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Speaking for the Public: How the Media Constructed Controversy and Consensus About Abortion from 1972 through 1994

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Speaking for the Public: How the Media Constructed Controversy and Consensus About  
Abortion from 1972 through 1994

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Sociology

by

Beth Gharrity Gardner

Dissertation Committee:  
Professor Francesca Polletta, Chair  
Professor Edwin Amenta  
Professor Evan Schofer

2015



## DEDICATION

To

the people I learn from

Der wahre Weg geht über ein Seil, das nicht in der Höhe gespannt ist,  
sondern knapp über dem Boden.  
Es scheint mehr bestimmt stolpern zu machen, als begangen zu werden.

The true path is along a rope, not a rope suspended way up in  
the air, but rather only just over the ground.  
It serves more like a tripwire than a tightrope.

Franz Kafka  
"The Zürau Aphorisms"

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Speaking for the Public: How the Media Constructed Controversy and Consensus About  
Abortion from 1972 through 1994

By

Beth Gharrity Gardner

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2015

Professor Francesca Polletta, Chair

How and when do journalists define the boundaries of acceptable controversy? And how do they do so while appearing to remain objective? To answer these questions, this research analyzes mainstream newspaper coverage of the American abortion debate from 1972 through 1994. Using qualitative content analyses and quantitative regression analyses, I explore how journalists rhetorically position themselves and other actors in news stories. More specifically, I analyze the use of analytic and outraged rhetoric in stories about the abortion controversy. I identify the actors who are ascribed analytic rhetoric or outrage rhetoric, as well as when journalists themselves use such rhetoric. I compare these uses across article characteristics and political contexts, as well as over time.

Findings show that to perform their objectivity, journalists adopt one of two roles: either that of neutral observer or that of guardian of consensus. Scholars have studied the first role but not the second. Both of these journalistic performances violate commitments to objectivity by implying certain conflicts and contenders are legitimate and others are beyond the pale of political acceptability. By serving as neutral observers and by serving as



guardians of consensus journalists enact their commitment to objectivity not by being impartial but by being partial (to their understanding of shared public values). Ironically, however, when adhering to the norms of the guardianship of consensus, journalists undermine the paradigms of “objective journalism” (i.e., facticity, independence, balance) and a democratic public sphere (i.e., civil, representative or inclusive, and dialogic). In addition to this consequence, these performances also treat different groups of actors as either co-representatives of the public interest or as illegitimate challengers to those interests.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“ ‘The public’ is not a simple entity, including all of the people of the nation equally; it is rather the articulated element of the populace...”  
– Celeste Condit 1990, p. 7.

“News imparts to occurrences their *public character* as it transforms mere happenings into publicly discussable events.”  
– Gaye Tuchman 1978, p.3.

When we think of controversial political issues, the “culture wars” in the United States, or of the general problem of incivility in political discourse, the abortion issue often comes to mind. Indeed, Carmines and Stimson argued in 1980 that the abortion issue had been “so ingrained over a long period that it structures voters’ ‘gut responses’ to candidates and political parties” (p. 78; see also Jelen and Wilcox 2003). But abortion has not always been so publicly contested. Positions on the issue have not been so deeply ingrained. Even the “sides” in the debate have changed: what we take as the mainstream position and the marginal one, the legitimate and the deviant, have changed.<sup>1</sup> How should we understand these cultural shifts and account for them?

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<sup>1</sup> As this study emphasizes discourse, it will become clear that language is politicized in various ways. As Luker (1984) observes, in political movements, “a choice of words is a choice of sides” (p. 2). While I disagree with her assertion that sides are always clear-cut and that they share very little common language, this observation applies more generally to the language of all political actors, especially journalists in the

According to E. E. Schattschneider (1960), “If a fight starts, watch the crowd,” because it will play the decisive role in the scope and the balance of forces. Some people will take sides and become engaged, while others will walk away. This premise is convincing, but less clear is *how* to watch the dynamic crowd or *which* elements of “the public” will shed light on the evolution of a fight. If we treat “the public” as the full scope of public opinion, some portions of the public, such as pro-life and pro-choice movement and party activists hold staunch views on abortion. However, the plurality of Americans think abortion should neither be strictly legal nor entirely illegal (Cook et al. 1992, Gallup 2015; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Luker 1984; Staggenborg 1991). In fact, most people are ambivalent about the morality of abortion, and the consensus among both strict pro-life supporters and pro-choice supporters is somewhat fragile (Dillon 1990; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). Thus, whether fluctuations in attitudes on abortion among Americans since the 1970s constitute increasing polarization is disputed.

The key insight from differing empirical and theoretical positions is that seeing abortion as a “culture war” issue is more about the appearance or perception of polarization than actual polarization (e.g., Cook et al. 1992, Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Mouw and Sobel 2001).<sup>2</sup> More specifically, that scholars and journalists have often

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discussions of public interest issues carried in the mass media. In line with other scholars (e.g., Ferree, Gamson, Gerhardt, and Rucht 2002), in my own efforts to remain “neutral” I use the terms *pro-abortion* or *pro-abortion-rights* to refer to people who seek to remove or reduce restrictions on abortion and *anti-abortion* for those people seeking to increase restrictions. Similarly, I call the two sides of the abortion issue the *pro-life* (or *right-to-life*) and *pro-choice* movements. I define *social movements* in this study as the constellation of social movement and political advocacy organizations (SMOs) grouped by issue-focus, rather than demographic make-up, “that have as their goal the attainment of the broadest preferences of social movement” (McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1216), using conventional or unconventional action. Thus, I use the appellations Pro-Choice SMOs and Pro-Life SMOs in some instances.

<sup>2</sup> Studies using the General Social Survey (GSS) and the National Election Survey (NES) to study attitudes on the abortion issue have found evidence for an increasing move from the middle to a stricter liberal stance following 1990 (Evans, Bryson, and DiMaggio 2001), for increasing polarization between mainline and evangelical Protestants since 1972 (Evans 2002), and for a divergence in attitudes between liberals and

inferred polarization from outcomes easily associated with it (e.g., violence). And, more recently, if polarization reflects anything about the actual public, it is the sorting of the citizenry into increasingly staunch issue platforms of the two major political parties. Therefore, although abortion is certainly a politicized issue, if we watch this crowd, it is harder to explain the fight.

Instead of looking to public opinion, we can look to mass-mediated discourse as constituting the public sphere. To understand the conflict in this setting, we need to recognize that the mass media are crucial definers of “the public” interest. The various players involved in the policy process – authorities, experts, activists, and so on – rely on the media to identify and influence the differentiated mass public (Gans 1979; Koopmans 2004; Rucht 2004). The policy-making of political elites is constrained and enabled by their *perceptions* of issues, actors and public sentiment (Campbell 1998; 2002). These perceptions are often based in media accounts, rather than issues, actors and public sentiments per se (Gamson 2004; Skrentny 2006). Moreover, what most people know about political contests they have not learned from personal experience but from the mass media (Molotch and Lester 1974; Shoemaker 1982, 1984; Tuchman 1978). And opinion polls fail to account for “the covert weightings that result from access to influence over public discourse” (Condit 1990, p. 8).<sup>3</sup> Thus, how the balance of forces in a conflict or a fight

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conservatives (Evans 2003). Using the same GSS data but different methods, Mouw and Sobel (2001) find no evidence of increasing polarization on abortion from 1972 to 1994. Furthermore, reviews and non-survey related research point to attitude polarization when issues “takeoff” (Baldassarri and Bearman 2007), as based on polarized elite and activist activities and discourse more than popular polarization (Cook et al. 1992), and as merely an appearance promulgated by uncritical expert and media interpretations (Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Williams 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Most scholarship suggests that media attention to an issue influences public opinion rather than the other way around (e.g., Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Further, studies on the abortion issue in particular also supports this assertion by showing how topics marginal to actual abortion supply and demand have become

change is, in many ways, about the media and how it portrays the issue, the contestants, and even the audience.

Other scholars have made this link between Schattschneider's advice and the role of mainstream press as the primary means by which the public is involved in political contests. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) argue that the media offer an important opportunity for social movements to enlarge the scope of a conflict because, as less powerful groups, they have less to lose by drawing additional people into the fray (also see Gamson 2004; Rucht 2004). It is certain that movements have sought media coverage as a way to persuade politicians and publics to support their stances on abortion. Those in political power have also relied on the media as a political resource to identify the crowd and to "mobilize bias" on abortion – presenting the issue in a way such as to maximize support (Schattschneider 1960). Even though political actors of all stripes made these efforts with the reach of the mass media in mind, the mass public has proven difficult to sway on abortion. And whether movements have less to lose than other political actors when contending in this setting remains unsettled (Gitlin 1980; Lipsky 1968). Part of what keeps us from a better understanding of these relationships is a deeper understanding of the modern American media in shaping them.

### **The Strong Case for Understanding the Mass Media**

Of course, journalists and their editors are the arbiters of news coverage. Reporters must make numerous, quick decisions to turn occurrences into newsworthy events and to transform the event into a "quality" news story. That is, a story not only familiar and true

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causes of common concern (e.g., "late-term" or "partial-birth" abortion) (e.g., Burns 2005; Simon and Jerit 2007).

but also important and interesting to audiences – all while ensuring the account is as objective as it can be (Cook 1998). But *how* reporters should exercise these judgments when constructing their stories is not made clear by the negative injunctions of the norms of “objective journalism:” political independence from subjects and advertisers, presenting the “facts” without interpreting them, and providing a balanced treatment of political claims (Hallin 1986, p. 68). Instead, institutional routines and “strategic rituals” have developed for the purpose of meeting journalistic standards (Tuchman 1972). While the rituals journalists follow are not themselves objective, they are well hidden from both readers and the journalists themselves (Cook 1998; Gans 1979; Molotch and Lester 1975). Put differently, reporters and readers alike are overwhelmingly convinced by the reportorial performance of “objectivity” or unbiasedness, and, as with other social role performances, “only the sociologist or the socially disgruntled will have any doubts about the ‘realness’ of what is presented” (Goffman 1959, p. 17).

Despite recognizing that the culture of news production affects coverage outcomes (e.g., Gamson 1988), most media sociologists take an overly simplistic view of the performance of the mass media. They often take the social front of “objective journalism” along with its imperfections as a fact in its own right. More specifically, most theoretical models take for granted *one* common set of “biases,” *one* common set of journalistic norms, *one* common institutionalized standard among journalists – although we know this is not the case (Schudson 2005). To be sure, journalistic rituals make newsworthiness and coverage outcomes highly formulaic (e.g., Cook 1998; Gans 1979). Thus, pragmatic, methodological reasons can partially account for why many scholars approach media

influence as a consistent set of practices or conventionalized “biases.”<sup>4</sup> Another reason for assuming a common standard among journalists likely rests on the fact that many studies focus on the newsgathering practices of journalists in the newsroom or on the beat to understand the profession’s construction of objectivity. But the enactment and implications of objectivity rituals are more easily seen in the patterns of news content because how journalists should apply strategic rituals to perform their own objectivity is not consciously articulated (Bennett 1990; Gans 1979).

A focus on what we think the media actually “does” through the practices of newsgathering and editing, while valuable, obscures the multifaceted and performative aspects of objectivity. Relying on official sources, balancing stories by producing two sides for every issue, and turning to familiar speakers for “good quotes” produces something that looks superficially “objective” but actually allows journalists a great deal of leeway in what they report. And even these most commonly identified rituals for demonstrating objectivity are not always employed (e.g., Gamson and Meyer 1996; Hallin 1986).

Despite the inevitable assumptions, preferences, and values that underlie the selective application of reporting rituals and the normative messages that are conveyed about the political processes being covered as a result, journalistic authority remains intact. For instance, journalists’ reliance on officialdom as part of their regularly scheduled newsbeat produces something that appears objectively important, but often reinforces the existing power structure (e.g., Hall, Connell, and Curti 1976; Tuchman 1978). Similarly, counterbalancing one source’s position with an opposing one to produce “fair,” balanced coverage tends to reduce the diversity of viewpoints in a debate or suggest parity between

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<sup>4</sup> Much research regarding news discourse has to do with the implications of *what* gets into the news: the

unequally supported arguments (e.g., Bennett 1988). And the values that are inevitably intertwined with these news judgments can seem objective because they are taken for granted by journalists and audiences alike, but they can also skew which actors and conflicts are portrayed as legitimate (Gans 1979; Hackett 1984). When combined, we can see that the strategic rituals for laying claim to professional objectivity are both based on and produce subtle structural and cultural tendencies that have important implications for all of the parties involved in the co-production of news (e.g., journalists, sources, and audiences). Such tendencies are well hidden because the “biases” of newsmaking rituals are not intended, they are performative (Goffman 1959, p. 17): enacted for “the benefit of other people,” for the benefit of the journalist, and for the profession of journalism.

Providing some insight into how this operates, Herbert Gans (1979) famously argued that “enduring values” of journalism, such as allegiance to one’s country, individualism, and the maintenance of social order, make the objective authority of journalists’ news judgments possible because they are widely shared by politicians and readers alike (p. 196-7). So even when institutional rituals skew coverage in favor of certain sources or viewpoints reporters are seen as affirming traditional, widely shared societal values rather than as espousing personal opinions. But Gans assumes that the alignment between consensual public or political values and news values is more enduring, more complete, and more internally consistent than it can actually be. He too fails to see objectivity as an interactive performance that may have more than one successful social front. Some closer examinations of the media coverage of public interest issues over time and in different contexts (Ettema and Glasser 1998; Hallin 1984, 1986), like some



scholarship on the relationship between the media and social movements (Sobieraj 2010), reveal that the implicit rules of newsmaking are neither singular nor simple.

Daniel Hallin (1986) has theorized most extensively on the connection between the varied applications of objectivity protocols in the coverage of an issue as it becomes contentious. Studying media coverage during the Vietnam era, he found that reporting styles shifted from a “deferential” stance toward officials and their policies in the beginning of the war, when support for war was largely unified, to a more “adversarial” one in later years as political divisions within the establishment and among the public intensified. Based on these findings, he argues that journalists practice “two entirely different kinds of journalism” (p. 150) depending on whether an issue resides within the “sphere of legitimate controversy” or within either the “sphere of consensus” or the “sphere of deviance.”

When an issue is within the “sphere of legitimate controversy,” the routines of “objectivity and balance reign as the supreme journalistic virtues” (p. 116). The reportage of legitimate controversies, such as electoral contests and topics on which the Democratic and Republican parties differ, is that of classical, “objective journalism.” Conversely, when reporters deem an issue popularly or powerfully consensual, “the region of ‘motherhood and apple pie,’” they no longer feel compelled to report as disinterested observers (p. 116-17). Instead, they abandon objectivity by writing stories as patriots willing to advocate for “our” shared values. Similarly, when actors or viewpoints threaten these presumably consensual values (e.g., terrorism), reporting enters the “sphere of deviance.” Here, the distinctions between neutral description, straight recitation from sources, and commentary collapse as reporters defend consensus against its would-be challengers. In short, Hallin’s

(1986) work suggests which mode of reporting prevails establishes the “limits of acceptable conflict” on an issue (p. 118).

A handful of subsequent studies have applied Hallin’s general theory (Ettema and Glasser 1998; Schudson 2002b; Wade 2011, 2012; Watkins 2001). However, important questions remain. The traditional rituals of objective journalism – those of “legitimate controversy” – are not always employed. Although Hallin (1984, 1986) hints at when this is likely to be the case at the broadest levels, both the generalizability and the specifics of how this varies across issues, the actors involved and different storytelling contexts are unclear. Further, when it is the case that reporters depart from the protocols objective journalism, what does coverage look like? How do reporters structure the language of their stories? And what specific rituals for constructing legitimately controversial situations versus consensual ones continue to allow journalists to give the impression of their objectivity? More specifically, how do journalists rhetorically perform their own objectivity through what they say in stories, as opposed to how they gather news and decide whom to quote? Why is the language of reportage structured the ways that is across the different actors who’ve made the news, across coverage events, and over time?

Paying attention to why reportage is structured in the ways that it is raises another set of questions about what impact those structures have for the messages conveyed about the political processes being covered. Unfortunately, we know more about media conventions for covering contentious tactics, like protests, than we do about conventions for covering contentious rhetoric (Koopmans and Statham 1999). Similarly, while previous work provides a number of insights about how movements are covered in the press as opposed to political elites (i.e., politicians), less is known about how journalists incorporate

their own voice, as well as the voices of elites, movements, and other actors into stories. In sum, journalists' role in constructing and managing the "limits of acceptable conflict" through how they choose to write stories about conflict is not well understood.

### **Attending to the Norms Governing Language in Reporting**

The choice of language is the journalist's primary tool, so it is surprising that the norms governing language in reporting have not received more attention. One of the objectives of this study is to show that in order to assess these norms we need to understand how reporters rhetorically position themselves relative to their sources, the audience, and the issue. Critically, for this positioning to appear to the reader as one of objectivity, journalists must develop relatively stable performances of objectivity for different subjects, storytelling and political contexts. A related aim, then, is to show that the norms governing language also revolve around the roles journalist's come to expect certain sources to play in relation to unfolding events.

These objectives are buttressed by what we know about other storytelling forms (e.g., Polletta 1998). Like other storytellers, journalists are constrained by the formal and informal institutional rules governing reporting as much as by their fidelity to "what really happened." Reporters decide when to insert their own commentary about an issue as well as which speakers and claims to feature. Therefore, how groups are represented in the press is not necessarily how they would choose to represent themselves. This insight is akin to scholarly assessments that attribute the character of coverage to real occurrences' conformity with the demands of news production (Amenta, Gardner, Tierney, Yerena, and Elliott 2012; Cook 1998; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1985; Sobieraj

2010; Tuchman 1978). Importantly, though, these insights must be extended to better understand the role of journalists themselves as political actors in meaning contests. Because despite discrepancies between what actually happens and what gets reported, media coverage is an important indicator of if not driver for political contests.

Based on this conceptualization, I offer my most general argument: *reporters privilege certain political positions over others or themselves make normative statements not because they eschew objectivity, but rather because they assume that issues, actors, or events that have not entered the sphere of legitimate controversy should be covered in a different way than those that have become objects of legitimate controversy.* These are not individual decisions, but result from the fact that the norms governing the language of reportage revolve around journalists' commitment to being objective professionals and the difficulty of performing this task in given the demands of news production. Thus, by ritually making decisions about how to portray themselves alongside other political actors when writing news stories, journalists paint a picture of the issue terrain that can have major consequences for the actors involved. So while mass media attention is crucial for political influence, the character of coverage can validate actors – portray them as reasonable, moderate, or politically serious – as well as discredit them as combative or extremist. To be clear, this is not about intentional “bias” but unintentional and unconscious bias that result from the rote application of heuristics for “objectivity.”

I also make the more specific argument that *in their efforts to depict political reality in ways that will appear objective journalists hew either to the familiar norms of “objective journalism” or to the norms of the guardianship of consensus (only some of which are equally familiar).* I show both what this role of guardian of public consensus looks like, that is, the

kind of writing in which it is expressed, and how it is different from the role of neutral observer we tend to associate with standard media practices. I investigate when and how these distinct performances of objectivity are enacted in relation to different actors, different story contexts and in different political contexts. The rhetorical devices used in reporting provide an important window into understanding how reporters at different times constructed popular consensus, legitimate controversy, and deviance in the face of little new information on abortion and relatively stable public opinion. Studying the character of mainstream media coverage of contention over abortion can shed light on the variable effects of media coverage on politics.

Furthermore, I argue that *because journalists both write in their own voice and they write by quoting and paraphrasing other people they are in the unique position to grant speakers different kinds of political roles and status as much as they do for themselves*. Media conventions for the quality of coverage actors receive, rather than simply the quantity of coverage they receive, can help to account for how issues, the key players involved, and their relations with one another have been represented by the press. By structuring language in certain ways, the media contribute to the construction and maintenance of community boundaries – to the “mapping” of legitimate members and challengers in contentious politics (Alexander and Smith 1993; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). I examine how the journalistic demonstration of objectivity affected the portrayals of social movements in relation to other actors in the American abortion debate.

## **The Mass Media Coverage of the American Abortion Debate**

Researchers have long recognized that major news organizations within the American media system (i.e., a few key television networks, newspapers, and magazines) are an important source for studying the dynamics of public discourse and the culture of the media in influencing that discourse. The American abortion debate is an excellent case for examining these dual roles of the mass media in the coverage of an issue as it became contentious. Overall, and in addition to its ongoing salience, abortion has many characteristics that hold for other public interest issues (e.g., climate change, foreign policy and war, nuclear power, civil rights issues) even if the players and mediating factors vary somewhat (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Glazer 1986). I highlight a few of these characteristics before reviewing the literatures I use to anchor my arguments.

Abortion, like other issues, influences political behavior, such as party coalitions and cohesion, voting and movement mobilization (Adams 1997; Jelen and Wilcox 2003; Rohlinger 2015; Staggenborg 1991). How these impacts shaped and were shaped by policy outcomes on abortion is not yet well understood. But there is little doubt that the mass media played a mediating role (Ferree et al. 2002; Ferree 2003). Notably, we know that the abortion debate was routinely covered in the national news media starting in the 1970s. Through this coverage the media amplified the messages of politicians about their stances on abortion to their constituents (Adams 1997; Simon and Jerit 2007). Coverage also influenced the strategies of pro-choice and pro-life movement groups (Rohlinger 2006, 2015).

Additionally, we know that at certain times moral outrage contributed to public controversy surrounding abortion and debate was heated. At others, the abortion issue was

more civilly or politely discussed. Thus, the discourse of the abortion debate, some of which has been examined through the use of media accounts, is not structurally different from other political debates (Burns 2002; Condit 1990; Dillon 1996; Jasper 1997; Luker 1984; Perloff 2010). This makes the examination of mass-mediated discourse on abortion relevant to other policy issue debates.

Lastly, the abortion issue provides an appropriate case for understanding the messages the media send about political actors, especially social movements, on opposing sides of a public debate. The pro-life and pro-choice movements importantly differ in terms of their emergence, organizational infrastructures, tactics and media strategies, and relation to a shifting status quo (e.g., Meyer and Staggenborg 2008; Staggenborg 1991). And because the two opposing movements active during the period are comparable to other national, policy-oriented movements (e.g., Rohlinger 2015), what this investigation reveals about the dynamics of portraying movements should be relevant beyond the scope of this study.

Both the force of the abortion issue and its similarity to political discourse on other public interest issues have made it a focal area of study for numerous social scientists. These studies permit me to situate my investigation of the news media in a rich historical literature on the abortion debate, to extend upon prior scholarship on the media coverage of abortion, and to generalize beyond the specifics of the abortion debate. As the foregoing discussions reflect, I broadly draw on scholarship on media, politics, and movements to develop my arguments.

## 1.1 Understanding Media Coverage

Laying the theoretical foundation for this project requires drawing upon two major perspectives of the media. One treats the media as a *site* where different political actors, including social movements, contest meanings. The other studies the role of the media in *constructing* political reality and reproducing culture. Although some overlap exists between these perspectives and some disagreements exist within them, each has theoretical blind spots that the other can help to resolve. Better integrated, they can illuminate how the media delimit the boundaries of acceptable conflict. After showing how these views can be blended to provide plausible answers to the questions I pose, I present the data I use to answer those questions and an overview of the dissertation.

### **The Coverage of Politics: Access to and Framing in the Mass Media**

To develop a picture of how media norms influence the news coverage political actors receive, I start by describing what we know about the function of the mass media as a central forum for public discourse.

