Candidate and party positions on moral issues are associated with fundamentalists and their positions in the press. Moreover, fundamentalist Christianity appears to be encompassing an increasing number of issues—issues that may continue to appear on the American political and social agenda.

Appendix 1, Appendix 2, and Notes follow.

APPENDIX 1

Overall, how are Fundamentalist Christians portrayed:

A. In the headline

- 1 Very negatively
- 2 Somewhat negatively
- 3 Balanced/Neutrally
- 4 Somewhat positively
- 5 Very positively
- 6 Not portrayed

B. In the article

- 1 Very negatively
- 2 Somewhat negatively
- 3 Balanced/Neutrally
- 4 Somewhat positively
- 5 Very positively
- 6 Not portrayed

If "6" [NOT PORTRAYED] TO BOTH 1a AND 1b, THEN GO TO NEXT ARTICLE.
For each dimension noted below, mark the answer that best reflects how this article portrayed Fundamentalist Christians.

- | | | | | | | |
|------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| a. | Very intolerant | Somewhat intolerant | Balanced | Somewhat tolerant | Very tolerant | DID NOT MENTION |
| b. | Very unintellig. | Somewhat unintellig. | Balanced | Somewhat intellig. | Very intellig. | DID NOT MENTION |
| c. | Very irresponsible | Somewhat irresponsible | Balanced | Somewhat responsible | Very responsible | DID NOT MENTION |
| Etc. | | | | | | |
| k. | Not at all violent | A little violent | Somewhat violent | Very violent | | DID NOT MENTION |

If "a little" to "very" violent, was this violence portrayed as:

_____ provoked OR _____ unprovoked?

Overall, how does the article "feel" toward Christian Fundamentalists? Use a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 means "extremely unfavorably/negatively" and 100 means "extremely favorably/positively." _____

What is the general focus of this article?

- 1 Economic 2 Social 3 Political 4 Human interest 5 Religious 6 Other

APPENDIX 2

Conceptual Definitions

Tolerance: The ability to sympathize for beliefs contrary to one's own. Scale does not measure the level of disagreement with other viewpoints, but the ability to accept such differences in a respectful/rational manner (including the ability to "agree to disagree").

Intelligence: Implicitly or explicitly stated by the citation of education level, derogatory labels (e.g., "backwards/backwater"), or the highlighting of irrational behaviors.

Negligent: Not capable of sufficiently handling the responsibilities already given them. This may include, but is not limited to, care of children, need to seek medical attention, and laziness in community affairs. See Responsible.

Responsible: Ability to handle obligations and own up to one's opinions and actions. Also look for accusations of blame shifting. See Negligent.

Sincerity: Perception of trustworthiness, dependability, or reliability

Criminal-Minded: Wishing to break or bend the laws, or having done so. Does the article suggest this group to be more apt to break laws than other groups? Is a specific law or guideline mentioned and described as being more frequently violated by Fundamentalists?

Law Abiding: Supporter of law and order in America. Are Fundamentalists seen as following the laws of the country, and agreeing with the laws in action? Does the article hint that this group would prefer to break the law/accepted norms?

Patriotic: Proud of country and what it stands for; supporter of the democratic system and the U.S. Constitution. Look for suggestions that they are against the government, or against taxes, etc. (Please note that taxes may be coded under "law-abiding/criminal-minded" if the article specifically mentions breaking the law.)

Racist: Belittling others due to their cultural or ethnic background (e.g., Fundamentalist Christians have often been associated with Nazis, skinheads, and the Ku Klux Klan). Conversely, are they portrayed as uniting the races, trying to mend past harms or trying to diversify churches?

Forcing Views on Others: This does not include proselytizing, but rather the imposition of views on others (not just sharing of those views).

Suicidal: Prone to behave or engage in dangerous behaviors where there is a high likelihood of harm to self; described as mentally unstable and capable of harming themselves; described as bent on killing themselves.

Political Involvement: Includes actions related to politics, such as lobbying, attempting to influence a vote, supporting a particular party or candidate.

Violent: Desiring/capable of rendering destruction to persons or objects; prone to damage people or things more than an average person.

NOTES

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4. Edmund Lambeth, Philip E. Meyer, and Esther Thorson, *Assessing Public Journalism* (Columbia, MS: University of Missouri Press, 1998).
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7. Elliot Cohen and Deni Elliot, *Journalism Ethics: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1997).
8. Theodore Lewis Glasser, "Objectivity and News Bias," in *Philosophical Issues in Journalism*, ed. Elliot Cohen (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 176-85.
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10. Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (January 1972): 660-79.
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13. Dietram A. Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49 (winter 1999): 103-123.
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15. Entman, "Framing: Towards Clarification," 52.
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18. Gamson, *Talking Politics*.
19. Entman, "Framing: Towards Clarification," 55.
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22. Anthony C. Thiselton, "An Age of Anxiety," in *The History of Christianity: A Lion Handbook*, ed. Tim Dowley (Oxford, UK: Lion Publishing, 1990), 610-27.
23. C. T. McIntire, "Fundamentalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of*

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24. Daniel G. Reid, *Concise Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Madison, WI: Intervarsity Press, 1995).

25. Andrew Kohut, John C. Green, Scott Keeter, and Robert Toth, *The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

26. David Beale, "S.B.C. House on the Sand?" [http://www.itib.org/articles/house_on_sand1.html], September 2001.

27. 1998 Institute for First Amendment Studies, Inc., "Moral Majority Folds." [<http://www.ifas.org/fw/8906/majority.html>], March 2001.

28. John Herbers, "Kennedy Chides Church Leaders on Role of State," *The New York Times*, 11 September 1984, sec. A, p. 1, col. 2.

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34. Lexis-Nexis articles were grouped into time periods to prevent the breaching of the Lexis-Nexis maximum search of 1,000 articles. The Lexis-Nexis-defined regions were also used such that newspapers from the Midwest region were published in Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Newspapers in the Northeast region were from Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Southeastern newspapers were published in Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Newspapers from the Western region were from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Out of the population ($N = 7,143$), a systematic sample was drawn based on every other article for about the first 200 articles in each stratified region and time period, and due to budgetary and manpower constraints, every third article thereafter. The sampling design resulted in a sample that reflected the proportion of each region/period of the population within half a percentage point.

35. Bolce and De Maio, "The Anti-Christian Fundamentalist Factor."

36. Intercoder reliabilities were consistently high: .85 for portrayals of fundamentalist Christians in the headline; .82 for portrayals of funda-

mentalist Christians in the article; .89 for tolerance; .80 for intelligence; .63 for responsibility; .78 for sincerity; .85 for criminality; .80 for racism; .72 for imposing their views on others; .63 for suicidal; .75 for political involvement; .72 for violence; .77 for unprovoked violence; and .92 for the thermometer rating.

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