Much of politics is rhetoric and political actors depend on the general audience mass media to make their speech public. So while direct interactions between contending parties do happen, it is more often the case that they learn about and try to influence one another via the media (Cook 1998; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Lipsky 1968; Rucht 2004). Moreover, the mass media link political communication between these actors to different discursive forums in the public sphere (e.g., legal, scientific, religious) and to the elusive mass audience. As media scholars Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester (1974) observe, “news tells us what we do not experience directly and thus renders otherwise remote



happenings observable and meaningful” (p. 101). The strongest versions of this argument hold that media *depictions* of issues, events, and actors in contemporary society are more crucial to political challenges than what actually happened (e.g., Koopmans 2004). Whether or not the mass media is *the* major site of political contests, it is generally agreed that they serve as the “master forum” for public discourse and political influence (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002, p. 10; see also Gamson 2004).

The power of the mass media has not gone unnoticed by scholars of media and of movements or by those engaged in the policy process. Media coverage affects the problems and issues placed on the governmental agenda, policy-making, and defines the pertinent political actors and issues for the mass public (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Kingdon 1984; McCombs 2005; McCombs and Shaw 1972). For social movements in particular, media coverage influences their mobilization and support (e.g., Andrews and Biggs 2006; Biggs 2003; Gitlin 1980; Lipsky 1968; Soule 2004; Tarrow 1994; Vliegenthart, Oegema, and Klandermans 2005). The coverage of movements also affects how they are perceived and discussed by policy-makers, and, thus, their ability to influence policy outcomes (e.g., McCammon, Muse, Newman, Terrell 2007; McAdam and Su 2002; Polletta 1998; Skrentny 2006). In what is a recursive process, these impacts push political actors to cater to the preferences of the mass media to achieve political influence (Cook 1998; Ferree 2003; Rucht 2004; Sobieraj 2010).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In an argument reminiscent of Althusser (1971), Altheide and Snow (1979) go so far as to argue that the “media are the dominant force to which other institutions conform” (p. 146). While this generalization may go too far, it accurately highlights the fact that the media are important to political interactions.

While the primary role of the media is communicative, this role is not passive. Far from simply mirroring political interactions, journalists and their editors “frame” them (Entman 1993; Gamson 1988; Goffman 1974). The concept of framing is variously applied in the literature, but it generally refers to signifying work that provides meaning in ways that channel subsequent reactions (Gamson 1992; Goffman 1974; Snow 2004; Snow and Benford 1988). In Todd Gitlin’s (1980) classic definition, media frames are “persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse (p. 7).”<sup>6</sup> This process has at least two dimensions. For one, journalists frame news through their role as “gatekeepers” to the mass media and broader public discourse – selecting which occurrences to turn into newsworthy events and which actors to quote/give voice in the news (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Ryan 1991; Tuchman 1978). Secondly, journalists frame news by mediating between what sources say and what to report while also deciding when to insert their own evaluations, analyses, and interpretations (Ashley and Olson 1998; Fishman 1980; Gamson 2004; Hallin 1986; Jacobs and Townsley 2011; Niven 2003). As the concept of framing suggests, newswriters not only steer opinion through their reporting but the process is also highly formulaic.

A main focus of inquiry is on the first dimension of media framing: whom or what gets through the news gate and why. The demands of news production – looming deadlines, limited resources, and a finite space for reporting the news – strongly condition these outcomes (Molotch and Lester 1974; Schudson 2001). Further, despite journalism’s

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<sup>6</sup> Media framing is also commonly defined in the literature as the process of selecting “some aspects of a perceived reality and making 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” (Entman 1993, p. 19; see also Matthes 2009).

express commitment to objectivity, journalists need to populate the news with meaningful events and to populate those stories with characters offering meaningful interpretations of those events. As these demands push journalists to routinize the sites and sources for news some actors are better positioned to influence news coverage than others.

Studies repeatedly demonstrate that the routines of newsgathering privilege “official” political voices and their institutional activity (e.g., Gans 1979; Fishman 1980; Hallin 1984, 1986; Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978). Although politicians and bureaucrats may not see it this way, journalists are relatively dependent on them to assemble political news (Molotch and Lester 1974; Schudson 2001). The special newsworthiness of the state is institutionalized in the form of news “beats” that assign reporters to regularly follow scheduled governmental activity and locations, such as official proceedings, press releases, the White House, or the courts (Fishman 1980). By virtue of their positions along these beats, state actors are seen as important and convenient sources for routine newsmaking. While this privileging has been shown to be especially true for political elites, it can also include experts affiliated with scientific fields and social institutions (e.g., law and medicine) (Cook 1998; Hallin 1992). Less frequently, it can include spokespeople for professionalized interest groups (e.g., Corbett 1998; Ferree et al. 2002). These routinized practices create a relatively stable relationship between journalists and legitimated institutions that, while not ensuring pro-government news, create an uneven terrain for unofficial actors and challengers to the status quo (Croteau and Hoynes 1994; Gitlin 1980; Herman and Chomsky 1988).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This selection of influential actors and events also has to do with what drives media attention cycles or what issues are already on the media agenda (Downs 1972), though the mechanisms by which some issues come to be covered over others and how central the state is in setting the agenda remains opaque (Cook 1998;

Reporters' gravitation to officials disadvantages social movements. But existing scholarship points to two ways political outsiders (i.e., movement groups) can enter the "news net." One of these paths is to mimic characteristics of political elites and their events to be perceived by journalists as credible, important sources for quality news. Bureaucratically organized, professional movement groups with ties to the media and that represent issues that align with those already on the media agenda are shown to obtain more media attention (e.g., Andrews and Caren 2010; Corbett 1998; Rohlinger 2002). Similarly, recent research suggests that when movements initiate their own coverage through activities that mirror conventional politics (e.g., electioneering, lobbying) the coverage they receive is more likely to validate them as relevant sources *with* relevant demands (Amenta et al. 2012). By approximating a role similar to that of political insiders, movements are better placed to make the news and, under some conditions, communicate their messages.

Alternatively, other scholarship indicates that movements can best attract the press by disrupting the traditional arrangements of newsgathering or by offering novelty and drama that generate audience interest (Bennett 1996; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Sobieraj 2010). As Tuchman (1978, p. 136) put it, "to make news, members of social movements may have to assemble at an inappropriate time in an inappropriate place to engage in an accordingly inappropriate activity." In a similar vein, according to Molotch and Lester (1974, p. 108), "anti-routine" events, like disruptive protests, make the news because they pose a problem for powerful, inherently important political actors. While this

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Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Kingdon 1984). It does seem to be clear that political actors seeking to send messages on an issue have better chances of doing so if that issues is already on the media agenda (e.g., Andrews and Caren; McCarthy et al. 1996).

argument is supported by findings that reporters rely on state sources to interpret or react to protest events (e.g., McLeod and Hertog 1992; Smith et al. 2001), in some instances, such non-routine, contentious coverage occasions can briefly destabilize journalists' reliance upon officials (Molotch and Lester 1975).

Unfortunately for activists, however, these two routes for making the news appear to work at cross-purposes. Echoing a longstanding debate in the movement literature about the trade-off between "conventional" politics and more disruptive forms of collective action in achieving influence (e.g., Piven and Cloward 1977), movements face a quandary when it comes to generating newsworthy events *and* gaining acceptance as credible sources (Gamson 1975; Gamson and Meyer 1996). Imitating insiders puts movements in competition with both political elites and more disruptive actors for coverage, lessening their relative chances for attention (e.g., Oliver and Maney 2000; Rohlinger et al. 2012; Sobieraj 2010). Conversely, disruption can make movements newsworthy, but this coverage frequently excludes their claims (e.g., Amenta et al. 2012; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gitlin 1980).

Despite revealing this dilemma for movement groups, the bulk of research on movements' struggle for validation and legitimacy focuses on protest coverage (for a review see Earl, Martin, McCarthy, and Soule 2004), the ability of movement groups to attract any media attention (e.g., Amenta, Caren, Olasky, and Stobaugh 2009; Andrews and Caren, 2010; Rohlinger, Kail, Taylor, and Conn 2012; Vliementhart et al. 2005), or to be given any opportunity to communicate in the media by being quoted or paraphrased (i.e., "standing" ) (Ferree et al. 2002). These emphases only get us so far. While they tell us about the hurdles movements face to make the news, they do not tell us about how movement

claims are represented in the mass media. In other words, they fail to account for the second dimension of media framing. Journalists not only decide what is news and who is relevant to an issue, they also decide what – of all that an actor may say – to include in a report and when to insert their own commentary.

We know relatively little about the factors influencing these storytelling decisions. As will be explored in greater detail in chapter 4, what evidence we do have is fascinating because it highlights a different set of obstacles that movements face to shape their own coverage. In his seminal research on the media coverage of the New Left, Todd Gitlin (1980, p.3) argued that movements “become ‘newsworthy’ only by submitting to the implicit rules of newsmaking, by conforming to journalistic notions (themselves embedded in history) of what a ‘story’ is. What an ‘event’ is, what a ‘protest’ is.” Indeed, some subsequent studies investigating the role of the media in how movements’ claims are covered reinforce Gitlin’s assessment (e.g., Amenta et al. 2012; Hackett and Zhao 1994; Sobieraj 2010). This suggests that we must pay greater attention to reportorial expectations about the type of story being written to better understand how different actors are portrayed according to their rhetoric.

In a more recent extension of Gitlin’s insight, Sarah Sobieraj’s (2010, 2011) research indicates that reporters not only have different expectations about the best ways to develop their stories to conform to professional standards but also about the types of accounts that different actors can provide. By examining the newsgathering practices of journalists alongside their reportage of demonstrations during presidential campaign events, she found journalists unwittingly applied distinct rules for covering government officials and protestors. In line with some prominent media scholars (e.g., Bennett 1988; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979), she argues that journalists treat officials with respect while

expecting them to speak on behalf of the office they represent, discuss the common good, and be moderate representatives of mainstream interests. What makes for the crux of Sobieraj's argument is that, by contrast, when following the implicit rules for covering movement associations reporters either entirely ignore activists as sources or prefer them to be "authentically" spontaneous, emotional, and self-interested (Sobieraj 2010). As I alluded to earlier in the introduction, when combined, this scholarship provides compelling evidence that journalists have established expectations about the roles different political actors can play in relation to unfolding events and according to the demands of news production.

Taken together, although journalists rely on sources to write the news, the literature on the media as a *site* for meaning contests recognizes that factors endogenous to the news media account for a great deal of news coverage and strongly condition the ability of different actors to send any messages. This expansive body of scholarship shows that coverage largely results from a confluence of institutionalized newsgathering routines, implicit "news values," and the ability of reporters to adapt occurrences into meaningful stories (Andrews and Caren 2010; Callaghan and Schnell 2001; McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996; Oliver and Maney 2000; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, and Augustyn 2001; Sobieraj 2010). Therefore, while political actors rely on the media for its communicative power, *none* of them can make news entirely on their own terms (e.g., Cook 1998; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993).

Despite these findings, much research holds that the built-in routines of newsmaking always privilege the political authority of the state or other elite sources of information (e.g., Croteau and Hoynes 1994; Herman and Chomsky 1988). As Hall and

colleagues (1976, p. 92) write: “It is in politics and the state, not in the media, that power is *skewed*.” But the evidence suggesting that that social movement discourse will always be disadvantaged by the organizational and ideological links the media have to those in power is limited. Few studies compare the actual discourse attached to different sets of actors, in relation to one another, in different storytelling contexts, or over time. Thus, we still have much more to learn about the social relationships the media establish with elite and movement actors. We can better understand the normative messages sent by the media through the quality of actor depictions by examining how sources are sorted or organized by their rhetoric in *relation* to one another, in *relation* to different events, and in *relation* to the role of journalists in news stories.

Conceptualizing either a uniform reportorial standard or one standard for movements and another for elites leads to differing predictions for the coverage of contentious politics. On one hand, studies suggest that sources must moderate their political performances to gain a voice in the media. On the other, they suggest that more disruptive or extreme performances are precisely what journalists come to expect and seek out to construct compelling stories. In either case, scholars tend to presume that the state is the ultimate source of media authority. Part of resolving these expectations and questioning an elite-dominated media requires a closer investigation of the portrayals of different political actors according to their rhetoric. Furthermore, although media conventions have been most revealing in terms of explaining coverage outcomes, the role of journalists as storytellers *and* commentators in shaping the portrayals of political actors is under examined. As a result, the role of the media in constructing coverage outcomes is predominantly treated as static or as singular. In sum, while valuable, the literature on the



media as a site for political contests tells us more about the ways actors can get any representation in the press than it does about the quality of that representation or the dynamic nature of the social relationships between the media and sources.

### **The Mainstream Media and the “Objective” Construction of Political Reality**

As the foregoing discussion suggests, although news is co-produced by journalists and the social world they seek to represent, the media play the crucial role in constructing that political reality. To better understand this process, we need to understand how the media routines and values so essential to newsmaking are strongly conditioned by the organizational and institutionalized commitments to objectivity.

At least since the 1970s, the practices of news production have been examined through a sociological lens that recognizes U.S. media coverage to be more a product of journalism than of individual journalists or editors (Cook 1998; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Tuchman 1972, 1978). This has a great deal to do with the professionalization of the American media system, which began in the 1920s with the Progressive ideals of objectivity and political independence as its cornerstones (Hallin 1986; Schudson 1981, 2003). Relatively stable structural and organizational features of news production have reinforced the institutionalization of “professionalized,” objective journalism: the need to produce and disseminate a finite amount of news accurately, quickly, and widely in a competitive industry environment (Gans 2003). The professionalism of mass media institutions speaks to the evidence that factors endogenous to the media to account for so much of news content. Moreover, professional constraints help to account for the autonomy of media organizations (despite a reliance on established institutions for routine

newsgathering) and for the importance of journalists as powerful political actors in their own right. Reporters have the liberty to use this power when crafting the news, but they must demonstrate that they are doing so "responsibly."

Of course, certain media outlets and forums (e.g., Fox News, political blogs, and the editorial pages of some newspapers) "spin" news in a way that is an identifiable norm violation (even if it might be effective political communication). But we would be mistaken to expect explicit partisanship or deliberate "bias" in most instances.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the most substantial portion of journalists' ideological work consists of presenting themselves as nonideological – as objective (Hackett 1984, p. 249).

Confronted with the difficult task of deciding what to cover as news and how to cover it according to the premier, professional norm of objectivity, reporters often reflexively hew to institutional conventions for gathering and presenting news. In particular, they follow what media sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1972) aptly termed "strategic rituals justifying a claim to objectivity" (p. 677). Research points to a set of "strategic rituals" or conventions for performing objectivity that reporters unconsciously follow in order to avoid bias – or charges of bias – in reporting. Most of the identified rituals involve standard practices for the sourcing of the story: the reliance on official sources, routine events, and balancing arguments from "both sides" of a debate. Or for story formatting in the newsroom: separating editorials from news reports and the inverted pyramid structure that puts the most material information first in an article (e.g., Fishman 1980; Tuchman 1972, 1978). Journalists' adherence to these rituals helps to separate the journalist from any implicit values or conclusions in a story, thus producing

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<sup>8</sup> Notably, scholars do not find consistent evidence of explicit partisanship by professional journalists in news coverage (e.g., Covert and Washburn 2007; Gans 1979; Niven 2003; Schudson 2001, 2003).

something that appears impartial. Importantly, however, reporters still convey normative messages about the political processes being covered because, as Gans (1979) highlighted, the protocols of objectivity cannot be divorced from the assumptions, values, and preferences underlying them.

Part of the challenge of unpacking media norms, then, lies in understanding the relationship between “objectivity as strategic ritual(s),” the value commitments that allow various constructions of objectivity or political reality to appear impartial, and the messages that are sent as a result. While Tuchman’s (1972, 1978) insights, as well as the studies supporting them, are mainly derived from a focus on rituals in the actions of journalists at work, content offers a different window into how strategic rituals are evidenced. Notably, Gans’ (1979) research extends Tuchman’s insights on newsmaking rituals by demonstrating that journalism holds “its own set of values with its own conception of the good social order,” that are manifest in the product (p. 62). He argues that the “enduring values” of journalism are not only congruent with objectivity, “they make it possible” (p. 197). Thus, a first step to addressing the challenge of media norms is to recognize that content is rule-bound in ways that are “strategic rituals justifying a claim to objectivity” and that these rituals represent the norms of objectivity as much as the other underlying values that make it possible.

Along these lines, it is generally recognized that an integral part of objectivity rituals is the need to make news consonant with socially shared norms, contexts, interests, and attitudes (Fairclough 2003; Schudson 1989; Van Dijk 1988). To attract large, general audiences, journalists face the cognitive constraint of having to presuppose existing knowledge, beliefs, and interests held by audiences about the situations being covered. The

evidence suggests that overcoming this burden requires reporters rely on their knowledge of earlier cases or even the coverage of their competitors (i.e., strategic objectivity rituals) to construct quality stories (Fairclough 2003; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Molotch and Lester 1974; Schudson 1989; Tuchman 1972). As a result, by relying on strategic rituals, journalists frequently “typify,” “frame,” or characterize the nature of an issue as of a particular kind, and in so doing create standard images of social problems (e.g., Best 1989; Coleman and Ross 2010; Tuchman 1978). Thus, this literature points to another significant step for understanding media norms: realizing that the highly repetitive routines and rituals as well as the messages conveyed about political processes that allow reporters to appear impartial are mutually constitutive.

These formulations reveal how coverage results not from “bias” in the conventional sense, but *through* rituals for performing objectivity. With these insights in mind, we must not take an overly optimistic or overly pessimistic image of media institutions and the mass-mediated public sphere at face value. To be sure, the core principles of “objective journalism” – political independence from political actors and advertisers, presenting the “facts” without interpreting them, and providing balance with respect to the treatment of opposing political positions (Hallin 1986, p. 68) – are closely aligned with normative visions of a democratic public sphere. In its idealized form, American journalism upholds the criteria for democratic discourse by encouraging civil dialogue among actors with opposing views and either being representative or popularly inclusive (see Ferree et al. 2002: ch. 10 for a discussion; also see Habermas 1984; Rohlinger 2007). Bracing these overlapping paradigms are Gans’ “enduring values” of journalism. Altruistic democracy (that identifies “winners and losers more than heroes and villains”) (p. 43), national

leadership, and the value of moderatism itself that “discourages excess or extremism” (Gans 1979, p. 51) conform to many of the criteria for a democratic public sphere. Conversely, other scholars emphasize the enactment and implications of these values as having a dark side, one that generates a hegemonic media anchored in a dependence on the political “establishment” (Bennett 1988; Herman and Chomsky 1988). The trouble with both views is that they take for granted a unitary, predictable standard for objective newsmaking among journalists.

The news judgments of journalism are not always compatible and the consensual political values argued to underlie them are not quite as “enduring” or consistent as we might expect. For example, although the ideals of objective journalism and a democratic public sphere may encourage journalists to keep discourse civil, representative, and dialogic, the media also place a premium on novelty, drama and conflict to generate interesting stories for audiences (e.g., Gans 1979; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Similarly, the apparently standardized rules of objective journalism do not seem to apply to investigative reports (Ettema and Glasser 1998), to the coverage of certain movements or groups (Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Hertog 1992; Shoemaker 1982, 1984; Sobieraj 2010), in periods of “just” warfare (Hackett and Zhao 1994; Hallin 1984, 1986), or during moments of national tragedy or threat (Schudson 2002a). With Gans’ insights in mind, in some cases journalists seem to enact a different set of norms or standards to affirm or defend “the public’s” interests and deeply held values.

The protocols of objective journalism do not easily map onto a unified role for journalists in shaping coverage outcomes. Objectivity as detached observation and objectivity as dependence on political elites are clearly not the only sources of journalist’s

professional authority. Instead, journalism also derives authority from its own conception of the public interest and its role reflecting or protecting shared values. In other words, the performance of objectivity appears to be, in some instances, what I am calling the role of a guardian of consensus. To understand this role and the extent to which it is distinctive from that of the role of neutral observer we tend to ascribe to reporting, the important questions become: What do the norms for the guardianship of consensus look like? And when do journalists turn to them? Another part of the challenge to understanding media norms and performances, then, is to figure out how best to pose answers to these questions. We can do so, I believe, by taking a more *relational* approach to news content.

### **Distinct Journalistic Norms and Their Effects on Newsmaking**

We can come the closest to theorizing broad patterns in the norms for reportage by placing the media at the center of investigation. A first step for such theorizing, I believe, is a better integration of what we know from scholars who have done just that. More specifically, I integrate Hallin's (1986) diachronic theory of the spheres of consensus, legitimacy, and deviance with Gans' (1979) more synchronic theory of the "enduring values" underlying the news.

Again, in Hallin's theory the mode of reporting that prevails among journalists is normative. As with the inevitable values that underlie reporter's "reality judgments" (Gans 1979, p. 196), Hallin argues that journalists' base reporting decisions on taken-for-granted assumptions about the "political climate in the country as a whole" that are tied to major political events (p. 118). In this broad view, determinations of the "limits of acceptable conflict" move along a continuum from consensus to legitimate controversy to deviance

and the boundaries are “fuzzy” (p. 117; see also Gitlin 1980). Yet his analyses of news content when combined with Gans’ analyses also suggest a more detailed view wherein reporting modes can shift based on the key actors involved in a news story. In particular, Hallin holds that legitimate dissent on national policies *primarily* originates within the state itself and the perception of a public consensus is *often* determined by agreement among elites. But, importantly, journalists are not always deferential toward or driven by state power (Hallin 1986, p. 87). This aligns with Gans’ assertions and with what we know the media as a site of political contests between challengers and elites.

Integrating these theories highlights how contingency makes identifying the domain in which an issue and its reportage reside complicated but not impossible. Whether issues, viewpoints, or certain political players are placed beyond the pale of acceptable controversy should be relative and dynamic because whether conflict is officially or culturally sanctioned (or perceived to be by reporters) is relative and dynamic (Shoemaker 1985). Part of the solution Hallin and Gans provide is to examine patterns in the news coverage of an issue over time. However, blending the insights from studies of news coverage as a site of struggle with news as a performative construction of political reality suggests we first need to understand how reporters rhetorically position themselves relative to their subjects so as to maintain the social front of objectivity. More precisely, we first need a baseline understanding of the specific strategic rituals reporters enact to conform to certain journalistic standards in order to grasp what the performance of the guardian of consensus looks like versus that of the performance of neutral observer. Only once this baseline is established can the question of when journalists turn to these roles to frame debate as consensual, legitimately controversial, or deviant be addressed.

To establish a baseline account of the implicit objectivity rituals of newsmaking as relational performances, I chose to focus on the textual work journalists do. That is, I focus on what reporters say through how they write stories. I began with the most central protocol of objectivity: that journalists source opinions to other speakers rather than voicing interpretations themselves. By studying the content of ostensibly neutral policy interpretations in coverage of the abortion debate, I started to recognize that the quality of this rhetoric while not neutral in the sense of being free from interpretation maintained a strong façade of objectivity. Thus, I term seemingly neutral policy interpretations “analytic rhetoric.’ Through content analysis, I unpacked analytic rhetoric into five speech constructions – diagnostic, hedging, society, polarization, and consensus claims (see Table 1.1). It became clear that such rhetorics for demonstrating objectivity could be used by journalists as well as other speakers to deflect criticism. I argue that speakers can buttress their authority as objective representatives of the public interest by being attached to the civil, publicly minded, and anti-extreme language that comprises analytic rhetoric.

The quality of analytic speech led me to explore more extreme forms of speech, which I refer to as outrage rhetoric. Using content analyses as well as drawing from scholarship on extreme forms of discourse, I identified two outraged speech constructions: attack and alarmist speech. The former captures attacks on an actor’s ideas, motives or competence. The latter captures claims that raise the alarm in condemning the threatening tactics of an individual or group. I found that the character of outrage discourse was quite distinct from that of analytic discourse. For one, outrage rhetoric is generally uncivil, extreme, and combative. In addition, unlike analytic rhetoric it suggests the speaker is inflexible in their position and that debate is often urgently personal (see Table 1.1).



**Table 1.1:** Forms of rhetoric and the type of talk they reflect

Rhetoric	Types	Short description of types	Tenor	Dimensions	Personalization	
Analytic Rhetoric		“Debate frames”	Civil, publicly minded & anti-extreme.	Multiple/complex.	Impersonal: undemonstrative.	
	Diagnostic	“Diagnostic” about the problem while being strictly noncommittal about the direction in which policy should be taken.		Abstract/open.		
	Hedging	Indicates that the speaker falls somewhere near the middle by conveying highly qualified positions on an issue.		Complex/Compromise.		
	Society	Takes a position of speaking on behalf of society or some large segment therein.		General.		
	Polarization	Emphasizes the divisive nature of the issue while signaling that the speaker is above the fray of impassioned conflict.		General.		
	Consensus	Takes a position that some common ground exists, that different views can co-exist, or that consensus is possible		General/Compromise.		
		“Injustice frames”				
	Outrage Rhetoric	Attacks a targeted actor’s ideas, motives or competence.	Uncivil.	Dogmatic/not complex	Personal: good guys & bad guys/ heroes & villains.	
	Attack speech	Claims that raise the alarm in harshly condemning the threatening tactics of an actor		Stalwart/Combative.		
	Alarmist speech	“Standard frames” Takes a clear policy position without n attacking the claims, character, or actions of others.	Publicly-minded	Stalwart/Combative.		
Partisan Rhetoric	Not analytic or outraged.	Civil.	Neither complex nor dogmatic	Impersonal: Contests between equals/ winners & losers.		

Note: for more detailed descriptions on Neutral rhetoric see chapter 3 and for more detailed descriptions of Outrage Rhetoric see chapter 5.

To systematically understand the appearance of these rhetorics in news coverage, I first explored journalists' use of analytic speech in relation to their sources and in different storytelling contexts (i.e., articles balancing opposing positions, the inclusion of a diversity of sources, and the type of activity being covered). These patterns revealed dynamics wherein reporters either used analytic interpretations to perform the role of guardian of consensus or they applied different strategic rituals to perform the role of neutral observer. Because the synthesized perspectives on the role of the media strongly suggest that the ritual enactment of objectivity varies according to the roles different actors are expected to play in relation to unfolding events, I next explored the distinctive performances of journalistic objectivity in relation to outrage rhetoric. By comparing across journalists and their full range of sources, I began to reveal which actors were presented as cool-headed in relation to the extremity of others and in relation to the type of story being told (e.g., contentious coverage occasioned by crime or protest, balanced article structures).

Together, these materials pointed to a clear typology of the norms for the guardianship of consensus versus the norms for neutral observation (see Table. 1.2). Once this baseline was established, I moved on to investigating the bigger picture of when journalists turned to the performance of guardian of consensus or that of neutral observer to construct debate as consensual, deviant, or legitimately controversial over time and through their use and mediation of analytic and outraged rhetoric. This not only revealed a great deal about the nature of these two performances but also their consequences for the legitimating or discrediting portrayals of other political actors in the abortion debate, especially the two opposing social movements.

**Table 1.2:** Journalistic norms and practices and their effects on news content

	<i>Norms for the guardianship of consensus</i>	<i>Norms for neutral observation</i>
Who Offers Interpretations	Journalists voice ostensibly analytic as well as outrage rhetoric to offer interpretations.	Sources offer interpretations and opinions, not journalists.
Acceptable Discourse	Rhetoric can be analytic (highlight the incivility of others) or outraged (uncivil)	Rhetoric is civil even if partisan and even during political contests.
How Actors are Portrayed	State and expert actors are treated as voices of consensual politics (analytic rhetoric) and legitimate outrage. Movement actors, church representatives and bystanders infrequently treated as voices of consensual politics and are often treated as deviant sources of outrage.	Actors are treated as voices of partisan politics with clear policy positions, but not analytic or outraged.
Article Structures	Balance is unnecessary unless to highlight deviance. A diversity of voices is used to highlight deviance.	Balance is essential. A diversity of voices reinforces accuracy and reflects independence from the state.
Typical Story Subjects	News occasioned by contentious political activity or actors (e.g., crime, protest).  Media-initiated coverage.	News occasioned by routine politics, primarily that of legitimated institutions.  Source-initiated coverage.

As will be discussed in the last two chapters, I found that in the American abortion debate social movements were not uniformly cast as deviant sources of political dissent. Instead, pro-life activists and sometimes bystanders as well as church representatives were treated as illegitimate sources, especially as the debate became controversial in the early 80s. By contrast, pro-choice activists were treated as legitimate challengers even when they voiced outrage. Moreover, the media treatment of the abortion issue was not always deferential toward the executive’s preferred policy position.

Throughout the dissertation I make clear that although the idea of a singular performance of objectivity in the mass media is appealing, it is problematic. It is problematic because we know that discursive outcomes in the mass media are partly negotiated between sources and newswriters. It is also problematic because we know that

while the media maintain autonomy through strong professional values and routines, journalists have power to use this autonomy and to demonstrate that they are doing so "responsibly" they have *a number* of strategic rituals that they can choose among in constructing a story. One of the larger points I make in this study is that a focus on the textual work journalists do (i.e., the content of news stories) makes it easier to explore the implicit rituals of newsmaking an objectivity as performative. Another point I make is that reporters do mark out and defend the boundaries of consensus through their strategic rituals, but they do so by performing two distinct roles: either that of neutral observer or that of guardian of consensus. The last point I will emphasize is given the theoretical importance of civility and consensus in the American politics and the public sphere, and that these are only effective norms if incivility, polarization, and positions at the extremes are considered a vice (Williams 1997), the media norms governing moderate and extreme forms of language are of unique relevance to understanding reportorial performances of objectivity and public controversy.

Taken together, by unpacking our media's specific objectivity performances, such a study reveals a lot about the way journalistic norms are perceived and ritually enacted by reporters. This is meaningful not only for our understandings of the coverage of political contention but also for our understandings of the culture of news production and its consequences for a democratic public sphere. Of course, my argument is not that journalists slant coverage to reflect their own personal political opinions. Instead, is it that just as the performance of neutral observer conflicts with the principles of "objective journalism" (i.e., independence, accuracy, and balance), so does the reportorial performance of the role of guardian of consensus. The irony is, however, that by actively

defending the normative ideals of a democratic public sphere (i.e., civility, inclusivity/representativeness, and dialogue) that are closely interwoven with the norms of objective journalism, journalists may undermine both ideologies when they guard their own vision of consensual political values.

## **1.2 The Data**

To make these arguments in the context of debates surrounding abortion in the American mass media, I rely on mainstream newspaper coverage of abortion from 1972 through 1994. I use Ferree et al.'s (2002) *Shaping Abortion Discourse* dataset (see the complete codebook: [www.ssc.wisc.edu/abortionstudy/](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/abortionstudy/)). This dataset is comprised of a systematic sampling of articles on the subject of abortion published in *The New York Times* (*NYT*) and *The Los Angeles Times* (*LAT*) between 1972 and 1994.

As the *NYT*, in particular, is a high-status, national newspaper with large circulation during the research period, this data is well suited for studying media practices and for linking to existing research. Notably, Gans' (1979) classic study of American news practices documents how news broadcasters and newsmagazines have relied on the *NYT* as “the professional setter of standards,” or the newspaper of record, “because they need to believe that someone is certain about news judgments” (p. 180-1). Other media scholars and studies attest to the status of this paper as a *validator* for other media and as having broad influence on a number of political processes (for a review see Earl et al. 2004; see also Bennett 1990; Ferree et al. 2002; McAdam 1982; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Tuchman 1987). The inclusion of the *LAT* in this dataset helps to replicate the results with a second well-regarded national newspaper. In addition, the two papers share comparable

circulation figures and issue coverage patterns over the research period (Ferree et al. 2002; also see Appendix A, Figure A1.1 for the coverage of abortion indexed in the two papers).

Of course, mainstream national newspapers only directly represent one type of news outlet and may obscure some local variation (Barranco and Wisler 1999; Oliver and Maney 2000; Pollock, Robinson, and Murray 1978). It is important to keep these limitations in mind when I refer to “the mass media,” “the press,” and “the mainstream media.” Despite this caveat, these two papers provide insight into a broader national news public, made up a widely distributed portion of the mass media, and remain one of the few continuous and complete data sources available to scholars (Earl et al. 2004; Ferree et al. 2002; Ferree 2003).<sup>9</sup> As a result, the discourse dynamics studied here are generally representative of mainstream media during the research period and remain a pertinent point of comparison to other news mediums (e.g., Sobieraj and Berry 2014).

Another related concern regularly raised in the study of newspapers is the problem of selection bias: what gets reported compared to “what actually happened.” I examine coverage once it already appeared in the media and thus, cannot directly address if sources provided different arguments than they were attributed. However, selection bias is often shown to be quite stable overtime and within newspapers (e.g., Barranco and Wisler 1999; McCarthy et al. 1996). While this stability is sometimes called into question in ways that can affect the use newspaper data for many research purposes (Myers and Caniglia 2004; Oliver and Maney 2000; Oliver and Myers 1999), it is less salient here as I am primarily

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to news distribution by the Associated Press and United Press International agencies, findings show that reporters themselves turn to other, leading news agencies for content to such an extent that mainstream news outlets often play an agenda setting role for one another and less elite media (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Fishman 1980). And other research indicates that aggregated local newspaper coverage can be remarkably similar to that of national newspapers (Myers and Caniglia 2004). Relatedly, social media platforms and online infrastructures often reproduce the dominance of a few news producers and audiences remain highly concentrated around a small number of top outlets (Hindman 2009).

interested in the *quality* or character of the claims attributed to different categories of actors once they gain entry into coverage. Moreover, given my focus on the institutional processes of the media over time, the evidence I accumulate based on this data offers sufficient support for my core arguments about why language is structured the way it is and the messages it conveys about the political interactions.

For practical and theoretical reasons, I focus on coverage from the years 1972 through 1994. The period examined here enables continuous comparison between the two newspapers wherein approximately 200 articles appeared per year.<sup>10</sup> As will be discussed in the case history in the next chapter, the period begins just before the “critical discourse moment” of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* Supreme Court decisions (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 24; see also Chilton 1987; Rohlinger 2002), where the abortion debate was vaulted from the state to the national level and a public discourse structure for the issue took shape (Condit 1990; Ferree 2003; Tribe 1992). The period ends in 1994, shortly after the start of the Clinton Presidency wherein many of the abortion policies of the Reagan-Bush Era were reversed and the Freedom to Access Clinic Entrances Act was signed into law.<sup>11</sup> Following the strategy of other published work using newspaper data, articles about abortion were identified using the *NYT Index* and the *LAT Index*.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Los Angeles Times* was not sampled before 1972 because it is not indexed before this date.

<sup>11</sup> I control for three distinct phases in the debate for many analyses, but to better understand critical shifts I sometimes break the research period into six time periods or present yearly analyses.

## Sample Criteria and Article Characteristics

Drawing from a population of 3,797 indexed articles written during the research period, 1,149 articles, or thirty percent of the population, were intensively coded.<sup>12</sup> The term “articles” encompasses editorials, op-ed columns, news analyses, and news reports, but excludes book reviews and letters to the editor. Unsurprisingly, given the standard content features of newspapers, the majority of articles are news reports (approximately 75 percent). Articles shorter than three paragraphs or not substantively about abortion were excluded as well (Ferree et al. 2002). With these conditions in mind, the final coded sample represents approximately 3 percent of the population of *any* articles *mentioning* “abortion” from 1972 through 1994.<sup>13</sup>

Coding for the newspaper and the type of article as well as for numerous other features of the articles within the actual process of primary data collection is among the many strengths of this dataset. Article level data include measures for the institutional sector or arena of activity spurring the article to be written, the spectrum of actors included in the article (e.g., state and civil society, political parties, social movement groups), the number of pro and anti abortion speakers, and the number of paragraphs, to name a few. To my knowledge, no other datasets on the coverage of issues in the United States have been so thorough and extensive in terms of coding for the characteristics of articles and linking the specifics of claims to the full range of actors representing them over such a long period of time (see Earl et al. 2004).

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<sup>12</sup> The data includes sampling weights to adjust for the different inclusion probabilities of articles each year. Therefore, I weight the data to reflect the true proportions of articles in the population in my analyses.

<sup>13</sup> To arrive at these figures, I conducted searches using ProQuest current and historical archives of the two newspapers for mentions of “abortion” from 1972 through 1994, excluding letters to the editor and book reviews.



## **Utterances and Ideas**

In addition to being coded at the article level, the data were coded at the utterance level to capture “standing” and policy issue “framing” in the media. Standing refers to when actors are given the opportunity to speak “as an actor with a voice” (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 13; see also Amenta et al. 2012; Koopmans 2004). The concept of framing or frames are variously applied in the literature, however, those identified in the data were identified along the lines of Gamson and Modigliani’s (1989, p. 2) classic definition of frames as: “‘interpretive packages’ that provide a central organizing idea that condenses and structures metaphors, representations, and arguments.” Or, as Gamson (2004, p. 245) put it simply, a frame is a “thought organizer” (see also Gamson 1992; Snow 2004; Snow and Benford 1988; Steensland 2008). Thus, rather than coding for how the media framed entire articles, coders identified specific arguments within each text. To capture the concepts of standing and framing, utterances were coded for hundreds of different ideas expressed about abortion and clustered into eight overarching frames (Fetal Life, Balancing Rights, Women’s Rights, Individual v. State, Morality, Social Effects, Pragmatic, and Social Justice). Each idea offered in a single utterance (uninterrupted quote or paragraph) was coded separately, so that individual utterances could contain multiple ideas.

Because frames can carry contesting positions, “allowing for a degree of controversy among those who share a common frame” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989, p. 3), ideas were identified as pro (supporting or extending rights), anti (more restrictions), or neutral (no direction) in their policy implications. For example, within the “Fetal Life” frame pro-abortion rights proponents assert that “Life begins at birth” while the anti position holds

that “life begins at conception.” However, the “Fetal Life” frame can also be taken in a neutral policy direction: “the real issue is when life begins” (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 106). With this coding of ideas and their policy direction, one can both distinguish statements or utterances that lack claims about abortion as well as identify claims with pro, anti, or neutral stances on abortion policy.<sup>14</sup> One can also measure the prominence of a certain frame or idea by its rate per utterance, or how often it appeared across utterances (see Ferree 2003; Ferree et al. 2002). Additionally, the units of analyses need not be articles, as is often the case, but can instead be utterances containing different ideas (i.e., claims) attached to different political actors or organizational speakers.

## **Speakers**

Because utterances or “speech acts” in the news have not only a “what” but also a “who,” a related strength of the primary dataset is that each utterance is linked to a speaker (an individual or organization quoted or paraphrased in an article), including the author of the story. In other words, statements or arguments are linked to their sponsors. This is very important. We know that actors must compete for the attention of the media just as social problems compete for media attention so this ability to link rhetoric to its “sponsors” provides a better picture of the larger discursive landscape (e.g., Ferree et al. 2003; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Steensland 2008). It makes possible the examination of the relative representation of actors as well as the relative attribution of utterances of a certain

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<sup>14</sup> Other scholarship on this issue debate has noted the ability to clearly distinguish between pro, anti, and neutral ideas or arguments about abortion (e.g., Rohlinger 2002; 2007). However, because utterances can contain multiple ideas and therefore, like frames offer competing policy arguments, I was careful to replicate the results of my findings using more and less restrictive codings of the policy stances taken in utterances (see chapter 3).

type across the full range of speakers in the discursive field constituted by the mass media (Ferree 2003; Koopmans and Statham 1999; Koopmans and Olzak 2004). Of note, in line with previous scholarship (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002; Steensland 2008), I consistently cluster speakers into larger categories for my analyses (e.g., journalists, state, movement organizations, unaffiliated actors, etc.).

Notably, journalist commentary captures when the author does not attribute interpretations or evaluations to other actors via quoting or paraphrasing, such as is often done in editorials, opinion pieces, syndicated columns, and in news reports (for similar findings on journalist commentary in news reports see Hallin 1986). It also captures when the category of actor being referred to is too vague to be capable of making an argument (e.g., “feminists,” “abortion opponents,” or “the majority of Americans.” (see Ferree et al. 2002 coding manual). Because of this distinction I ran my analyses using the more inclusive operationalization of journalist utterances *and* the more exclusive operationalization of journalists arguments. The results were substantively robust with some variation in significance level do to the reduction in the sample size. Therefore, I apply the more inclusive operationalization of journalists as it best captures the concept of the author “speaking” in the text. However, the primary models for analytic rhetoric and outrage rhetoric are replicated using the narrower operationalization and presented in Appendix A.

### **The Quality of Media Discourse**

Media and movement scholars are only beginning to investigate the *quality* of coverage by examining claims in addition to or instead of simple actor mentions and “standing” rather than the quantity of coverage alone (e.g., Amenta et al. 2012; Ferree et al. 2002; Ferree

2003; Snow, Vliegthart, and Corrigan-Brown 2007; Sobieraj 2010; Steensland 2008). Even more rare are studies that look beyond movements to other political actors, that include journalists as sources of commentary, or that examine dynamics in issue coverage over time (e.g., Hallin 1986). These studies as well as those on the culture of news production make valuable contributions to understanding the constraints of journalism that importantly shape coverage (e.g., Tuchman 1972, 1978; Fishman 1980; Gans 1979). However, we only have pieces to the puzzle of how the normative standards underlying reporting shape the role of journalists in news stories, condition the quality of coverage actors receive, and influence how larger issue cultures are framed discursively over time.

This dataset and my elaborations on it permit me to address these gaps. For the purposes of this research, I derive many of my media variables from coding in the original dataset, but I also constructed new variables using content analyses, other existing research on my case, and research on discourse in the news media. Because I am interested in the tenor and character of claims different political actors are attributed within the content of news, I conceptualize and identify what I call analytic rhetoric and I use an existing concept of outrage discourse to identify and conceptualize outrage rhetoric. Thus, my major dependent variables for capturing the *quality* of coverage – analytic and outrage rhetoric – are based on my own examination of the Ferree et al. (2002) codebook combined with content analyses of the utterance content to which idea elements were applied. In some cases, I also read the full articles in which certain outcomes appeared for further verification.

My reliance on the original dataset for the idea elements coded and my work extending them to speak to other research are strategic given the commonly identified

problem in framing research of the lack of consistent measurement (e.g., Benford and Snow 2000; de Vreese 2005; Entman 1993; Matthes 2009; Scheufele 1999). Of course, greater details on the procedures used to ensure reliability, the methods and operationalization of key variables are described in the respective chapters dealing with these coverage outcomes. Further, by building on this dataset, I am able to attend to patterns in how language is structured by investigating the appearance of analytic and outraged rhetoric across speakers and in relation to article attributes and political contexts. This is important because I believe the contention that “social movements can only be understood in *relational terms*” applies to movement coverage outcomes as well (Rucht 2004, p. 197).<sup>15</sup>

### **1.3 Overview of the Dissertation**

Placing the news product at the center of investigation allows me to treat the mass media as both a site for and as an agent in political contests. Because journalists are treated in this study as both mediators and voices in shaping the content of the news, I am able to investigate what a language for demonstrating objectivity looks like. I examine in detail the appearance of ostensibly neutral and extreme forms of discourse: how language is structured in stories through the actors and storytelling templates it appears with as well as how this structuring shifted over time in relation to events in broader political environment. I pay special attention to the commonalities and differences in how journalists position themselves and why they portray different political actors in different ways. In the following chapters, which I briefly summarize below, I show how journalists

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<sup>15</sup> While a few studies attend to broader discursive trends in the mass media coverage of the abortion debate (e.g., Ferree 2003; Ferree et al. 2002; Rohlinger 2007), they focus on different features of coverage outcomes than those investigated here.

constructed their objectivity in the American abortion debate and how by doing so both as neutral observers and as guardians of consensus they violated commitments to objectivity.

Chapter 2 provides a brief case history of the American abortion debate. In general, this account helps to contextualize the mass-mediated representation of “what actually happened:” the major political decisions, the actors involved in contesting the issue both on the ground and in the media, and the key turning points in the larger issue debate.

Chapter 3 homes in on the performative aspects of objectivity by examining journalists’ use and attribution of analytic rhetoric. My choice to begin exploring the journalistic norms governing language by analyzing analytic rhetoric is a strategic one because such ostensibly neutral speech is what we most associate with the traditional ideals of objective journalism and a deliberative democratic public sphere. I explore the specific strategic rituals that reporters can choose among to construct a front of objectivity in their writing. I show that news content offers a different vantage point for understanding the ritualized nature of objectivity. In this detailed examination, I trace how the varied application of objectivity rituals culminates into two *distinct performances* of objectivity that construct the limits of acceptable conflict in news stories. I show that journalists sometimes enact their commitment to objectivity not by being impartial but by being partial to their understanding of public consensus and social order.

To better account for how journalists construct consensus, controversy, and deviance through their performances of objectivity, chapter 4 examines extreme forms of discourse, which I refer to as outrage rhetoric. As in chapter 3, I use detailed content analysis paired with logistic regression techniques to show how journalists position themselves as arbiters of the social good through their structuring of outrage rhetoric. I

show how storytelling rituals place some actors beyond the bounds of the social good and others as co-defenders of the limits of acceptable controversy. Thus, in this chapter, I further develop my argument that media norms for portraying speakers are embedded in journalistic assumptions about the kinds of accounts different actors can provide in certain kinds of stories. These assumptions have consequences: when journalists perform objectivity by guarding consensus, they violate the ideals of an inclusive, civil, and dialogic public sphere as well as the rules of "objective journalism."

When do journalists adopt a role of guardian of public consensus rather than a role of neutral observer? Chapter 5 examines how the language of reportage is structured at different times and in different political contexts. Using descriptive patterns in coverage as well as logistic regression techniques, I examine the points at which consensus on the issue of abortion was established and defended by journalists and the points at which the issue was presented instead as legitimately controversial. I also examine how the legitimating or discrediting portrayals of actors – authorities, experts, movements, and so on – varied in relation to these shifts.

In chapter 6, I review the dissertation's key findings as they relate to why the language of reportage is structured in the ways that is and the impact those structures have on the messages that are conveyed about political contention. Further, I highlight the implications of my research, and especially my argument about journalists' two roles, for understanding our media system, the contemporary abortion debate, and the coverage of social movements, more broadly. While discussing the limitations of this study, I offer suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN ABORTION DEBATE

“The discursive opportunity structure is part of the broader political opportunity structure. The latter concept refers to all of the institutional and cultural access points that actors can seize upon to attempt to bring their claims into the political forum...The discursive opportunity structure is limited to the framework of ideas and meaning-making institutions in a particular society.”

– Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht 2002, p. 62

In this research, I focus on the years 1972 through 1994 to systematically investigate how the media shaped controversy and consensus surrounding abortion. Important events in the evolution of the issue and the players involved, the material realities bracketing this period, help to contextualize the mass-mediated representation of these realities.<sup>16</sup>

In line with previous scholarship on this public interest issue, I review the historical contexts of the abortion issue as broad shifts between “critical discourse moments” (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 24; see also Chilton 1987). It is argued that these moments of increased attention to an issue influence and are influenced by critical political events, such as Supreme Court decisions, federal laws, and presidential elections (Amenta et al. 2012; Ferree 2003; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, 2008; Rohlinger 2002, 2015; Staggenborg 1989, 1991). Therefore, I will highlight these kinds of events as well as the activities of the

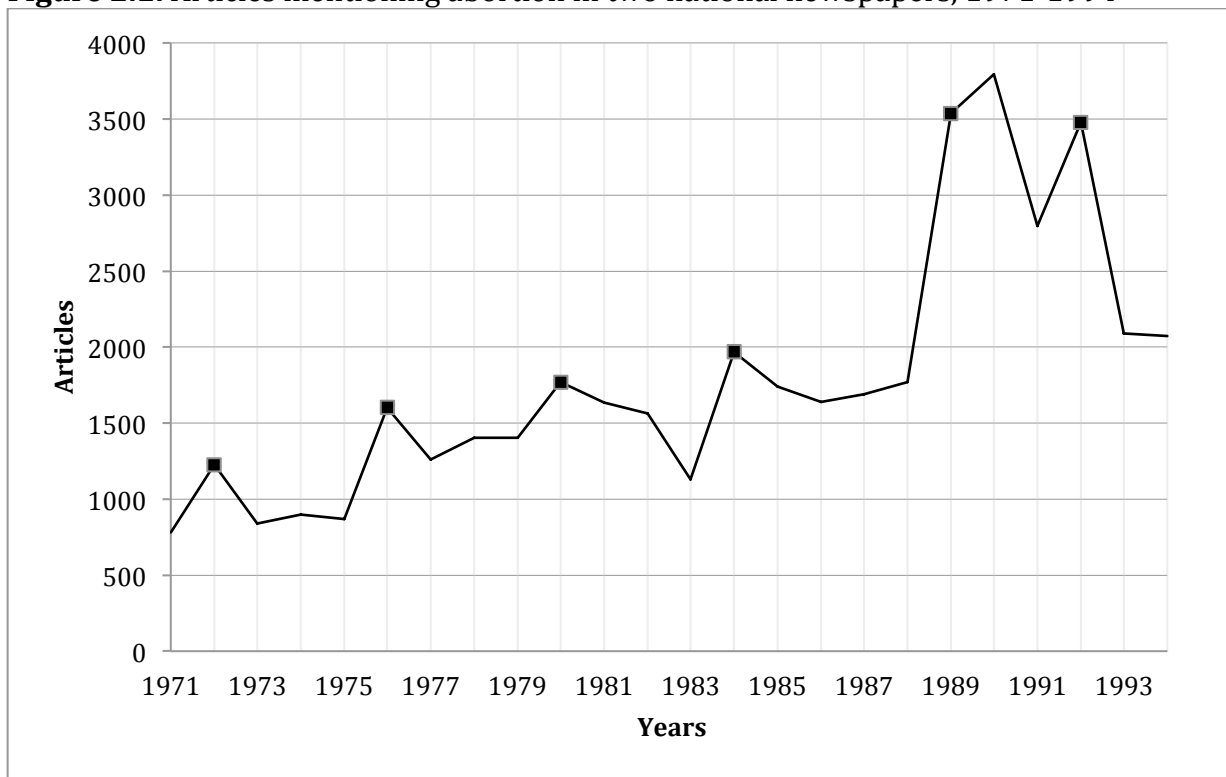
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<sup>16</sup> More detailed historical accounts are available in Burns (2005), Staggenborg (1991), and Rohlinger (2015).



two major social movements that contributed and responded to them. Because news coverage is understood to chart if not determine issue salience, including the abortion issue (e.g., Epstein and Segal 2000; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008), Figure 2.1 graphs the number of *New York Times* (NYT) and *Los Angeles Times* (LAT) articles mentioning abortion from 1971 through 1994.

**Figure 2.1:** Articles mentioning abortion in two national newspapers, 1971-1994



Data source: ProQuest archives of the *NYT* and *LAT* for articles, editorials, and letters to editors mentioning "abortion."

The first key turning point is seen in 1972, when the Supreme Court agreed to hear *Roe v. Wade*. The next two spikes in coverage appear in 1976 when the House of Representatives passed the Hyde Amendment and then in 1980 with the start of the Reagan administration and the Court's decision to accept the Hyde Amendment. Coverage

again increases in 1984 with Reagan's reelection victory. We next see a drastic rise in coverage in 1989 when the Supreme Court decided on *Webster* and George H.W. Bush became President. Finally, we see a surge in attention with the presidential victory of Bill Clinton. Thus, to map major shifts, I divide the debate into six distinct periods based on obvious changes in the political environment and media attention to abortion. First are the years 1972-1976 during and following the *Roe v. Wade* decision that spurred national debate alongside state level legislation and legal argument. Next are the years 1977-1980, which constitute a first phase of response to reforms and funding restrictions. The years 1981-1983 immediately following the election of abortion opponent Ronald Reagan represent the next phase of debate. Then Reagan's landslide reelection victory sets the stage for the 1984-1988 period. The years 1989-92 capture when the Court again significantly revised the law. And, finally, the years 1993-94 follow the election of abortion supporter Bill Clinton.

## **2.1 Background, 1960-72**

Prior to the early 1960s, there was public silence on the issue of abortion (Luker 1984). Needing protection from prosecution and concerned about patients risking illegal abortions in large numbers, physicians and public health advocates were major players in seeking to reform punitive abortion laws in the 1950s. But the issue was principally contained within the professional realm. Over the course of the 1960s, the media slowly began to take up narratives of the horror of illegal abortion and overwhelming opposition to changing state laws prohibiting abortion shifted to a slight majority in favor of letting women and their physicians make the decision (Condit 1990; Ferree and Hess 1994;

Staggenborg 1991). Some state legislatures began to modestly liberalize laws that criminalized doctors and patients by creating a few exceptions based on a 1959 model proffered by the American Law Institute (ALI).

By 1970, however, when abortion had become a relatively safe medical procedure, only twelve state legislatures had passed such reform laws out of the 50 that had outlawed abortion in all or all but the most dire of circumstances prior to 1967 (Merton 1981; Tribe 1992). Most laws continued to be punitive, most abortions were still prohibited or expensive, and decisions were still mainly left in the hands of doctors and hospital committees. As a result of the 1970 peak in minimal state reforms, a movement to legalize abortion by *repealing* restrictive abortion laws emerged.

Some of the organizations that formed during this period would later become leading groups in the “pro-choice” movement. In 1967, the National Organization for Women (NOW), an organization formed in 1966 to work for women’s equality, added the right of women to control their reproductive lives in their “Women’s Bill of Rights” (Tribe 1992). Shortly thereafter, in 1969, the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Law (NARAL – after 1973 the National Abortion Rights Action League) was created and began campaigning to repeal existing laws. Despite the ability of these groups to attract some media attention, their efforts to demand a central voice for women, and the relative weakness of any anti-abortion countermovement, prior to 1973 *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* U.S. Supreme Court decisions the movement was not yet powerful or well organized and was firmly “outside” the established political process (Ferree et al. 2002; Luker 1984; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008; Staggenborg 1991).

While physicians, liberal clergy, and even some government officials provided strength to the cause of legalizing abortion by challenging state legislatures and, increasingly, the courts (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008), they did not necessarily advocate for a woman's right to make the decision. Furthermore, the groups that emerged with abortion rights platforms had not yet consolidated alliances with population-oriented and family planning organizations that were less active on the issue (Staggenborg 1989, 1991). It would take the Supreme Court to vault the abortion issue from the state to the national level.

## **2.2 Phase I: Abortion Becomes a National Issue 1972-76**

Before the Supreme Court agreed to hear the *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* cases in 1972, there were very few successes in efforts to *repeal* abortion laws (i.e., Hawaii, New York, and Alaska). Between 1970 and 1973, amid greater attention to the still taboo issue, only one other state legislature moved to repeal prohibitions on early abortions (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008; Tribe 1992). In addition, at this time, the alignment of the major political parties on the abortion issue was unclear. The New York abortion law that essentially legalized abortion in the first trimester was only saved from repeal by a veto by the state's Republican Governor, Nelson Rockefeller. The Catholic Church, whose constituency also tended to be that of the Democratic Party, was the dominant voice of opposition to abortion and a majority of early "pro-life" advocates were Democrats (Ferree et al. 2002).

Against this backdrop of general liberalization but slow advancement in the realm of reproductive rights among state legislatures, it is fairly certain that without the seminal

court decisions in 1973 the ability of a woman to choose for herself whether to terminate a pregnancy during the first three months of pregnancy would not have spread so rapidly across the country. However, as Burns (2005) notes, “the Supreme Court justified its 1973 decisions most explicitly and unambiguously in terms of physicians’ rights to practice medicine, not in terms of women’s rights to abortion” (p. 5). In the years immediately following *Roe*, legislative debates on the rights that women had over abortion increased substantially.

The reality that women were largely left out of the picture was not lost on cause groups concerned about the issue. Although the pro-choice movement and very nascent, local versions of “pro-life” activism emerged prior to 1973, it wasn’t until after *Roe v. Wade* that wider mobilization began and these two movements became major players in the abortion debate (Ferree and Hess 1994; Glazer 1986; Rohlinger 2015; Staggenborg 19991). In general, more than law and practice shifted from the decision, “the case legitimated a new set of shared meanings” (Condit 1990, p.22; Ferree et al. 2002).<sup>17</sup> More specifically, despite its language the decision dramatically shifted abortion from a relatively invisible technical, medical matter to a “public moral issue of nationwide concern” (Luker 1984, p. 127).

Having been defeated in the courts, Catholic Bishops and Christian evangelicals took the pro-life movement to the national level and made Congress a new target for the struggle (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008; Staggenborg 1989). They called for action to impose greater restrictions on abortion and denounced the support of abortion as against

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<sup>17</sup> Ferree et al. (2002) demonstrate this influence by comparing U.S. framing of the issue, where they found that the trimester principle conveyed in the Supreme Court decision was reflected in debates about the developmental stages of the fetus, to that of Germany, where such debate was largely absent.

God's law. In the face of an increasingly organized and vocal opposition at both the state and national levels, the pro-choice movement regrouped to defend *Roe* and continued to use their advantage in the courts. The movement to advance abortion rights expanded beyond NARAL and NOW to include new allies among established interest groups, such as Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union, and newly founded Catholic feminist and national religious coalitions (Ferree et al. 2002; McCarthy 1987; Merton 1981; Staggenborg 1991).

By 1976, although pro-life groups failed in their campaign for a "Right-to-Life" amendment to the Constitution, inroads were made to national organizing and legislative maneuvers at the state level resulted in some successes that were later rejected by the courts (Merton 1981). In addition, in 1976, the countermovement against abortion achieved its first major victory. Republican Representative Henry Hyde succeeded in taking advantage of the Court's ruling that state governments were not obligated to pay for abortion for poor women. He shepherded an amendment (the Hyde Amendment) to a House appropriations bill prohibiting the use of Medicaid and other federal funds to pay for elective abortions. Although initially blocked from implementation by court injunction the next phase of the debate would see this effort rewarded.

### **2.3 Phase II: Retrenchment on Abortion, 1977-80**

Between 1977 and 1980, two Supreme Court cases dealt a blow to pro-choice activists. In 1977 the Court affirmed state rights to limit the allocation of public funds for abortion and in 1980 it upheld the constitutionality of the Hyde Amendment. As a result, litigation became an unreliable tactic for the pro-choice movement. Meanwhile, right-to-life groups

became more aggressive on other fronts: seeking allies in the Republic Party, targeting politicians who deviated from a pro-life stance, and engaging in non-violent direct actions to prevent access to clinics providing abortions (Ferree et al. 2002; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). Among certain pro-life groups and individuals, mobilization against abortion took more violent forms, such as assaults on personnel, kidnappings, bombings, setting fire to clinics, and death threats. Provider statistics show that the number of bombings, arson, or acid attacks more than tripled from this period (1977-1980) through the next two phases of debate (1981-1988) (National Abortion Federation 2014).<sup>18</sup> Despite funding restrictions and increasing disruption, stasis – in the sense that the decision to have an abortion be left to the woman and her physician – prevailed.

## **2.4 Phase III: Conservatism Gains Ground, 1981-83**

By the early 1980s, abortion was a defining issue for the two major political parties and the tide began to turn against abortion rights, especially in cases not involving rape, incest, or threat to the woman's life. The Christian Right came to the fore alongside the election victory of anti-abortion President Ronald Reagan. Reagan's commitment to oppose abortion, making it part of the Republican platform, and his overarching "social agenda" created a clear and broad partisan agenda on the issue (Ferree et al. 2002; Glazer 1986; Rohlinger 2015). This agenda provided new allies to the once lonely Catholic opposition on abortion (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). Heeding the anti-abortion forces supporting his bid for Presidency, Reagan promised to appoint only those opposed to abortion to the

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<sup>18</sup> National Abortion Federation (NAF) (2014) statistics report more than 11,000 incidents of violence and disruption against abortion providers from 1977-1994 (223 were bomb, arson, or acid attacks and 144 of these occurred between 1977 and 1988). To arrive at yearly counts, I relied on state-level incidents reported by the NAF.

Supreme Court even before elected and, once in office, endorsed a Human Life Amendment to the Constitution. In 1983, although the Court generally affirmed *Roe* by finding many of the newly enacted Missouri and Ohio state restrictions unconstitutional, it made clearer how states could restrict access without completely denying the right to an abortion (Ferree and Hess 1994).

As a result, pro-choice activists were largely on the defensive through the first Reagan administration: blocking Reagan's conservative, anti-abortion Court nominees, lobbying against the adoption of more restrictive legislation at both the state and national level, campaigning to counter pro-life messages, and getting women through clinic blockades. The pro-life movement continued to maintain a stalemate while gaining limited success in established institutional arenas, such as Supreme Court decisions and appointments. In contrast, "the courts all over the United States ...provided the right-to-lifers with their greatest frustration, for in the courts, emotion, intimidation, bloody pictures, and threats of retribution on election day did no good" (Merton 1981, p. 89). Moreover, pro-life leaders found Reagan's gestures insufficient in meeting their expectations. Thus, the pro-life movement began to shift the conflict as it focused its energies on two fronts: the realms of public relations and direct-action (Staggenborg 1991).

## **2.5 Phase IV: Conservatism Gains More Ground, 1984-88**

Reagan's 1984 landslide reelection victory in both popular and electoral votes helped to give him a further mandate on his "social agenda." Despite this symbolic victory, pro-life activists stayed on the offensive. The late-1984 release of the film *The Silent Scream* by pro-



life advocates, depicting abortion via ultrasound and describing the imagery as showing the fetus suffering pain, attracted media attention. In response to this provocative success, the pro-choice movement similarly sought to arouse pro-choice sympathy and garner media attention by refuting the “scientific” evidence of the film and by asking women to send letters to elected officials recounting their personal experiences with abortion.

During the 1984-1988 period, while the major organizations in the Christian Right influenced Republican Party organizations, confrontational, dramatic attacks on abortion clinics and clinic blockades intensified along the fringes of the pro-life movement and increased its visibility. The group Operation Rescue, founded in 1987 by Randall Terry, became particularly prominent among the more radical faction of the pro-life movement for its clinic blockades. Still largely on the defensive, pro-choice activists struggled to be accepted as established interest groups when attempting to influence Congress. They spent a good deal of their time outside of abortion clinics protesting violence and attempting to protect providers and clients (Staggenborg 1991). The two opposing movements won and lost different judicial and political battles during the Reagan years. In terms of public opinion, by 1985, the level of public support for abortion was almost identical to where it was in 1972 (Mouw and Sobel 2001). However, Reagan’s successful Court appointments, such as that of anti-abortionist Judge Robert Bork in 1987, seemed to tilt the stalemate in slight favor of pro-life advocates.

## **2.6 Phase V: “Uneasy Compromise,” 1989-92**

When the case of *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* came before the Supreme Court in 1989, the outcome was uncertain and the conflict between the two movements was

intense. “The combination of justices who had originally voted against *Roe* with those appointed by Reagan now constituted a narrow majority of the Court” (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 37). The Reagan administration had also submitted a brief asking the Court to use the case as a chance to overturn *Roe* and the subsequent election victory of Republican George H.W. Bush solidified another anti-abortion administration (Staggenborg 1991). The *Webster* decision did not overturn the fundamental right to abortion laid out in *Roe v. Wade*, but it did leave standing a Missouri law prohibiting the use of public funds, facilities, and employees from providing abortions, stating that life “begins at conception,” and requiring doctors test for fetal viability (Ferree and Hess 1994).

Furthermore, the *Webster* decision generated significant ambiguities with a new standard that allowed abortion restrictions as long as they did not constitute “an undue burden” on pregnant woman. What was made very clear was that state legislatures had significant room to restrict abortion access and that other federal cases testing the “undue burden” standard could further erode the 1973 Court ruling. In short, the *Webster* case was a critical event in shifting the debate as the state was given greater liberty to intervene in the doctor-patient relationship.

Once again, both pro-choice and pro-life groups were dissatisfied with the outcome – this time for threatening the *Roe* framework on the one hand and not overturning it on the other. In conjunction with renewed movement mobilization, many state legislatures continued to challenge abortion rights now that the door was open, some reaffirmed *Roe*, and others did nothing (Ferree and Hess 1994). The first challenge to a restrictive state statute reached the Supreme Court in 1992 (*Casey v. Planned Parenthood*). Here, the Court affirmed that the state is prohibited from banning most abortions (as established by *Roe*),

but also ruled that states may regulate abortions so as to protect the health of the mother, the life of the fetus, and may outlaw abortions of "viable" fetuses. In short, states were granted more latitude to intervene to protect the fetus but continued to uphold a woman's right to make the individual choice (Ferree 2003). Thus, in the *Casey* decision, the "undue burden" standard was only weakly illuminated and only for this particular Court (Ferree et al. 2002).

The Reagan and Bush administrations also issued their own regulations that undermined access to abortion. For example, the Bush administration barred providers receiving federal funds from even mentioning the option of abortion to their clients and the court upheld this executive order in 1991 (Ferree and Hess 1994). The lines dividing the two major parties and their affinities for the two opposing movements were clear. Democratic presidential hopefuls endorsed abortion and began appealing to members of the Republican Party's constituency (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008).

Despite this clear partisan divide, some political elites, including President Bush, began to avoid or moderate their previously staunch anti-abortion stands in response to the issue's political volatility following *Webster* (Staggenborg 1991). Moreover, and with the general stability of opinions in mind, any trend toward polarization and favorable abortion attitudes were more in evidence in the early 90s than at any other time since 1972, with more people moving from the middle to a stricter liberal stance (Evans et al. 2001; Mouw and Sobel 2001). The *Webster* ruling culminated in a phase of debate that Ferree et al. (2002) aptly refer to as "an uneasy compromise" (p. 39).

## 2.7 Phase VI: Reorganization, 1993-94

By the time of the 1992 presidential election, pro-choice groups mobilized to support pro-choice Democratic candidate Bill Clinton. Clinton's pledge to defend abortion rights after over a decade of anti-abortion administrations signaled a major shift in national politics (Meyer and Staggenborg 1998, 2008). Once in office, Clinton quickly reversed numerous policies that had established barriers to abortion access (e.g., the ban on abortion in military hospitals and on Medicaid funding for abortion for poor women). In addition, Clinton's appointment of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer to the Supreme Court helped to reverse the Court's conservative tilt (Ferree and Hess 1994).

In the face of this threat to longstanding pro-life goals (of seeing *Roe* overturned or a right-to-life amendment to the Constitution), incidents of disruption against abortion clinics by anti-abortion activists increased again, with 264 occurring in 1993 alone (National Abortion Federation 2014). Three highly visible murders of abortion doctors in 1993 and 1994, presumably by individuals, received support from certain factions of the anti-abortion movement (Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). In response, in 1994, Congress passed the Freedom to Access Clinic Entrances Act (FACE) into law, which appear to have been effective in decreasing the most violent acts against abortion clinics and providers (National Abortion Federation 2014).

Overall, for the most part of this period, access to abortion was limited both by states and by the effects of violent and peaceful anti-abortion protests. Although this study ends in 1994, I take up some of the implications of the findings for the contemporary abortion debate in the concluding chapter. Of note, however, many of the regulations on abortion put into place during the 80s and the opportunities to challenge abortion access

through the ambiguities of the “undue burden” standard have been reanimated in current debates.

## CHAPTER 3

### **STAYING ABOVE THE FRAY: JOURNALIST'S USE AND ATTRIBUTION OF ANALYTIC RHETORIC IN THE ABORTION DEBATE**

“Often we find that if the principal ideal aims of an organization are to be achieved, then it will be necessary at times to by-pass momentarily other ideals of the organization, while maintaining the impression that these other ideals are still in force.”

– Erving Goffman 1959, p. 45

It is argued that objectivity is the most important professional norm for American journalists (Soloski 1989). At least since the writings of media scholars Gaye Tuchman (1972) and Herbert Gans (1979), we know that journalists engage in rituals to demonstrate their objectivity. Although the performance of objectivity is central to the art of newswriting, the institutional routines that have developed for this purpose are themselves far from objective. Reliance on official sources, on balancing stories by producing two sides for every claim, and turning to familiar speakers for quotes produces something that looks “fair” but allows the journalist a great deal of freedom in what is reported. While that latitude allows some opportunity to insert the journalists’ own opinions, it also demands that journalists develop a set of practices that will allow them to appear both informed and uninvolved, thoughtful but not committed to any side.

We still know little, however, about how journalists perform objectivity through what they say in their stories as opposed to how they gather the news and whom they quote. Reporters not only write in their own voice, they write by quoting and paraphrasing other people. Because we know that the construction of a news story actually mediates between what sources say and what to report and in what context, we should pay more attention to the textual work journalists do. Journalists need to position themselves relative to the source, the audience and the issue, and the norms of journalism demand that this position appear to the reader as one of neutrality. This means that journalists face the task of performing objectivity rhetorically. Especially when an issue is controversial, how might journalists construct a position that seems above the fray of impassioned political debate? How do they use their expected performance of objectivity to convey normative messages about the political processes they cover, for example that it is polarized and partisan as they are not?

Because the choice of language is the journalist's primary tool for writing stories, it is important to examine the norms governing language when considering the rituals by which journalistic objectivity is performed. In this chapter, I argue that these norms include “analytic” speech constructions, which I call analytic rhetoric. I conceptualize five analytic constructions for demonstrating objectivity - *diagnostic*, highly qualified or *hedging* arguments, speaking on behalf of *society*, and arguments about the *polarization* and the possibility for *consensus* in the larger issue debate.<sup>19</sup> Empirically, I rely on the newspaper coverage of the American abortion debate from 1972 through 1994. I employ logistic regression analyses to compare the language in which journalists offer seemingly “neutral”

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<sup>19</sup> Statements of facts, processes, procedures, and laws that provide no evaluation or justification are not considered arguments in this research (Ferree, Gerhardt, Gamson and Rucht 2002).

evaluations and interpretations with that of other political actors and the appearance of analytic rhetoric in relation to different article characteristics and political contexts.

As discussed in chapter 1, whereas the bulk of studies that employ or investigate the mass media assume the principles of “objective journalism” to be uniformly applied (Schudson 2005), I challenge this simplification. I explore how the particular strategic rituals that reporters can choose among allow journalists to *perform* their objectivity in different ways. In doing so, I emphasize that journalists demonstrate their objectivity by not only by selecting *whom* to quote but also by deciding *what* to quote and how to insert their own commentary in different storytelling contexts. This means that however actors actually speak, how they are portrayed in the press is not necessarily how they would choose to represent themselves. It also means that attention must be paid to relative representations of actors in the media – authorities, activists, journalists, and so forth. With these arguments in mind, I turn now to a discussion of what we do and do not know about journalistic rituals in the construction of objectivity. Next, I move to the hypotheses I derive from synthesizing insights from the study of the media as a site of political contests and from the study of the media as central actors in political contests.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In line with other scholars (e.g., Ferree 2003; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhardt, and Rucht 2002), in my own efforts to remain “neutral” I use the terms *pro-abortion* or *pro-abortion-rights* to refer to people who seek to remove or reduce restrictions on abortion and *anti-abortion* for those people seeking to increase restrictions – even if these may not be the preferred term for all parties involved. Similarly, I call the two sides of the abortion issue the *pro-life* (or *right-to-life*) and *pro-choice* movements. I also use the appellations Pro-Choice SMOs and Pro-Life SMOs in some instances to refer to the constellation of social movement and political advocacy organizations (SMOs) grouped by issue-focus.



### **3.1 Journalists as Objective Speakers**

Amid the pressures of strict deadlines and limited resources, journalists must make numerous, quick decisions about what is familiar and true, important and interesting to produce “quality” news stories (Cook 1998). The inevitable values that guide these decisions can be found between the lines of what gets reported. As Herbert Gans (1979) convincingly demonstrated in his seminal study of American news practices, “there is, underlying the news, a picture of the nation and society as it ought to be” (p. 39). Considering that news production goes on with little articulation of underlying or internalized assumptions, normative standards are more easily seen in the patterns of journalistic content than in the newsroom or on the beat (Bennett 1990; Cook 1998). So we don’t have to follow reporters around to investigate the subtle and interesting work being done to construct a story that displays the author as “objective.”

What we know about the underlying values, preferences, and assumptions that guide newswriters is compelling. In his important treatment of media coverage, Gans (1979) argued that the “enduring values” of journalism, such as nationalism, moderatism, and social order, anchor the objective authority of journalists because they align with traditional political beliefs or societal values (p. 196-7). He suggests that reporters rarely appear partial when affirming or articulating consensus positions in their stories, even ones they develop themselves, because they affirm values that are widely shared. However, journalistic values or principles for producing quality stories are not always compatible and the consensual political beliefs upon which the “enduring values” of news rest may not be as enduring or complete as Gans suggests.

In what is an important qualification to Gans' argument, Daniel Hallin (1986) argues that the norms governing reporting vary over time, depending on whether an issue is within what he termed the "sphere of legitimate controversy" or within either the "sphere of consensus" or the "sphere of deviance." As discussed in chapter 1, drawing on the media coverage of the Vietnam War, Hallin posits that legitimate controversies demand the core protocols of objective journalism be followed. As a result, these controversies are portrayed as legitimate. Conversely, when an issue resides within either the sphere of consensus (as the Vietnam War did at its beginning) or within the sphere of deviance (as the North Vietnamese and antiwar movement were the early years), journalists no longer feel compelled to remain objective observers. In consensus reporting, journalists advocate for, celebrate, or condone the practices, customs, and voices of the current order as noncontroversial. In contrast to implying that no conflict exists, in deviance reporting (the interlocked opposite of consensus), journalists actively defend consensus values and thereby imply that conflict, unrest, or dissenting voices are unacceptable.

So what does the language of these spheres of reportage look like and what drives the mode of reporting that prevails? To address the former, Hallin suggests that within the domains of consensual and deviant the usual distinctions between impartial, balanced reporting and commentary collapse. Reporters no longer balance sources with conflicting perspectives, may not write from the third-person impersonal, may be less reliant on sources to interpret meanings, and may overtly champion or denigrate their subjects. But to what extent specific rituals of objectivity construct the sphere in which an issue resides is hazy. In regards to what leads journalists to abandon the principles of objective journalism, Hallin's short answer is the national leadership. Consensus and deviance tend

to reflect agreement among elites while legitimate controversies tend to capture electoral and legislative contests or debates within and between the two major political parties. But as this is not always the case we only have partial answers to these important questions.

In Hallin's (1986) broad view, reporting practices move along what he acknowledges to be a "fuzzy" continuum between the spheres of consensus, legitimate controversy, and deviance over time and in relation to major events shaping the political climate (p. 118). However, both he and subsequent researchers also suggest the mode of reporting can also shift depending on the subject of the story and the actors involved. Ettema and Glasser (1998) show that investigative reporters routinely "test" dominant community values when writing about instances of wrongdoing. In a completely different context, Mcleod and Hertog (1992) find that reporters covering protests characterized public opinion as consensual through "the use of such phrases as 'the national mood,' 'public sentiment' or 'most people feel' " (p. 261; also see Hackett and Zhao 1994; Dardis 2006). And, in a more direct application of Hallin's line of reasoning, Schudson (2002a) argues that reportorial obligations to objectivity are abandoned in the wake of public threats or national tragedies. Using the primary example of the September 11th attacks in the United States, he shows reporters adopting the "intimacy of the consensual 'we' " (p. 41) under the unspoken assumption that there is only one side to national tragedy and terrorists don't deserve "objective" treatments.<sup>21</sup>

Taken together, these studies provide numerous insights, but how and when the media fashion themselves (let alone others) as legitimate and objective "guardians of a moral order" (Gans 1979, p. 57), remains unclear. Despite these gaps, this scholarship

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<sup>21</sup> Other examples include natural disasters and the Kennedy assassination.

supports two key observations. First, although the “limits of acceptable conflict” are based on taken for granted assumptions of journalism. Like Gans’ (1979) “enduring” news values, these normative positions are unlikely to appear partial to politicians or readers. Second, when combined, these studies suggest that although the strategic rituals of journalism can shift both broadly over time, by the actors involved, and across different types of stories, coverage remains patterned.

Schudson (2002b, p. 263) writes: “It is as if journalists were unconsciously multilingual, code-switching from neutral interpreters to guardians of social consensus and back again without missing a beat.” I concur, but think that to understand how this “code switching” is enacted, we need to investigate the language of these roles as performative. And we need to better understand how journalists perform what I will call the role of “guardian of consensus.” This can be done by paying closer attention to how specific rituals of objectivity are employed – the content of seemingly “neutral” interpretations, how journalists position themselves relative to other speakers, and how reporters organize stories. Relatedly, I argue that to understand the enactment and implications of these performances we also need to see what other political actors may be cast as above the fray of impassioned debate by being attributed analytic rhetoric.

Therefore, in this chapter I begin to investigate what the role of guardian of consensus looks like, that is, the kind of writing in which it is expressed, and how it is distinctive from a role of neutral observer. Specifically, I ask how do journalists perform their own objectivity by using analytic rhetoric when saying things in their own voice, by showing certain sources as similarly “objective,” or by organizing the story according to the subject and to be “fair”? Do these different strategic rituals substitute for each other or go

together? And what normative messages does a language for demonstrating objectivity communicate? To pose answers these questions I bridge insights about objectivity from studies of the cultural production of news with those of the coverage of different political actors and issues.

### **3.2 Hypotheses**

The idea of speech acts as performative, as making something come into existence, is part of understanding what reporting does when it sources stories. As Sigal (1986, p. 25) observes, “News is not what happens, but what someone says has happened or will happen.” Which “someones” are identified as legitimate sources is central to how reporters identify important occurrences and turn those occurrences into meaningful news events (e.g., Tuchman 1978).

Journalists are in the unique spot to both espouse their own views and select the speech of their sources to communicate in news stories. Attributing positions and interpretations to other political actors is a principle operationalization of objectivity because it allows journalists to demonstrate their professional skill in separating their personal opinions from their work and presenting “just the facts” (Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Tuchman 1972). Indeed, quotes or paraphrases of what other people *say* are the only sorts of facts that can “speak for themselves.” With this standard in mind, if journalists offer interpretations in their own voice, they have professional reason to present themselves as dispassionate, impersonal nonpartisans in contrast to the vividness, forcefulness, and subjectivity of their sources (Cook 1998). However, by departing from the attribution ritual of objective journalism, reporters may also construct a position for themselves as the

paramount guardians of consensual social values. This suggests the following overarching hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1: Journalists affirm their objectivity by using analytic rhetoric in their own commentary more than they attribute it to other actors.*

Because journalists also write through the quotes they attribute to sources, it is important to theorize which sources reporters might cast as analytic speakers.

### **Sourcing Rituals**

As discussed in chapter 1, the pressures of news production shape journalists' attention to and treatment of different political actors. To recall, this process of framing news content has two dimensions that are shaped by deeply interwoven institutionalized routines and assumptions of journalism. To gather the news, journalists rely on taken for granted interorganizational or structural relationships in the field of politics. To present that news journalists make assumptions about the kinds of stories and sources that will appear familiar, interesting, credible, and important to their audiences and editors. Both of these dimensions or repertoires for newsmaking should influence how reporters represent their constellation of sources to buttress their own authority and that of their reports.

The coverage of politics, a staple of news, is consistently shown to privilege official facts, official events, and official voices (e.g., Gans 1979; Fishman 1980; Hallin 1984, 1986; Schudson 2001). By holding positions in accessible government bureaucracies along premier news "beats" (e.g., the White House or the courts), state actors are deemed inherently relevant, convenient, and competent sources for political events and viewpoints (Bennett 1988; Fishman 1980; Hallin 1986; Sigal 1973, 1986). In a similar fashion, experts affiliated with scientific fields and social institutions (e.g., law and medicine) are also

deemed important sources for the raw materials of news (Cook 1998; Hallin 1992). Sourcing interpretations and evaluations to these influential sources, adds an air of credibility to news reports (Tuchman 1978). In short, a routine reliance on sources within legitimated institutions helps journalists to meet the primary concerns for producing “quality” stories – that the story be accurate, important, and interesting.

This orientation toward established institutions pushes journalists to take certain claims of actors within those institutions seriously because they are “structurally induced” (Fishman 1980, p. 132). Research shows that journalists not only treat state officials with respect but also expect them to speak on behalf of their office, offer reasonable claims and discuss the common good (Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Sobieraj 2010). Beyond being located “in the political know,” the authority of the claims of state officials also derives from their conventionalized image as representatives of the nation (Gans 1979). In what appears to be a comparable matching of media portrayals to social roles or status, studies suggest that journalists enlist scientific, academic, and legal experts to serve as “neutral sources” for unbiased opinions and even to contextualize the positions of officials in news reports (Steele 1995, p. 799; also see Hallin 1992). The authority of experts may also have a lot to do with the fact that they occupy roles in institutions that follow professional guidelines encouraging objectivity similar to those of journalists. The persistent consequence of constructing objectivity through these authorized accounts is that it routinely disadvantages actors outside the main arena of politics.

Those outside the halls of power are rarely considered inherently relevant sources. Political “outsiders,” social movements in particular, are not an integral part of any news

beat and often must pursue the press to even make the news (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Ryan 1991; Sobieraj 2010). Studies show a few pathways for doing so. Social movement groups can imitate the conventional politics and bureaucratic organization of “insiders” (Amenta et al. 2002; Rohlinger 2002), link themselves to issues already being covered in the media (McCarthy et al. 1996), or cause disrupt the “business as usual” routines of political newsgathering (Gamson and Meyer 1996; Molotch and Lester 1974, Oliver and Maney 2000). In general, research suggests that movements tend to make themselves newsworthy by generating large, disruptive, or dramatic events that are within easy reach of the news agency and provide interesting stories (for a review see Earl et al. 2004).

Media attention, however, does not assure recognition or credibility, especially in the case of protest. In contrast to elites and experts, journalists have been shown to seek out activist sources to discuss their personal ties to an issue rather than speak on behalf of any public role or group (Bennett 1988; Ferree et al 2002; Gitlin 1980; Sobieraj 2010; Tuchman 1978). In fact, Sobieraj (2010, 2011) argues that even when movement associations attempt to follow the media rules applied to insiders – being professional and prepared for comment – they fail to shape the news because reporters expect activists to be amateur, spontaneous and emotional. Movement groups and their representatives face a unique disadvantage in the quality of messages they can send. It seems to be through juxtapositioning them to institutionally embedded, reliable, and authorized speakers that their presence in a story reinforces reportorial credibility. Taken together, these distinct sourcing rituals for “insiders” and “outsiders,” suggest that journalists can also guard consensus values by casting experts and state actors as analytic speakers. Therefore, I offer the following two hypotheses:



*Hypothesis 2: Experts will be more likely than any other (non-author) speakers to be cast as “objective” by being attributed analytic rhetoric in coverage.*

*Hypothesis 3: Following experts, state actors will be attributed analytic speech more than social movement actors.*

### **Rituals for the Story Subject: Protest & Coverage Occasions**

Just as sourcing rituals are linked to a hierarchy of political role expectations in ways I argue impact which actors are represented as analytic, this hierarchy also shapes how journalists cover certain types of subjects. Starting with stories that report protest, we know that the disruptive activities that garner marginalized groups media attention tend to disparage the group or ignore the messages they seek to draw attention to (e.g., Dardis 2006; Entman and Rojecki 1993; Hackett and Zhao 1994; Jacobs 1996). Rather than sending a movement’s intended message, journalists frequently turn to the reactions of those adversely affected by movement mobilization (e.g., the police or a government spokesperson) for substantive interpretations of protest and protestors (Cook 1998; Molotch and Lester 1974; Smith et al. 2001). As a result, protest coverage tends to focus on conflict and the deviance of the tactics or the protestors themselves. And activists that engage in protest are commonly treated as entertaining spectacles, sideshows, or upstarts in the media (Ashley and Olson 1998; Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1985). In sum, this literature suggests that the press employ a number of strategies to distance themselves from the views of groups who engage in extra-institutional forms of action.

In parallel to the reporting of protest, the arena of politics that creates the news peg or “hook” on which the story hangs can also influence how journalists write their stories. Media organizations are the most dependent on established political actors to construct “objective events.” As the most substantial channels of news information (Schudson 2001;

Sigal 1973, 1986), when political elites promote or are a part of routine political news, journalists have a greater need to attribute the story to state sources and let them convey their messages (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Molotch and Lester 1974). Although movement actors are generally less successful in influencing their media coverage, recent research suggests they too are better able to get their demands covered in the press when they initiate the activity spurring the article to be written (but are not engaged in disruptive protest) (Amenta et al. 2012). In contrast to stories initiated by the main arenas of state politics and even by civil society actors, are stories that reporters initiate or promote themselves, such as cultural events, investigative reports, or newspaper-sponsored polls. Journalists have the greatest autonomy over what gets said when assembling such articles (Ettema and Glasser 1998; Cook 1998). Therefore, reporters are more likely to need to contextualize or find speakers to interpret the relevance and importance of such stories in an analytic way so that they will appear objective.

Overall, I suggest that the inclusion of analytic rhetoric will differ according to these different coverage occasions. Whereas reporters covering protest and news events generated by political actors are likely to incorporate disgruntled, partisan interpretations to authorized sources, media-initiated articles are more likely to incorporate analytic rhetoric to construct the objective importance of the storyline. Moreover, the opportunity for journalists to position themselves as guardians of consensus should be more limited for contests stemming from institutional locations outside of the media itself. However, while institutionalized conflicts are more likely to be demand neutral observation from reporters and push them to rely on sources for interpretations, protest reporting does not seem to demand this type of objectivity from journalists. Instead, protest coverage may provide an

opportunity for journalists to position themselves as guardians of consensus. This theorization of strategic rituals for covering different types of news occasions suggests the following three hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4: Analytic rhetoric is less likely to appear in articles that report protest.*

*Hypothesis 5: Analytic rhetoric is more likely to appear in media-initiated coverage.*

*Hypothesis 6: Journalists are more likely to voice analytic rhetoric when reporting protest to guard consensus values.*

### **Rituals for Structuring Claims**

The ways journalists' structure sources and arguments to perform objectivity should also impact the appearance of analytic rhetoric. To observe the organizational values of reporting "fairly" and "accurately," reporters routinely implement "balance" – quoting speakers with competing positions or arguments from "both sides" of an issue. Presenting competing truth-claims supposedly allows the audience to decide which speaker is the most persuasive and suggests a lack of bias (Tuchman 1972). This rhetorical structure is among the most easily identified and routinely practiced rituals of objectivity.

Balance is so ritualized that journalists have been shown to construct balance even when the strength or support of opposing positions or parties are highly imbalanced (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). Put differently, striking a balance between sources suggests a fair fight by implying some parity even when this may be far from accurate. Moreover, despite being a canon of neutrality, given the media's reliance on authorized speakers, it is not shocking that balance is often found most commonly applied to contests between authorized actors (Gans 1979; Hallin 1986; Sobieraj

2010). For instance, quoting dueling experts, a “liberal” versus a “conservative,” or a Republican rebutting a Democrat and vice versa, permits journalists to appear both critical *and* nonpartisan (Cook 1998; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Tuchman 1974). Thus, while on its face balance could appear with analytic rhetoric in an additive fashion, reinforcing and enhancing the perceived objectivity of the report, we also know that the balance norm isn’t always applied and that journalistic protocols are only loosely coupled to the goal of objectivity (Tuchman 1972).

The protocol of balance is argued to be a preferred ritual for stories of “legitimate controversy” – wherein competing perspectives should speak for themselves free of journalistic interpretation (Hallin 1984, 1986; Schudson 2002a). In contrast, one can argue that incorporating analytic rhetoric – speech that is likely to affirm (a moderate) consensus– is the more likely ritual for stories where journalists deem controversy inimical to the public interest. I argue that whereas balance conforms to the norms of objective journalism, analytic rhetoric conforms to the norms of a guardianship of consensus. In other words, I hypothesize that balance and analytic speech are likely to be two distinct strategic rituals for the application of journalistic power:

*Hypothesis 7: Analytic rhetoric is less likely to appear in balanced articles.*

### **3.3 Data & Measures**

I test these hypotheses using Ferree et al.’s (2002) *Shaping Abortion Discourse* dataset on the national newspaper coverage of abortion from 1972 through 1994. Although discussed in chapter 1, section 3, it is useful to briefly review a few elements of the data and to specify how the sample was identified for the purposes of this chapter: investigating the

appearance of analytic rhetoric across speakers and article characteristics. To identify analytic evaluative statements, I rely on the original dataset, wherein coders distinguished quoted or paraphrased utterances lacking substantive arguments about abortion (e.g., “standing” alone) from those including ideas on abortion policy (e.g., arguments or claims). In this analysis, utterances and articles not containing any argumentation or framing are excluded because the focus is on ostensibly neutral/analytic interpretations of abortion policy.<sup>22</sup> The resulting sample consists of 6,646 evaluative utterances that appeared in a total of 1,113 articles. This constitutes 97 percent of the original sample of articles, 77 percent of quoted or paraphrased statements, and all utterances with evaluative content (Appendix A, Table A3.1 for descriptive statistics).<sup>23</sup>

### **Dependent Variables: Analytic Rhetoric & Analytic Constructions**

To operationalize the primary outcome variable, analytic rhetoric, a number of iterative procedures were followed. In the original data, hundreds of ideas are coded as pro (supporting or extending rights), anti (more restrictions), or neutral (no direction) in their policy implications. Each argument/idea offered in a single utterance (uninterrupted quote or paragraph) was coded separately, so that individual utterances could contain multiple ideas. With the help of a colleague, Erin Evans, these idea categorizations were closely

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<sup>22</sup> While some additional insight could be gained from examining statements without evaluative content, it would prevent me from ensuring reliability (non-evaluative utterances are not contained in the utterance content data), from comparing across actors (especially my ability to include journalists in the comparison), and, thus, is considered beyond the scope of this inquiry. And, again, statements of facts, processes, procedures, and laws that provide no evaluation or justification were also not considered arguments in the original data collection (Ferree et al. 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Note: these figures reflect the unweighted, raw data.

investigated to confirm “neutral” versus overtly slanted policy ideas.<sup>24</sup> We examined all ideas and the examples given by the codebook and identified any coded as pro or anti that might be considered neutral and vice versa. For the few identified as potentially problematic, we examined samples of utterances coded as containing these ideas in the dataset. Ultimately, we found that the overwhelming majority of original codings of ideas as policy neutral were appropriate, however, we also recognized that ostensibly “neutral” arguments about abortion appeared to serve different purposes and were far from purely neutral. Because these ideas convey interpretations about the issue, I refer to them as analytic rhetoric.

Before turning to this subset, my general conceptualization of analytic rhetoric captures arguments that avoid taking a strict side in the abortion debate. Analytic rhetoric signals an actor’s impartiality and civility on an issue by communicating that they do not take a clear side and are thus, rhetorically distance themselves from controversy. However, two operationalizations were explored for this research: ideal-typical (only analytic/neutral ideas) and realistic (combinations with pro and anti ideas). The latter is used for the analyses presented here because findings were consistent across both operationalizations. Only the significance levels varied, which was likely due to the reduced sample size when using “pure” categorizations. In this investigation, *analytic rhetoric* is a dichotomous measure of evaluative statements that include any analytic interpretations about abortion policy.

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<sup>24</sup> In addition to being coded as pro, anti, and neutral, ideas were clustered into eight overarching frames. For example, within the “Fetal Life” frame pro-abortion rights proponents assert that “Life begins at birth” while the anti position holds that “life begins at conception.” Notably, the “Fetal Life” frame can also be taken in a neutral policy direction: “the real issue is when life begins” (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 106).

Recognizing that analytic rhetoric is not uniform, *types* of analytic rhetoric were constructed from content analyses of neutral ideas and samples of utterances containing these ideas in the dataset. First, arguments that were strongly ambivalent about policy were distinguished from those that could carry a subtle policy position. For example, the idea women are in conflict or undecided about whether abortion or an unwanted pregnancy is the lesser evil was coded as a “diagnostic” speech construction. In contrast, arguments that abortions should be reduced can be taken in a pro-abortion or anti-abortion policy direction (e.g., abortion should be safe, legal and rare; or abortions should be difficult to get) and were coded as instances of “hedging” speech. A number of iterative coding procedures were followed.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, any analytic policy idea failing the strict rule of ambivalence for diagnostic arguments was coded as hedging speech. In addition, I examined if the speakers using these analytic ideas were identified as pro, anti, or neutral on balance in their argumentation over the research period. The patterns helped to confirm the two mutually exclusive categories.

While following these procedures, further subsets of analytic rhetoric emerged. The three that emerged were arguments referring to society or the public, the divisiveness of the issue, or the possibility for consensus. Samples of utterances containing ideas with these types of arguments were examined.<sup>26</sup> Once again, my colleague and I went back and forth between the actual utterance content and the codes we were identifying before

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<sup>25</sup> My colleague and I agreed on over ninety percent of our independent codes using random utterance examples containing analytic rhetoric (i.e. policy neutral ideas), but drew an additional sample for those on which there was any concern or disagreement.

<sup>26</sup> For example, “all sides agree that reducing the number abortions is desirable, but differ in the means they take to do this” was coded as society and consensus. I also ran additional word searches through the texts of analytic utterances (those coded as “neutral”) for terms, such as “consensus,” “agreement,” “polarization,” “division,” “most people,” “society,” “everyone,” to confirm the accuracy of the agreed upon categorizations of society, polarization, and consensus.

finalizing the coding scheme. Once finalized, we individually coded a ten percent sample of utterance content, which produced an inter-coder reliability score greater than 90 percent. In total, five analytic speech constructions were conceptualized: diagnostic, hedging, society, polarization, and consensus. Each of these constructions is measured dichotomously as the presence of that type of idea or argument in an utterance.

*Diagnostic.* – This speech construction is comprised of arguments that are “diagnostic” about the problem causing conflict while being strictly noncommittal about the direction in which policy should be taken (e.g., Snow and Benford 1988). Diagnostic interpretations regularly point to a broad source of concern on the issue (e.g., fairness, rights) while remaining too abstract to fully endorse a clear policy stance. For example, “Brown's stand is based on the issue of fairness... 'the only argument he gave voice to was that of fairness.' ” In the case of the abortion debate, diagnostic speech does not explicitly indicate if a speaker is for or against abortion rights and is therefore in line with the insight that some arguments “are better described as ambivalent than as pro or con” (Gamson 1988, p. 166). An example from the data captures the ambivalent nature of these claims: “There are two rights. The right of the mother and the right of the fetus.” Often, this speech presents what aspect of the abortion issue is contested: the role of women in society, balancing the rights of women with the rights of the fetus, or whether abortion should be treated as a private issue, to name a few. Thus, the journalist (or other speaker) can interpret the crux of the issue and show they are knowledgeable as to what is at stake while remaining open and seemingly neutral with regards to what outcome is preferable.



*Hedging.* – Unlike the abstract nature of the diagnostic construction, hedging speech affirms the moderation of the speaker by conveying highly qualified positions on an issue. Hedging arguments are Janus-faced by, on the one side, suggesting the speaker falls somewhere near the middle but is not undecided on the issue, and, on the other, by taking a more highly nuanced stance that shields or veils partisan policy positions. For example, “Perhaps our concept of 'viability' needs to be extended to question not only whether the fetus is capable of living outside the uterus, but whether the conditions exist to allow it to live, grow and develop once it is born.” Hedging speech often presents a conditional position where abortion is okay with some exception or not okay under some condition. A statement attributed to George Bush illustrates this conditionality: “...yes my position has evolved, and it's continuing to evolve and it's evolving in favor of life. And I had a couple of exceptions that I support - rape incest, and the life of the mother...” In the sense of “objective” being centered, in the middle, or not clearly on either “side,” these statements show that the speaker takes a dispassionate or anti-extreme stand. Taking such a moderate or middle ground stance rejects taking a particular “side,” especially when the sides are defined as absolute and uncompromising. Journalists might choose to perform their objectivity through such dispassionate analysis, but other political actors are also likely to find hedging speech strategic for appearing moderate, rational, or for deflecting critics.

*Society.* – Society constructions take a position of speaking on behalf of society or some large segment therein. Society rhetoric can include inferences from polling when evoking the public’s opinion, but most do not. The critical element of this analytic construction is that the speaker often implies knowledge beyond their individual position, as though they

are a mouthpiece for society, the voice of broader social values or majority interests. For instance, “Nobody who is pro-life has converted to pro-choice. But a whole lot of people have gone the other way.” A more overt characterization of public opinion is evident in the following statement: “If my reading of the current trend of opinion is correct, it is also time for the two extremes in the debate to begin to reconsider their positions.” Society rhetoric, as well as the polarization and consensus arguments I detail next, come the closest to what we would expect from the publicly-minded speech of a “moral guardian” or advocate of a (generally moderate) consensus (e.g., Gans 1979; Hallin 1986; McLeod and Hertog 1992).

*Polarization.* – This construction emphasizes the divisive nature of the issue while signaling that the speaker is above the fray of conflict. In abortion coverage, it consists of arguments that the contest between pro and anti abortion positions cannot be resolved or that the issue of abortion splits society into two, warring camps. The following commentary depicts an instance of a polarization speech: “How the debate has touched American beliefs and attitudes remains to be seen though it clearly continues to inflame the passions of those who believe in the righteousness of their cause.” Rather than commenting on policy, polarization claims usually speak to the broader conflict. For example, “Outside the United States, too, abortion has emerged as one of the most contentious and charged issues in national politics.” These examples highlight the distancing function of polarization – emotions are felt and expressed by believers, not by the impartial observer making the statement. The speaker can opine against the heated nature of the conflict and politely present it as negative (Chilton 1987). But passion or emotion is shown to be missing in the speaker, which makes polarization statements appear “objective” because a whole complex

of attitudes relates undemonstrativeness with neutrality with moderation and with objectivity (in journalism as in science).<sup>27</sup>

*Consensus.* – In contrast to polarization claims, this speech construction contains ideas that some common ground exists, that different views can co-exist as equally valid, or that consensus is possible. For example, “What is most critical is that people on both sides sound reasonable...There's a great middle ground out there that's very ambivalent on the issue of abortion, and both sides have the opportunity to claim this middle ground.” Consensus claims imply that an actor is both nonpartisan on the issue and seeks resolution to the conflict in a positive and polite way (Chilton 1987). Another example points to the possibility of reaching consensus: “But we should not let [traditions that divide us] obscure the common ground we all can stand on.” Notably, consensus speech constructions do not necessarily posit that consensus exists in society. Instead, they emphasize the desirability of consensus or its strong prospects and ritually claim the role of being the celebrant or advocate for a “whole society” view. Consensus speech aligns with the observation that publics, and journalists in particular, sometimes develop a perspective that seeks the end to longstanding conflicts or debates (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002; Gamson 2004).

### **Independent Variables**

*Organizational Sources/Speakers.* – This is measured using the specific speaker information (an individual or organization quoted or paraphrased in an article) linked to each

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<sup>27</sup> Polarization rhetoric may also allow journalists, in particular, to demonstrate their objectivity when writing conflict-oriented stories, a theme with a high news value and one often applied in the media reporting of protest (e.g., Oliver and Maney 2000; Sobieraj 2010).

evaluative utterance, including the journalist who wrote the article. Importantly, this makes the examination of the relative attribution of arguments across the full range of speakers possible. Speakers were clustered into seven organizational categories: speakers embedded in the state (legislative, executive, judicial, and political parties at all levels of government), speakers affiliated with pro-life movement organizations (“Life SMOs”), speakers affiliated with pro-choice movement organizations (“Choice SMOs”), expert speakers affiliated with medical, legal, or academic institutions, speakers affiliated with church organizations, unaffiliated actors (“bystanders”), and the journalist/author.<sup>28</sup>

*Protest and Coverage Occasions.* – Because reportorial norms for the coverage of protest are argued to be distinct, I include a dichotomous variable from the original data that measures if *protest* was (1) or was not (0) reported in the article. Similarly, the news peg or the event arena of political activity that generates media coverage can influence the autonomy of the journalist writing the story. The initiating *arena* is measured using a categorical variable also derived from the original dataset. The original dataset defines an arena by the “activity that is stimulating public discussion and stirring the pot on the abortion issue...the institutional realm in the society from which this activity is coming.” I utilized these codes and collapsed their categories into media/culture (1), state (2), and non-state (3) activities to account for media-initiated and source-initiated coverage.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This approach to collapsing speaker categories is largely in line with previous research examining the claims of different actors across speaker groups (e.g., Ferree 2003; Ferree et al. 2002; Snow et al. 2007; Steensland 2008).

<sup>29</sup> The variables for protest coverage and the arena category for non-state activities are conceptually distinct. Protest can be reported in articles initiated in any arena and coverage generated by non-state activity is not always the result of protest. In the data, approximately 76 percent of articles generated by non-state, non-media activity did not report protest.

*Structuring Claims: Balancing Protocols.* – To capture the premier protocol for constructing “fair” or balanced stories, I incorporate two variables derived from codes in the original dataset. The first, *argument balance* dichotomously measures the presence of both pro and anti abortion rights arguments in the article (1) versus an absence of dialogue (0). Although this is the most traditional operationalization of balance, I chose to employ a second measure of fairness as the presence of a plurality or diversity of organizational speakers in an article.<sup>30</sup> This *diversity* measure identifies the share of utterances in an article provided by each type of organizational speaker using a basic Herfindahl index (a widely used measure of concentration, see Fiss and Hirsch 2005). A “0” reflects a low diversity scores (relative to the mean) and can be interpreted as “most or all utterances are made by a few or only one organization type.” High diversity (1) can be interpreted as “utterances are equally distributed among organization types.”<sup>31</sup>

*Control Variables: Media and Political Contexts* – Three variables coded in the original data are used to control for the characteristics of the news product. Because the standard principles of objectivity demand that journalists abstain from editorializing in news reports, a dichotomous indicator for whether the article is a traditional *news report* (1)

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<sup>30</sup> Quotes from a diversity of different speakers can be added to a story to corroborate the factuality of an assertion (e.g., “fact by triangulation”) and reinforce the journalist’s appearance of autonomy from purely “insider” perspectives (Fishman 1980). Moreover, as Gans (2003, 103) puts it, in its ideal form, “multiperspectival” news coverage is a “bottoms-up corrective for the mostly top-down perspectives of the news media;” something not ensured through the balance of pro and con positions.

<sup>31</sup> Alternative operationalizations of these variables were tested. For example, an operationalization of balance based on an index of the diversity of arguments (using a Herfindahl index) was tested and the results were consistent. Similarly, I constructed a variable from the original data that identifies whether an article included only one category of organizational speaker (e.g., state only), or whether the article contained multiple organizational sources (e.g., state and movement). The nine categories of the original variable were collapsed into a dichotomous measure indicating the presence (1) or absence (0) of organizational source diversity. Here too the results were consistent, but the distinction between diversity and no diversity was less clear.

instead of an editorial, feature, or some other format (0) controls for this distinction. Longer stories tend to be more prominent and can move beyond the most material information (e.g., Andrews and Caren 2010; Shoemaker 1984; Tuchman 1972). Because longer, more prominent stories can *say* more than shorter ones, I incorporate a count measure of the number of evaluative utterances in an article to proxy *article length*.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, a dummy variable for *newspaper* controls for if the article appeared in *The New York Times (NYT)* (1) or *The Los Angeles Times (LAT)* (0) in case the routines of objective journalism vary between the two papers.

In terms of broader political contexts that may influence objectivity rituals, I include controls for Supreme Court decisions, presidential elections, and distinct time periods.<sup>33</sup> Using well-regarded research on the abortion case and newspaper coverage, I constructed a dichotomous variable for each year in which there was any major Supreme *Court case* decision on abortion rights. Such major Court decisions are crucial national political events and they have been shown to impact discursive outcomes in media coverage of the debate (Ferree et al. 2002; Rohlinger 2002). Following a similar logic, I control for presidential elections as signaling changes in the political environment (see Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). However, I also include this variable because contests between the two major parties are when the norms of objective reporting should reign supreme compared to those of the guardianship of social consensus. The *election* variable is a dichotomous measure for each year in which a presidential election took place (1) versus no election (0).

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<sup>32</sup> An operationalization using the number of paragraphs in an article was also tested and findings were robust across all dependent variables.

<sup>33</sup> Because research shows that abortion attitudes have been highly stable over time (especially up to the 1990s) and more likely to result from media attention than to drive it, this analysis does not examine public opinion (for a review see Jelen and Wilcox 2003; see also Evans, Bryson, and DiMaggio 2001; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Gallup 2015; Mouw and Sobel 2001).

Finally, and also in line with previous scholarship on this public interest issue, I control for change over time as broad shifts between three time periods (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002; Staggenborg 1989, 1991). The *time periods* used for this analysis are: the years 1972-76 during and following the *Roe v. Wade* decision that made abortion a national public issue, the 1977-88 phase of retrenchment and conservatism on abortion, and the years 1989-94 when abortion laws were again revised by the courts (see chapter 2 for details on the case history).<sup>34</sup> This periodization may also help to control for the argument that reportorial obligations shift between major political events (e.g., Hallin’s 1986) and for the assertion that journalists have a more difficult time remaining objective as debates wear on (Ferree et al. 2002; Gamson 2004; Rohlinger 2007).

### 3.4 Analysis

**Table 3.1** Analytic Rhetoric Frequencies and Percentages

	Utterances		Articles	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
<i>Analytic Constructions:</i>				
Diagnostic	1,159	17	527	46
Hedging	837	12	470	41
Society	824	12	434	38
Polarization	474	7	285	25
Consensus	230	4	148	13
<i>Analytic Rhetoric</i>	1,876	28%	732	64%
N	6,646		1,146	

Note: percentages are unweighted and do not add up to the total percentages because speakers can include multiple arguments in a single utterance. I use a conservative estimate for articles by including all articles, whether framing occurred or not.

<sup>34</sup> This periodization also helps me to avoid collinearity with the Court case and elections variables, which is why I do not use the six time periods discussed in chapter 2.

Table 3.1 presents a general picture of the prevalence of analytic rhetoric over the research period. We see that twenty-eight percent of all evaluative utterances included analytic rhetoric and sixty-four percent of all articles included at least one analytic statement. The prevalence of the five different analytic speech constructions is also presented at both the utterance and article level. Diagnostic interpretations were the most common, followed by hedging, society, polarization, and consensus interpretations respectively.

To test the hypotheses, I employed simple logistic regression models with survey weights adjusting for the inclusion probabilities of articles and the sample size over the research period.<sup>35</sup> The presence of each of the five analytic speech constructions in an utterance was modeled as a binary outcome. It is straightforward to interpret the results as the relative chances of an argument belonging to a certain coded type. Three different models were run for each dependent variable, yet I only present model building for the first dependent variable, analytic rhetoric (though all models not presented here are available upon request). The results are shown in Table 3.2 and Table 3.3.

Beginning with the appearance of any analytic rhetoric in coverage (Table 3.2), Model 1 includes controls as well as the indicators for organizational sources or speakers. State sources constitute the omitted category because this reference group provides a theoretically relevant baseline of authorized speakers against which I can assess how journalists cast themselves and others as objective. The expectation that journalists rhetorically position themselves as objective by espousing analytic rhetoric more than they

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<sup>35</sup> This analysis was aided by the use of hierarchical logistic regression models that allowed me to decompose the unexplained variance in analytic utterance coverage on different explanatory levels. The main insight from these models was that the largest part of unexplained variance could be attributed to the article level. This suggests that the composition of articles in terms of text characteristics, selection of arguments and speakers is crucial for the construction of analytic rhetoric. However, the inclusion of sampling weights in this method is not straightforward. I therefore chose simple logistic models for the analysis presented here.



attribute it to any other speakers is confirmed. Following journalists, only experts bear a positive relationship to analytic rhetoric compared to state sources. Thus, and as expected, state and expert actors appear to be privileged over others in being treated as “neutral” sources.

Table 3.2 Coefficients from logistic regression models of analytic rhetoric

Independent Variables	(1) Organizational Sources		(2) Story Subject/Occasion		(3) Balance Structures	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
<i>Source (State Omit.)</i>						
Life SMOs	-0.288*	(0.137)	-0.244+	(0.139)	-0.198	(0.140)
Choice SMOs	-0.490***	(0.124)	-0.453***	(0.126)	-0.422***	(0.128)
Experts	0.198+	(0.108)	0.194+	(0.112)	0.203+	(0.113)
Church	-0.446**	(0.149)	-0.397*	(0.156)	-0.356*	(0.157)
Bystander	-0.163	(0.117)	-0.155	(0.123)	-0.129	(0.124)
Journalist/Author	0.294***	(0.078)	0.287***	(0.079)	0.305***	(0.081)
<i>Protest-Event Arena (Media Omit.)</i>						
State			-0.382**	(0.127)	-0.325*	(0.128)
Non-State			-0.444***	(0.131)	-0.404**	(0.131)
<i>Article Structure</i>						
Argument Balance					-0.257***	(0.067)
Org. Diversity					-0.097	(0.064)
<i>Controls</i>						
News Report	-0.199**	(0.064)	-0.161*	(0.066)	-0.063	(0.070)
Length	0.011**	(0.004)	0.012***	(0.004)	0.018***	(0.004)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.067	(0.058)	-0.077	(0.059)	-0.065	(0.059)
Court Case	0.286***	(0.075)	0.262***	(0.075)	0.256***	(0.076)
Election	-0.173*	(0.070)	-0.157*	(0.071)	-0.168*	(0.071)
<i>Period (72-76' Omit.)</i>						
77-88'	0.115	(0.089)	0.116	(0.089)	0.132	(0.090)
89-94'	0.014	(0.085)	0.016	(0.086)	0.042	(0.087)
Constant	-0.952***	(0.154)	-0.564**	(0.195)	-0.603**	(0.197)

N= 6,646 across models. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed)

Model 2 assesses the influence of different story subjects or occasions for coverage on analytic rhetoric. As anticipated, articles reporting protest reduced analytic rhetoric. This suggests that protest coverage amplifies the presentation of partisan or polemical argumentation. I also expected that coverage initiated by newswriters would increase the appearance of analytic rhetoric because such coverage offers the journalist greater authorial autonomy in constructing the objective importance of the story. Indeed, stories initiated by both state and non-state actors are significantly less likely to include analytic interpretations compared to media-initiated coverage (the omitted reference category).

The next step, Model 3, completes the full model by adding the effects of balance protocols for demonstrating “fairness.” I hypothesized that if analytic rhetoric is strategically distinct from the norms of objective reporting, the balancing norm should be inversely related to the appearance of analytic rhetoric. The results show that articles providing a balance of opposing viewpoints and those with a greater diversity of organizational voices reduced analytic rhetoric, although only the negative effect of argument balance is significant. This lends some support to the assertion that journalists will *either* incorporate a language of objectivity to perform their role as guardian of consensus when they deem a topic incontestable *or* adhere to the principle norms of objective journalism (i.e., balance) when they deem a topic legitimately controversial. To confirm this theorized role enactment of journalists, I ran supplementary analyses and found this interpretation to be accurate. Journalists were significantly unlikely to voice

analytic interpretations in balanced articles ( $p < 0.10$ ) and when articles do not report protest (results not shown, see Appendix A, Figures A3.1A-A3.1B).<sup>36</sup>

Before discussing the interplay of the main explanatory variables in the full model, I want to briefly account for the influence of the control variables on analytic rhetoric. For media controls, the prevalence of analytic arguments generally decreased in news reports, which is as expected because journalists are encouraged to avoid editorializing on the pages reserved for “straight objective” news. Notably, however, this relationship is no longer significant once balancing structures enter the model. One interpretation of this result is that balance is more meaningful to the norms governing a language of objectivity than the distinction between news reports and editorials. Notably, longer or more prominent stories, which often move beyond who, what, when, and where, increase the appearance of analytic rhetoric. Lastly, for media controls, both the *NYT* and the *LAT* newspapers appear to follow the same unwritten rules for objectivity across all models.

Turning to control variables for the political environment, years in which the Supreme Court made major decisions on abortion policy consistently increased the prevalence of analytic rhetoric. In contrast, presidential elections dampened analytic rhetoric. These findings provide some confirmation to Hallin’s (1986) arguments linking the modes of reportage to shifts in the larger issue debate although the effects of distinct periods on analytic rhetoric are not significant. The results indirectly support his insight that journalists deem contests within and between the two major political parties legitimate. They also may revise his account by suggesting that highly visible Court

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<sup>36</sup> I ran additional models interacting organizational speakers with the argument balance variable and then plotted predicted probabilities for the appearance of analytic rhetoric under the condition of balance (other variables were held at their means).

decisions proffer a status quo or national-level consensus that may increase reporters' use of analytic rhetoric. Chapter 5 will examine the influence of these political contexts in greater detail.

Returning to the key explanatory variables in Model 3, journalists remain the predominant voices of analytic rhetoric. The two types of sources most likely to be cast as objective through analytic rhetoric are experts and state actors. Further, pro-life movement speakers are no longer significantly different from state sources in the full model and the strength of significant differences for other speakers diminishes. This suggests other article attributes are stronger predictors of analytic positioning than the inclusion of those speakers in an article. Protest reporting, source-initiated articles, and article balance all significantly reduce the appearance of analytic rhetoric in coverage. Overall, Table 3.2 suggests that journalists apply different rituals for objective reporting (balanced articles and source-initiated articles) than they do for analytic rhetoric (no balance and media-initiated coverage). It also hints at the idea that journalists guarded consensus by positioning themselves and few other sources as objective, analytic speakers (i.e., experts and state actors). To better account for these results, it is necessary to look at the appearance of different analytic speech constructions in relation to these explanatory variables (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 presents the influence of all variables on each of the analytic speech constructions: diagnostic, hedging, society, polarization, and consensus. We can see that most of the control variables maintain the same pattern of influence as they did for any analytic rhetoric, the influence of broader political factors on discourse will be taken up in chapter 5.

**Table 3.3** Coefficients from logistic regression models of five analytic speech constructions

Independent Variables	Diagnostoc		Hedging		Society		Polarization		Consensus	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
<i>Source (State Omit.)</i>										
Life SMOs	-0.341+	(0.186)	-0.039	(0.177)	0.115	(0.191)	0.206	(0.263)	-0.776+	(0.458)
Choice SMOs	-0.190	(0.157)	-0.549**	(0.179)	-0.091	(0.181)	-0.098	(0.268)	-0.146	(0.296)
Experts	0.527***	(0.134)	-0.234	(0.154)	0.150	(0.162)	0.297	(0.234)	0.472+	(0.259)
Church	-0.269	(0.208)	-0.359+	(0.202)	-0.447+	(0.261)	-0.327	(0.391)	0.516	(0.342)
Bystander	0.079	(0.151)	-0.380*	(0.173)	-0.139	(0.184)	0.070	(0.245)	-0.274	(0.318)
Journalist	0.645***	(0.100)	-0.173	(0.108)	0.666***	(0.111)	1.166***	(0.158)	0.246	(0.206)
Protest	0.034	(0.114)	-0.584***	(0.151)	0.274*	(0.126)	0.514**	(0.157)	-0.326	(0.246)
<i>Arena (Media Omit.)</i>										
State	-0.485***	(0.138)	-0.047	(0.179)	-0.108	(0.162)	-0.274	(0.198)	-0.786**	(0.246)
Non-State	-0.518***	(0.142)	-0.086	(0.183)	-0.332*	(0.169)	-0.357+	(0.209)	-0.621*	(0.242)
<i>Article Structure</i>										
Argument Balance	-0.293***	(0.080)	-0.162+	(0.088)	-0.286**	(0.088)	-0.195+	(0.116)	-0.573***	(0.162)
Org. Diversity	-0.005	(0.077)	-0.188*	(0.086)	-0.144+	(0.087)	-0.157	(0.111)	0.007	(0.155)
<i>Controls</i>										
News Report	-0.027	(0.083)	-0.057	(0.096)	-0.083	(0.090)	-0.026	(0.120)	-0.001	(0.162)
Length	0.025***	(0.004)	-0.000	(0.005)	0.021***	(0.005)	0.021***	(0.006)	0.017*	(0.008)
Court Case	0.170+	(0.088)	0.368***	(0.105)	0.394***	(0.101)	0.217+	(0.129)	0.227	(0.184)
Election	-0.070	(0.084)	-0.306**	(0.100)	-0.251**	(0.096)	-0.182	(0.125)	-0.019	(0.167)
<i>Period (72-76 Omit.)</i>										
77-88'	0.161	(0.107)	0.024	(0.120)	0.174	(0.124)	0.235	(0.171)	0.987***	(0.291)
89-94'	0.015	(0.105)	0.028	(0.114)	-0.005	(0.119)	0.287+	(0.160)	1.134***	(0.285)
Constant	-1.392***	(0.226)	-1.512***	(0.276)	-2.279***	(0.265)	-3.062***	(0.339)	-3.357***	(0.462)

N= 6,646. Newspaper control variable included, but coefficients are not reported (not significant).

Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed test)

Comparing across the models, journalists themselves primarily account for the prevalence of diagnostic, society, and polarization speech constructions. Notably, journalists avoided hedging rhetoric, which can be used to veil positions with policy implications, in favor of diagnostic speech identifying the crux of the matter, speech on behalf of society, and using dispassionate polarization rhetoric to comment on the divisive nature of abortion. That journalists rhetorically performed their own objectivity in these ways generally aligns with what we know about the “enduring values” argued to reinforce the claim to objectivity: keep *personal* opinions and partisanship out of reporting, defend the public interest, and conflict sells. It also aligns with what we would expect from an ostensibly objective guardian of consensus values.

By looking at which other actors were attributed analytic rhetoric, we can see that journalists showed their sources in different ways that I hypothesized would buttress their own objectivity performance. As anticipated, experts are the most closely aligned journalists in being positioned as analytic interpreters of debate. In particular, experts were routinely attributed diagnostic claims and statements that consensus is possible. In contrast to these findings, state actors were strongly distinguished from other actors in being attributed hedging arguments. This suggests that the state is supposed to be “neutral” only in the sense of representing the middle or coming down in the middle when an issue is up for debate. This result is not shocking when public opinion was neither strictly for or against abortion rights over the period and officials can best occupy the role of representing the nation when they don’t “marginalize” stable majority opinion (Bennett 1990).

The source results also indicate that movement activists from opposing sides of the debate, church speakers, and bystanders were unlikely to be cast as “objective” in abortion coverage. While generally in line with my hypotheses, we see that these differences vary by the type of analytic rhetoric. Helping to account for the non-neutral positioning of church speakers alongside movement groups is the history of pro-life advocacy. Representatives of the Catholic Church and Christian evangelicals, in particular, were vocal critics and part of the vanguard in the movement against abortion liberalization from 1972 through 1994 (Staggenborg 1989, 1991). Also of note, pro-choice activists were especially unlikely to be cited with hedging positions. These portrayals provide some support to the argument that evidence that journalists’ expect certain sources to be passionate partisans, but it may also indicate that these sources rarely offer moderate arguments. For example, pro-choice activists have often refused to enter the middle ground of the debate (see Rohlinger 2006).

When it comes to the influence of article structures and story subjects on the appearance of different analytic constructions, I highlight argument balance and protest reporting. As anticipated, balanced articles reduced all types of analytic interpretation. Once again, this suggests that the norms of objective reporting and those of the guardianship of consensus are distinct.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to the monotonic effect of balance, the reporting of protest dampened hedging rhetoric and amplified polarization and society rhetoric. Hallin’s (1986) theory seems to prove useful again. Mainly, if performing objectivity through article balance is closely tied to the sphere of legitimate controversy, society and polarization rhetoric may place protest outside this sphere. While this finding also supports core understandings about the media’s typical treatment of protests and

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<sup>37</sup> To recall, analytic rhetoric decreased in balanced articles, which supports this interpretation.

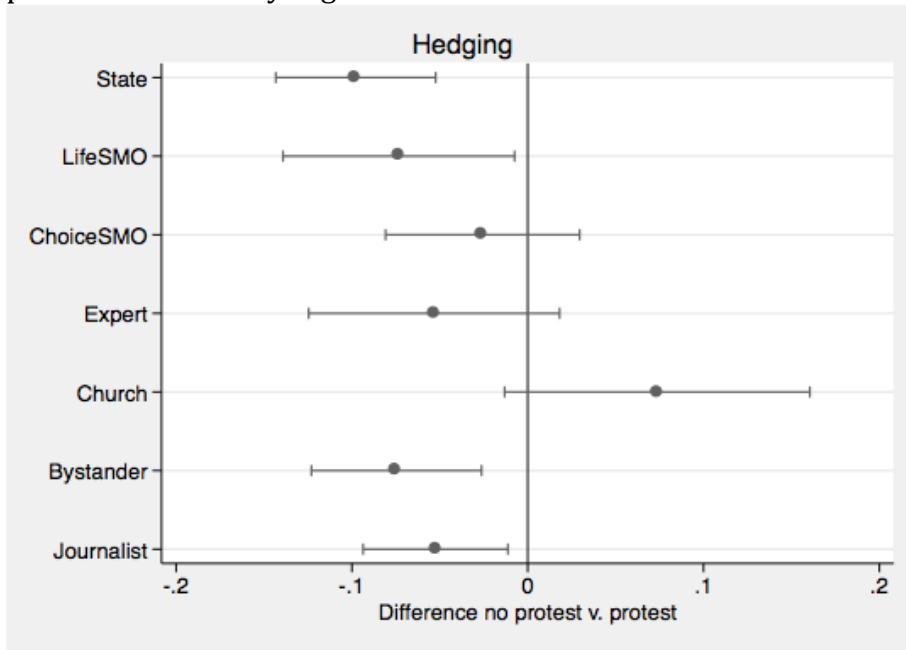
protestors (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Smith et al. 2001), it doesn't tell us which actors were responsible for the analytic rhetoric surrounding protest. Did journalists guard consensus and the social order by voicing analytic rhetoric in protest coverage or did they attribute it to other speakers – experts, authorities, and so on?

To test the hypothesis that journalists distance themselves from protestors and serve as guardians of social consensus in protest coverage I ran supplementary analyses. Additional models were estimated on each dependent variable with interactions between the organizational source variables and the reporting of protest variable. I plotted predicted probabilities for each analytic construction and each source type under the condition of the reporting of protest vs. non-reporting using the marginsplot command in Stata 13 (other explanatory variables are held at their means and error bars reflect 95 percent confidence intervals). Diagnostic rhetoric is excluded as I only present the significant findings from the marginal effects (see Appendix A, Figures A3.2A-A3.7B).

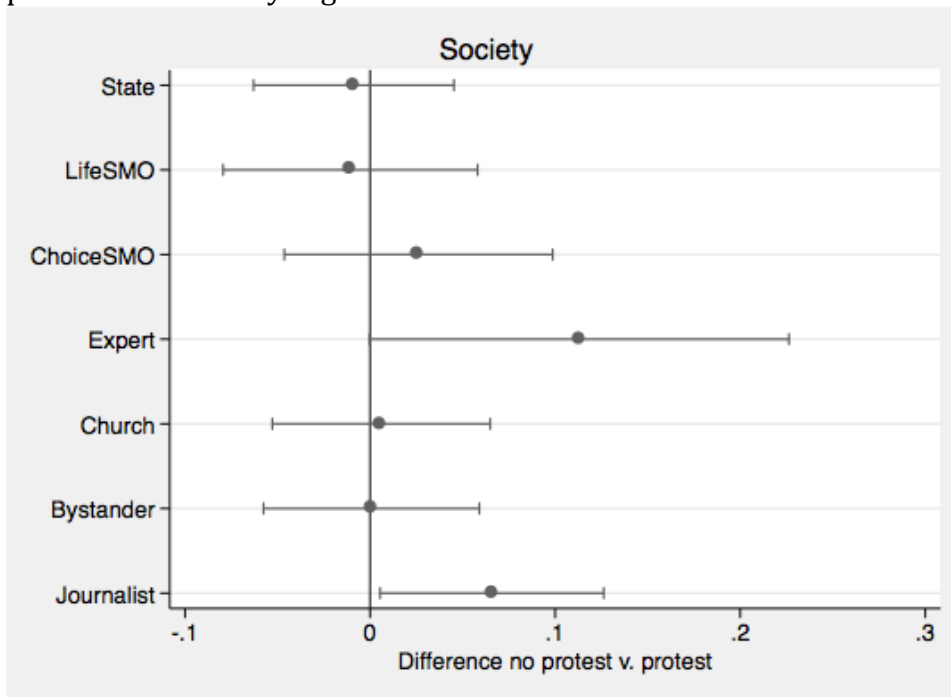
The first figure (Figure 3.1) shows that under the condition of protest reporting, hedging arguments decreased for all speakers with the exception of Church representatives. This suggests that these actors alone were occasionally positioned as voices of a more moderate, middle ground in response to activist protest. It hints at the idea that despite various alliances between church and movement organizations on the abortion issue, church actors avoided dogmatic messages or those evincing a firmness of resolve in the face of protest (c.f., Dillon 1995 for a discussion of Catholic Church discourse during this period). Figures 3.2-3.4 provide even more support to my hypothesis.



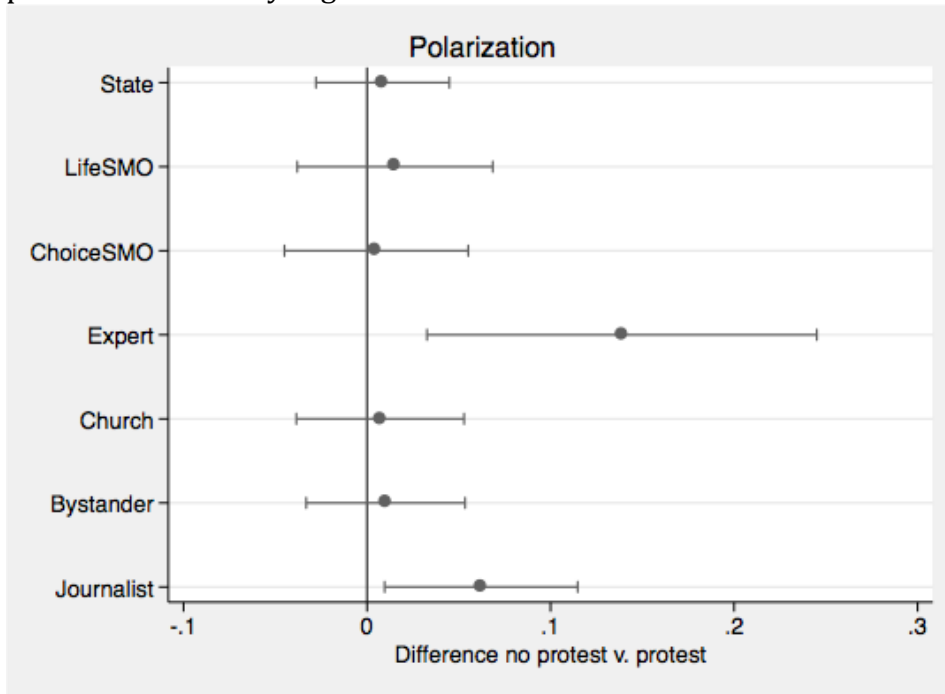
**Figure 3.1:** Difference in predicted share of hedging utterances no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



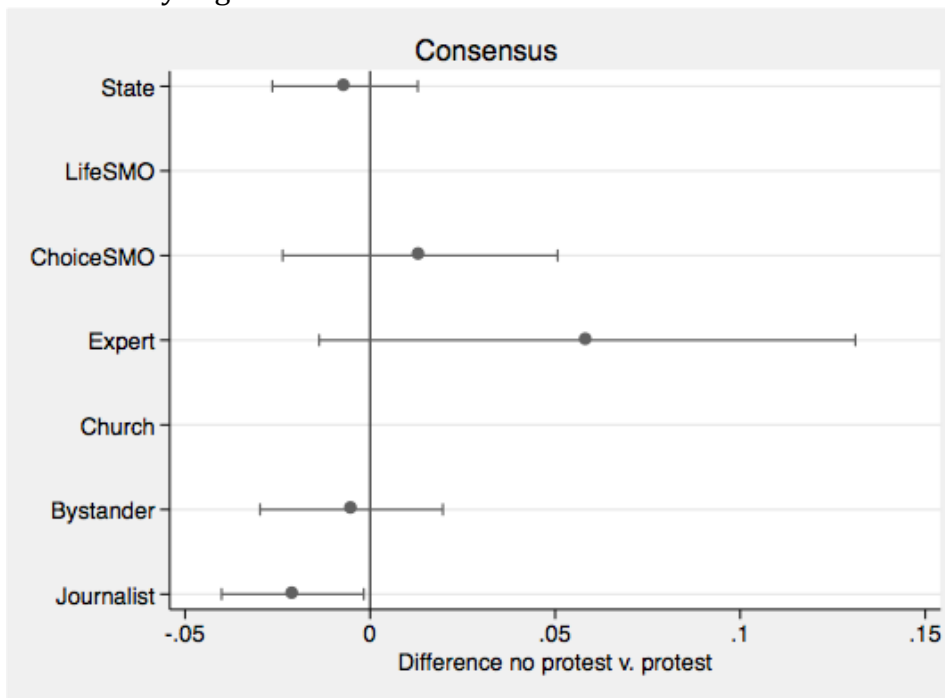
**Figure 3.2:** Difference in predicted share of society utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



**Figure 3.3:** Difference in predicted share of polarization utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



**Figure 3.4:** Difference in predicted share of consensus utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



Note: The model predicted no consensus utterances for Life SMOs and Churches in articles mentioning protest.

Journalists distinguished themselves as guardians of consensus through society and polarization rhetoric when the debate touched on protest. We also see reporters positioned experts as distanced from passionate protestors by routinely portraying them with polarization claims and advocating for consensus. However, journalists chiefly acted as the guardians of social order by speaking on behalf of society, highlighting polarization, and *abandoning* claims that consensus exists or is possible. Beyond supporting the existing insight that protestors are commonly disadvantaged in their media treatment, these analyses suggest that journalists buttress their objective authority by rhetorically distancing themselves from protest, by situating it as beyond the bounds of the public good –as deviant. They also strongly align with my hunch that reporters position themselves as guardians of consensus values through what they say in their articles.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

How did reporters construct a position for themselves as above the fray of political debate on abortion? By presenting themselves as dispassionate and analytic in relation to their sources and even while presenting the issue as polarized and partisan. Reporters clearly adhered to unspoken norms governing language, analytic rhetoric in particular, as an important part of their objectivity performance. More specifically, journalists voiced and organized analytic rhetoric by following specific sourcing rituals, rituals for covering different story subjects, and rituals for structuring arguments. Based on my results, I argue that through the differential application of these rituals reporters performed either the role of neutral observer or the role of guardian of consensus. More importantly, I reveal how

journalists sometimes enact their commitment to objectivity not by being impartial but by being partial to their own understanding of public consensus.

The strategic rituals for neutral observation are relatively familiar. However, and more critically given what little we know about the norms for the guardianship of consensus look like, this chapter illustrates certain rituals as going together to construct the journalistic role of neutral observer as distinct from that of guardian of consensus. The norms for neutral observation include the absence of the author's evaluative voice, letting sources speak for themselves when they initiate their own coverage, and presenting a balance of opposing claims. By contrast, the norms for the guardianship of consensus permit journalists to include their own interpretive voice by using analytic rhetoric, to cast certain sources as co-arbiters of the limits of acceptable conflict, not to apply the balancing norm, and to typify protest as an unacceptable form of political controversy.

More specifically, I show the kind of writing in which the guardianship of consensus can be expressed. I conceptualize five analytic speech constructions within a language for demonstrating objectivity: *diagnostic* speech, highly qualified or *hedging* speech, speech about the public's perception (*society*), and commentary about the prospects for resolving the issue (*polarization* and *consensus*). Journalists performed the role of guardian of consensus by diagnosing the topic of concern without taking a stance, speaking for society, and emphasizing the polarizing nature of debate. In short, journalists primarily reserved for themselves – not “authorized” state speakers or other sources – the role of guardian of consensus through what they said and how they mediated discourse. But the attribution of these analytic speech constructions to different sources in the abortion debate was politically skewed.

Affirming my arguments that the need to appear objective will lead journalists to incorporate experts and state actors as objective speakers, results show experts and officials were routinely portrayed as sources of analytic argumentation. Whereas experts were cast as co-guardians of debate alongside reporters, state actors were primarily cast as objective in the sense of representing middle ground opinions or anti-extreme views on the issue of abortion. Also reflecting the hierarchy of sourcing rituals, bystanders, movement activists, and church representatives were unlikely to be cast as analytic speakers. Taken together, these findings can be broadly interpreted as granting a relative legitimacy to experts and officials that serves to discredit political outsiders, especially movement groups.

My conceptualization of analytic rhetoric and investigation of its appearance across story subjects or coverage occasions points to some implications for the norms of the guardianship of consensus. Analytic argumentation among sources generally decreased when the debate touched on protest. However, journalists turned to the role of guardian of consensus by speaking on behalf of the public, emphasizing their coolness in response to polarizing nature of such activity, and casting experts as co-defenders of the public interest in protest coverage. Also of note, analytic rhetoric was more likely to be incorporated into articles initiated by the media or by the journalists themselves. This supports my argument that analytic rhetoric is used to certify the importance or objective meaningfulness of media-promoted coverage.

Finally, I show that the balancing arguments from opposing sides, one of the core rituals of “objective journalism” reduced all forms of analytic rhetoric and also significantly dampened the author’s analytic voice. To make sense of these findings, I elaborate on a

Hallin's (1986) theory to argue that reporters strategically applied the balance norm to position themselves as neutral observers when they judged the topic of abortion coverage to be legitimately controversial (i.e., within the "sphere of legitimate controversy"). In contrast, they strategically invoked analytic rhetoric to reinforce their role as guardians of consensus when they deemed the topic of controversy inimical to consensual values. They did so by representing themselves as the mouthpiece for the public interest (the "sphere of consensus") and as its advocates by characterizing protest as beyond the bounds of the public good (the "sphere of deviance"). Thus, as has been argued for the entire news media (e.g., Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gans 1979), I show that through these two distinct objectivity performances journalists were crucial arbiters of the mainstream – the dominant view of what is reasonable and moral. Although different speakers attempt to advance claims on behalf of the public or "the nation," journalists disproportionately presented these assertions and used them to place boundaries on the degree of legitimate dissent on the abortion issue.

To review, by examining the analytic rhetoric that appeared in the American abortion debate, I offer an understanding for how journalists use seemingly neutral language to construct a position for themselves that seems to above the fray of impassioned debate. In addition, I show that there is more than one way for journalistic objectivity to be performed in news stories and that there are multiple strategies for doing so. Finally, I illustrate how through the application of strategic rituals – writing in their own voice, showing sources in certain ways, and structuring stories – journalists enact *distinct* performances of objectivity. My approach of linking analytic speech to journalists, their sources, and different coverage contexts also began to show some of the implications of

objectivity performances for how different actors and events are portrayed in the media. First, by performing the role of neutral observer or that of the guardian of consensus journalists demarcate and reinforce the bounds of political acceptability. Second, the norms governing a language of objectivity suggest that being positioned as objective can signal a source is credible and aligned with the public interest. Such positioning is likely to benefit political actors, not only the journalist writing the story.

Despite these contributions, lingering questions remain. For one, we still need to know more about the norms governing language when considering the rituals by which the role of guardianship of consensus and the role of neutral observer are performed. We have seen journalists' use and attribute analytic rhetoric to guard consensus, but how might they perform this role through the use and attribution of extreme forms of speech? In addition, although I explore sourcing rituals, rituals for the occasion of coverage, and the ritual of structuring fairness, the relationship between these strategic rituals can still be clearer. Notably, to better understand the portrayals of actors, we need to investigate the roles they are selected to play in different storytelling contexts. Lastly, this chapter only begins to address *when* journalists use different strategies to perform their objectivity in what they write. I address the former limitations in the next chapter and the question of when in chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 4

### JOINING THE FRAY? JOURNALIST'S USE AND ATTRIBUTION OF OUTRAGE RHETORIC IN THE ABORTION DEBATE

“Extremism is only an effective epithet if moderation, reasonableness, and positions near the center are considered a virtue. Presumably, in a deeply divided culture partisans might attract like-minded persons to their cause if they are indeed *relatively* extremist...But activist rhetoric is also meant to persuade bystander publics – and calling your opponent extremists in order to discredit them seems to indicate that activists recognize that most of the game is played in the center of the field. It may even indicate that activists prefer to think of themselves as moderate and reasonable compared to their adversaries. In any case, it is a de facto recognition of the normative importance of consensus in American politics”  
– Rhys Williams 1997 emphasis added, p.288-9

In the previous chapter, I showed that journalists construct the limits of acceptable conflict through how they write their stories. To perform the role of guardian of public consensus, reporters rhetorically position themselves as not committed to any “side,” as representatives of what “the public” thinks, and as coolly dispassionate compared to the intensity of their subjects. They also guard consensus by ritually casting experts as co-arbiters of consensual political values and political elites as voices of moderation. Finally, they perform the guardian role by amplifying their own “neutral” voice in the coverage of protest in a way that treats it as beyond the bounds of acceptable conflict. In contrast to this performance, journalists sometimes adhere to the standard rituals of neutral



observation: abstaining from commentary, balancing arguments and letting sources interpret the news events they initiate.

Journalistic norms governing *analytic* rhetoric are only one of the ways in which journalists can use language to perform objectivity. Journalists also write about combativeness and antagonism; about staunch partisanship and extreme forms of discourse. If the quality of analytic rhetoric implies that some actors are reasonable, credible, or objective arbiters of political debate, what are the possible implications of extreme discourse, especially for the coverage of social movements? In this chapter, I investigate journalists' coverage of extreme discourse to better understand how journalists construct consensus versus legitimate controversy.

Recent research suggests that various forms of provocative, highly charged, or outraged political discourse used by political actors are effective at generating media interest and political response (Bail 2012; Smith 2010; Stewart 2012; Sobieraj and Berry 2011). These extreme forms of political speech, which I refer to as outrage rhetoric, share a style of verbal antagonism that dramatizes conflict. They are likely to signal broader polarization to audiences than what may actually exist (e.g., Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Cook et al. 1992, Fiorina et al. Pope 2005; Mouw and Sobel 2001; Williams 1997). Being attached to outrage rhetoric is likely to be powerful and risky for all political actors, but especially so for journalists and movement activists.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> In my own efforts to remain "neutral" I use the terms *pro-abortion* or *pro-abortion-rights* to refer to people who seek to remove or reduce restrictions on abortion and *anti-abortion* for those people seeking to increase restrictions – even if these may not be the preferred term for all parties involved. Similarly, I call the two sides of the abortion issue the *pro-life* (or *right-to-life*) and *pro-choice* movements. I also use the appellations Pro-Choice SMOs and Pro-Life SMOs in some instances to refer to the constellation of social movement and political advocacy organizations (SMOs) grouped by issue-focus.

While the previous chapter highlights how journalists participate in shaping debate when taking on the role of guardian of consensus, we do not know if or how this performance includes outrage rhetoric. Reporters that voice outrage to defend consensus values could appear far from objective, especially if they stand out in doing so. But, under certain conditions, journalists could continue to appear impartial even when enacting their commitment to neutrality through voicing outrage in the defense of consensual values. For movements, demonizing opponents may provide “colorful quotes” for reporters, create newsworthy conflict, and demonstrate their resoluteness or threat to authorities. But being portrayed as outraged or hysterical relative, say, to moderate authorities or also possibly to other movement actors can also be discrediting. Previous research suggests that news coverage of activists’ tactics tends to delegitimize activists by portraying them as deviant. But we do not know if the coverage of activists’ rhetoric has the same effect. To find out if journalists’ use and attribution of outrage rhetoric is used to marginalize activists as deviant (as protest was shown to do in the previous chapter), we need to investigate the norms governing this language. I will examine what outrage rhetoric looks like, with whom it appears, and in relation to what storytelling contexts.

Analyzing outrage rhetoric requires two things. First, drawing on Sobieraj and Berry’s (2011, p.20) definition of “outrage” discourse as “involving efforts to provoke visceral responses (e.g., anger, righteousness, fear, moral indignation) from the audience,” I conceptualize and identify two rhetorics of outrage in abortion discourse: attack speech and alarmist speech. Attack speech refers to outraged claims that attack a targeted actor’s ideas, motives or competence, and social associations. Alarmist speech refers to outraged claims that raise the alarm in harshly condemning the threatening behaviors or physical

tactics of an actor. Second, I apply logistic regression to analyze the appearance of outrage rhetoric in the mass media coverage of the abortion debate across different speakers, article characteristics, and political contexts from 1972 through 1994.

In this chapter, I further develop the assertion that media norms for portraying speakers are embedded in journalistic assumptions about the kinds of accounts different actors can provide in certain kinds of stories. Again, this is not to say that the news ignores the real world “out there.” Rather, journalists follow different strategic rituals when deciding which speakers and claims to feature in order to position themselves relative to the issue, the players involved, and their audiences. Therefore, I focus more closely on how journalists draw the boundaries of acceptable conflict through their use of outrage rhetoric and their portrayals of social movements in relation to other political actors. To this end, I begin with a discussion of what I mean by outrage rhetoric.

## **4.1 Outrage Rhetoric**

Scholars have recently begun theorizing and analyzing the quality and consequences of highly charged forms of political communication. These include discourses of apocalypse (Smith 2010; Stewart 2012), incivility (Jamieson 2012), outrage (Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Sobieraj and Berry 2011), the grotesque (Halfmann and Young 2010), and emotional displays of fear or anger (Andsager 2000; Bail 2012). This research broadly demonstrates that polemical, emotional, or inflammatory styles of discourse are drawn on by a variety of political actors to engage audiences, stir controversy, and even compel political action. Notably, in most of these studies the media are treated as a site for assessing these qualities of talk in the public sphere but not for their role in conveying inflammatory talk. For the

sake of consistency and because reporters are treated as agents in their research, I draw on a recent conceptualization of “outrage discourse” by Jeffrey Berry and Sarah Sobieraj (2011, 2014) and refer to this broad category of speech as outrage rhetoric.

Berry and Sobieraj (2014) define outrage discourse as involving “efforts to provoke emotional responses...from the audience through the use of overgeneralization, sensationalism, misleading or patently inaccurate information, ad hominem attacks, and belittling ridicule of opponents” (p. 7). The authors examined the use of outrage discourse by contemporary conservative and progressive media personalities across a variety of mediums and its effects on movements. Whereas their study emphasizes a recent boom in outrage in political media programs (see also Sobieraj and Berry 2011), other studies have shown outrage rhetoric to be a central part of the discursive repertoire of many political actors, including social movements, and not just recently.

Halfmann and Young (2010) explore the use of extreme symbolic strategies, such as horrific or gruesome accounts by the abolitionist movement in the 1830s and the anti-abortion movement as early as the 1960s.<sup>39</sup> Their study also emphasizes that movements deploy outrage rhetoric or, in their case, grotesque imageries as a mobilization tool and to provoke a visceral response. In line with outrage rhetoric, they write: “grotesque imagery can reduce the complexity and dimensionality of issues by privileging ‘gut reactions’ ” (p. 40). To be sure, “hot cognitions” and moral outrage or anger at perceived injustices have long been argued to motivate movement participation (e.g., Gamson 1992, 1995; Goodwin and Jasper 2006; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Jasper 1997; Jasper 2012). However,

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<sup>39</sup> This accords with other historical accounts of the movements on abortion, wherein as early as 1972 activists from both sides intentionally adopted confrontational discursive strategies as a way to delegitimize opponents and attract media attention (Staggenborg 1991).

politicians also have reason to deploy outraged forms of political communication to mobilize constituencies and delegitimize adversaries.

Scholarship demonstrates the ways in which the apocalyptic narratives of politicians depicting antagonists as “evil” compel political action in line with them (Smith 2005; Stewart 2012; see also Alexander and Smith 1993). Similarly, Della Porta (1999) shows that both movement and politicians’ discourse over the right to protest in the German and Italian mass media, was often dominated by outrage rhetoric. Politicians were characterized as Nazis or fascists by movements and, in return, they characterized movement groups as terrorists. In short, we know that outrage rhetoric is also a part of how political elites attempt to justify their views and influence attitudes.

Different forms of outrage rhetoric resemble one another in melodramatizing conflict and making efforts to provoke reactions through ideologically extremizing language, character assassination, and strong emotional displays. However, it is possible to parse out two distinct threads – what I call attack and alarmist speech. The first set, attack speech, includes outrage claims attacking the character of a targeted actor’s ideas, motives or competence, and social associations (Alexander and Smith 1993; Smith 2010; Sobieraj and Berry 2011). The second set, alarmist speech, includes outrage claims that target the threatening practices or physical tactics of an adversary, thereby emphasizing the conflict, challenge, or danger more than the motivations or character of the actor engaged in the activity (e.g., Della Porta 1999; Sobieraj and Berry 2011). This distinction is analytically useful because political actors may be supported for their outraged claims even when their tactics are rejected and vice versa (e.g., Jasper 1997). In fact, both activists and authorities may make the calculation that attacking antagonists for their tactics rather than for the

character of their position is more persuasive or less politically risky (Della Porta 1999; Rohlinger 2002; 2015). And it is possible that journalistic norms for incorporating outraged attack speech and outraged alarmist speech may differ.

In sum, previous scholarship suggests that outrage rhetoric is both powerful and risky for political actors. The vilification and hyperbole that are mainstays of outrage rhetoric can intensify the support of those newly converted or already committed to the cause, and can convert audiences into supporters. Or it can repel them (for a discussion of the difficulty of conceptualizing the effects of outrage, see Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Halfmann and Young 2010; Sobieraj and Berry 2011). Despite the relevance of outrage rhetoric to the politics of dissent, we have competing expectations about the norms that should govern this language in the press.

## **4.2 Patterns in the Coverage of Politics**

As discussed in chapter 1, political actors rely on the media as a political resource to reach their constituency, delegitimize adversaries, and build alliances (Della Porta 1999; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Lipsky 1968; Sigal 1986). But we must keep in mind that the institutionalized standards of the mass media, while not seamless, strongly condition the ability of different actors to gain the influence they seek.

The interwoven norms of objective journalism and democratic public sphere seem to inadvertently reinforce moderate, mainstream views and civility in the mass media (e.g., Ferree 2003; Ferree et al. 2002). To the extent that the media actually honor or are able to meet these demands as a part of the standards of “objective journalism,” political actors should abandon extreme rhetoric to have their message carried in the media. In short, if

we take the idealized vision of the American mass media on its face, we would assume the journalists should not contribute to an uncivil public sphere by voicing outraged claims themselves. Moreover, we would think that the more radical the claim in its content and tenor, the more likely reporters are to deem it a challenge to values esteeming accuracy, mutual respect or order, and consonance with audience beliefs (Gans 1979). The inevitable constraints of newswork, however, inevitably create a disjuncture between the ideals of objective journalism tied to a democratic public sphere and what actually gets produced.

Scholarship recognizing the varied application of objective journalism's core principles and the incompatibility between certain news values, like research on the relationship between media and movements, suggest that political actors may be well served by outrage rhetoric. Producing "quality" stories not only involves a normative vision of an unbiased and fair press but also the sometimes competing values placed on the novelty, vividness, drama, or conflict of a social problem (e.g., Cook 1998; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Indeed, research indicates that outrage rhetoric is likely to gain purchase in the news because it is provocative, it dramatizes conflict, and also because it is a part of the political communication of political actors perceived to be important to cover (Alexander 2006; Bail 2012; Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Halfmann and Young 2010; Smith 2010; Stewart 2012). Thus, outrage rhetoric can be highly compatible with familiar media narratives, scripts, and themes for the coverage of issues of ongoing controversy. It can help to populate stories with clear and familiar characters espousing complementary polemical accounts (Jacobs 2000; Shoemaker and Reese 1991; Smith 2010).

Adjudicating between diverging visions of the character of discourse that should dominate the public sphere requires that we pay attention to what routines and rituals

undergird the “discursive opportunity structure” of the mainstream media (Ferree et al. 2002; Koopmans and Statham 2000; c.f. Koopmans and Olzak 2002). According to Ferree (2003), discursive opportunity structures are “institutionally anchored ways of thinking that provide a gradient of relative political acceptability to specific packages of ideas” (p. 309). To understand how actors should conform these “institutionally anchored ways of thinking” requires we also look closely at what we know about them from patterns in the coverage of politics.<sup>40</sup>

One implicit bias journalists tend to produce is a “structural-institutional” one – based on inter-organizational relationships that are easily taken for granted by newswriters (Cook 1998; Tuchman 1972). A second, related bias journalists tend to produce is a “cultural-institutional” one – based on their own routine-bound experiences and assumptions about their audiences (Gans 1979). While these “biases” are closely interwoven and their labels oversimplifying, I make this distinction to elaborate on how the demands of news production shape the ways different actors are likely to be portrayed in different kinds of stories.

### **Structural “Biases” in News Production**

The relationship between reporters and officials tends to be one of respect due to their mutual-dependency (e.g., Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). As Tuchman (1978) observes: “Challenging the legitimacy of offices holding centralized information dismantles the news net” (p. 87). Thus, in the previous chapter, I showed that journalists reinforce their own

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<sup>40</sup> Of course, the stability of this structure in the media is variable (Ferree et al. 2002; Gamson and Meyer 1996), as will be discussed with over time examinations in chapter 5. However, to get a better sense of which elements are more and less stable it is useful to begin with their dynamics across more discrete coverage contexts (e.g., the actors involved and storytelling contexts).



objective authority by reinforcing the objectivity of their institutional sources (i.e., state and expert speakers). However, it is also certainly possible that sources inhabiting legitimated institutions may be, in certain instances at least, free from the civility requirements of their bureaucratic roles and even the enduring journalistic value of “moderatism” (Gans 1979). Indeed, such an unusual, contentious political performance by bureaucrats could be eminently newsworthy (Mast 2006; Molotch and Lester 1974). We know this in part because although reporters are far less reliant on unofficial actors “outside” the main arenas of politics, such as movement groups (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1986; Sobieraj 2010), these actors can make the news by disrupting the rituals of newsgathering and the standard version of political reality.

Indeed, the relationship between movements and the media is imbalanced because much of the mobilization, support, and impact of social movements hinges on the ability of social movements to gain media attention (e.g., Gamson 1975; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Koopmans 2004; Lipsky 1968; Vliegthart et al. 2005). The vast body of scholarship on the coverage of social movements indicates that newsgathering routines disadvantage movement actors and their contentious politics. From this literature, we generally know that while disruptive, “outsider” tactics help movement actors achieve media attention by disrupting the rituals of newsgathering or the routines of inherently newsworthy powerholders, these tactics undermine gaining a voice and achieving institutional influence (e.g., Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Molotch and Lester 1974). Conversely, when movements’ mimic the more conventional, “insider” tactics of inherently legitimated institutions (e.g., lobbying, petitions) they can increase their chances of gaining a voice and influence while also undermining their relative chances for media attention (Amenta et al.

2012; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Oliver and Maney 2000; Rohlinger 2002). Both of these routes for catering to the “structural” demands of news production have major limitations.

The institutionalized relationships journalists take for granted when following newsgathering rituals often foster a relatively stable favoritism of elites in what gets communicated about politics. Indeed, this privileging can be seen in the product. For instance, it is most often the case that journalists seek out views expressed within mainstream government debate to represent each side of an issue (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Hallin 1986). Similarly, by “indexing” authority and credibility according to structural locations, non-official voices are more likely to be included when “those voices express opinions already emerging in official circles” (Bennett 1990, p.106). But we also know that not all news is pro-government and that movements are not always discredited in their coverage, even in their protest coverage (Gitlin 1980; Hackett and Zhao 1994; Hallin 1986; Schudson 2001). Thus, we must not assume that the rituals of objectivity fostered by structural-institutional routines are the only ones shaping coverage outcomes.

### **Cultural “Biases” in News Production**

The ability to turn occurrences into meaningful stories is essential to the art of newswriting. Journalists not only decide what is news and who is relevant but also choose a storyline that then shapes their decisions about the way to report an event (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). The evidence suggests that journalists write news in ways that characterize or “typify” issues, social actors, and events to make them appear “natural” or “familiar” to audiences (Best 1989; Coleman and Ross 2010; Fairclough 2003; Tuchman 1978). They do so not only by relying on routine-bound knowledge of earlier cases, but also

based on assumptions about the background knowledge of their audiences and the shared norms, beliefs, and attitudes held by that audience.

This process of crafting stories that will appear familiar based on assumptions of what is familiar is recursive and the precise mechanisms involved not well understood. However, we know the process tends to result in certain subjects or storylines being seen as having “quality” that goes beyond their timeliness, their capacity to elicit human interest, and their focus on conflict or drama (Cook 1998). For example “anti-routine” or contentious coverage occasions may not only disrupt the newsgathering of “politics as usual” but also meet journalists’ expectation that a “quality” story be interesting. Scholars have repeatedly shown that protestors can make themselves (if not their messages) newsworthy by playing into news values that generate audience interest (Bennett 1996; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Sobieraj 2010). Most highly esteemed are storylines that go along with the “enduring values” of journalism (e.g., nationalism, social order, and pastoral Americana) because they align with traditional or widely held American political beliefs (Cook 1998; Gans 1979). Out of habit, reporters interweave news routines with news values and with narrative templates when deciding how to write stories.<sup>41</sup>

In his examination of newsroom production practices, Mark Fishman (1980, p. 131) describes the process of linking sources to events and to storylines. He writes: “[Reporters] define for their sources the terms of an acceptable account, the terms in which all the various accounts will be framed, and the terms in which the event will be described in the news story.” To reiterate the ramifications of this finding, no matter how actors actually

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<sup>41</sup> Notably, this conceptualization bears an affinity to that of “master frames” (Snow and Benford 1988).

speak, how they are represented in the press is not necessarily how they would choose to represent themselves.

The scholarship that has looked at the messages sources are quoted with in media coverage supports this picture. For instance, even when not engaged in protest, activists are often quoted in ways that do not transmit substantive claims or policy views to readers (Ferree 2002; Hallin 1986), such as when they are asked to explain the logistical details of a protest or financing (Amenta et al. 2012; Sobieraj 2010). And even though reporters do not want to alienate the powerful officials central to their purposes of newsmaking, not all coverage of political insiders includes their substantive arguments (Schudson 2001). This is evident when election coverage focuses on a “horse-race” between candidates (Jamieson and Cappella 1998). Combined, these findings suggest that the social roles journalists expect their subjects to perform are not uniform.

In some corroboration of this assessment, Todd Gitlin (1980) classically argued that movements must conform “to journalistic notions (themselves embedded in history) of what a ‘story’ is. What an ‘event’ is, what a ‘protest’ is” (p. 3). Indeed, movements must struggle to get their claims to fit media templates. Subsequent research shows that instead of allowing movements to cast themselves in a public role or convey the public interest, reporters prefer movement actors to personalize the issue (Bennett 1988; Ferree et al. 2002). But, even here, while narratives can be powerful political and discursive tools for movements to make the news (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002; Gamson 2001, Polletta 2006), recent research suggests that journalists may dismiss activists’ stories that seem pre-prepared or “out of character” as inauthentic. Notably, Sarah Sobieraj (2010, 2012) argues that journalists have distinct expectations for the types of accounts government officials and

movement associations should provide. Studying reporters and their coverage of activists protesting political campaign events, she found that journalists expected “real” activists to be spontaneous while providing self-interested and emotional (but not too emotional) accounts. Journalists worked to fulfill this expectation by “auditioning” protestors until they found ones meeting their authenticity requirements. Sobieraj’s findings also suggest that imitating political insiders will not pay off for movements. In sum, this scholarship proposes that journalists both typify speakers and they typify events, often in relation to one another, to tell quality stories.

Combining what we know about the complex rituals of newsmaking, how political actors and events are represented in *relation* to other actors and events, is crucial to understanding the quality of their depictions in the media. Put differently, the language journalists use and attribute to speakers depends on the political actors, the subject of the story, and their relations to one another because these are all a part of the performance of an objective news story. Despite the relevance of outrage rhetoric to the politics of dissent, a number of questions remain about the media norms governing this language.

How might reporters perform their own “objectivity” through their structuring of outrage rhetoric? Are authorities represented as moderate against hysterical movement groups? Are movement groups on both sides of an issue represented as outraged, or is one side represented more as a voice of reason? In what story contexts is outrage rhetoric likely to appear in media coverage? And what are the implications of these patterns for the journalistic performance of objectivity? To address these questions, I focus on the reportorial performance of objectivity in relation to outrage rhetoric and two sets of journalist expectations for storytelling rituals that should influence the appearance or

discursive acceptability of outrage rhetoric: the types of accounts different actors are expected provide and the types of accounts that fit with the way stories are organized.

### **4.3 Hypotheses**

As discussed in the previously, a standard journalistic ritual for neutral observation is attributing positions and interpretations to other political actors (Tuchman 1972). Following this objectivity protocol allows reporters to demonstrate they are presenting “just the facts” when constructing a news story. But reporters do not always adhere to this protocol, just as they do not always balance opposing positions in their stories (Hallin 1986). Instead, as I demonstrated, journalists can use analytic rhetoric that is moderate, dispassionate, and seemingly impartial to perform the role of guardians of consensus. However, as part of this role for delimiting the boundaries of acceptable conflict it may also be strategic for journalists to directly voice outrage (Gans 1979; Hallin 1986). In other words, journalists can buttress their own authority by positioning themselves as analytic in comparison to the subjectivity, intensity, and outrage of their subjects *or* by joining the fray as outraged spokespersons for the public interest. Against this backdrop, I offer the following two competing hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1A: Journalists are unlikely to affirm their objectivity by voicing outrage.*

*Hypothesis 1B: Journalists are likely to affirm their objectivity by voicing outrage.*

### **Source Expectations**

To address media source expectations, I begin with the ways in which journalists are likely to depict authorities. The evidence suggests that the inherently newsworthy structural

location of authorities adds an air of credibility to news reports that source them because their accounts are “bureaucratically organized” (Fishman 1980, p. 51). Relatedly, the culturally-influenced news values of journalism suggest that state actors are expected to speak on behalf of their office, offer reasonable claims, discuss the common good, and generally serve as representatives of the national leadership and democratic order (Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Sobieraj 2010). And lastly, I showed in the previous chapter that journalists cast state actors as “objective” in the sense that they represent a middle ground position. This is in line with the argument that officials can reinforce popular consensus when they do not “marginalize” stable majority opinion (Bennett 1990). Thus, despite some findings that state actors are shown in the media drawing on outrage to justify their positions (e.g., Smith 2010), I do not expect this to be common.

*Hypothesis 2: State actors are unlikely to be cast as outraged.*

Scholars of media and movements point to two competing sets of expectations about the kinds of discourse that are likely to be attached to movements and their representatives. Some research suggests that movements must abandon their radical politics and mimic conventional politics for their messages to be aired in the media (Amenta et al 2012; Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1984). And journalists are shown to prefer movement claims that are moderate, mainstream, and not overly emotional (Ferree 2003; Sobieraj 2010). The contraposition is that outrage rhetoric may be a central part of how journalists expect activists to speak and that attributing outrage to activists may even be a rhetorical tool that journalists use to discredit them. In other words, outrage rhetoric can make movement claims newsworthy along the same lines that violent or confrontational collective action can (e.g., Bail 2012). As movements are more dependent on journalists

than the other way around, reporters are less likely to be held accountable for portraying activists in ways the activists would prefer to avoid (e.g., Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). While the previous chapter demonstrated that movement representatives are among the least likely to be attributed analytic rhetoric, it did not address if casting movements as outraged could help journalists reinforce their performances of objectivity. Recognizing these distinct expectations, I offer two competing hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 3A: Social movement actors are not likely to be cast as outraged compared to other speakers.*

*Hypothesis 3B: Social movement actors are the most likely to be cast as outraged compared to other speakers.*

Of course, different movements can be portrayed according to their actual qualities as they relate to the demands of news production. The abortion debate provides an excellent case for examining the coverage of outrage rhetoric because the “pro-life” and “pro-choice” movements differ in terms of their emergence in relation to the status quo at the beginning of the research period, their organizational infrastructures, as well as their tactics and media strategies (see chapter 2). The pro-life movement emerged on the scene later, growing mainly in a backlash against the status quo of *Roe v. Wade* that established a legal right for women to seek abortions. Its organizational infrastructure was largely embedded in the Catholic Church, which was the vanguard in the movement against abortion liberalization during the early years of debate. And the pro-life movement not only had weaker ties to media, it also had factions engaged in more violent and disruptive tactics than the pro-choice movement.

The pro-choice movement emerged prior to the *Roe* decision and came to be supported by longstanding and prominent organizations to defend the new status quo.



Leading movement groups tended to be more professional, media-savvy and, although they often mobilized in larger numbers than their countermovement, their tactics were less violent. Prior scholarship on this movement has shown that its organizations engaged in vilifying the opposition in the media (McCaffrey and Keyes 2000). However, Rohlinger's (2006, 2015) research reveals that some pro-choice movement groups made the strategic choice to remain silent during acrimonious debate to avoid discrediting themselves (Rohlinger 2006, 2015). In addition, although I found that both movements were unlikely to be cast as neutral or nonpartisan by reporters, the main difference between them was that pro-choice activists were not attributed with nuanced, middle ground speech (hedging rhetoric). Based on these differing characteristics of the two movements, insights from prior scholarship, and the findings from chapter 3, I offer the following two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 4: Pro-life movement actors are the most likely to be cast as outraged through speech attacking pro-choice positions.*

*Hypothesis 5: Pro-choice movement actors are the most likely to be cast as outraged through alarmist speech about threatening tactics rather than through speech attacking pro-life positions.*

This is not to suggest movements are monolithic when we know that they are not (e.g., Meyer and Rochon 1997; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). Of course, we are likely to see outrage attributed to certain organizations and not others. Whereas some movement organizations are virtually a part of the political process others engage in sporadic protests that don't get coverage at all. These are hypotheses about overall trends and patterns, which provide insight into the predominant media treatment of movement actors.

Finally, reporters have been found to cite bystanders as a way of inserting their own opinions while appearing impartial, to serve as the voice of the public gallery, or to provide (generally hostile) eyewitness reactions to activism (Dardis 2006; Gamson 2004; McLeod

and Hertog 1992, 1999; Sigal 1986). While this role does not suggest what type of outrage bystanders are likely to be attributed, given their strong structural disadvantage and the fact that they can be used to provide “colorful quotes,” it would not be surprising if journalists would position bystanders as outraged.

*Hypothesis 6: Bystanders are likely to be cast as outraged.*

### **The Subjects & Structure of the Story**

As seen in the previous chapter, a key characteristic of news stories is the arena of politics that creates the news peg or “hook” on which the story hangs – the type of activity or actors driving coverage (e.g., Amenta et al. 2012). One would expect that the norms governing outrage rhetoric would differ according to what is driving the coverage. In contrast to my examination of media-initiated stories as occasions for analytic rhetoric, in this chapter I highlight how some stories are likely to be nested in the “sphere of legitimate controversy” and others in the “sphere of deviance” (Hallin 1986).

The most routine political news is comprised of stories occasioned by actors with the most habitual access to the media. Actors with habitual access are those who are a part of routine news beats and are representatives of established institutions and the publics they serve (Molotch and Lester 1974). State actors, experts from academic, scientific and legal fields, and church representatives are the most likely to be “members of the club [who] enter the media forum through the front door when they choose” (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993, p. 121; see also Cook 1998; Steele 1995). Reporters view these actors’ activities as newsworthy and interesting by proxy of their important place on the beat and not necessarily for any drama, novelty, or conflict they may provide. Thus, the combination of inherent newsworthiness and credibility makes these subjects (including the contests

between or among them) primary candidates for being treated as legitimate controversies where journalists follow the norms of objective journalism.

In contrast to routine coverage occasions are “anti-routine” ones (Molotch and Lester 1973). Stories occasioned by contentious events, or promoted by those who are not “members of the club,” are deemed newsworthy for their disruption of routine political newsgathering or for the interest they offer (e.g., Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Molotch and Lester 1974). This is in line with what has long been argued for the coverage of movement activism in the media. Movement activity, disruptive protest, and crime coverage are among the most common coverage occasions for movements because they satisfy the media’s craving for narratives of disruption or conflict (e.g., Gitlin 1980; Sobieraj 2010). If the drama and conflict generated by unofficial actors and their relatively “contentious” activities is because they run counter to the routine media depictions of political reality, I expect that such coverage should often be relegated to the sphere of deviance and increase polemical argumentation. Taken together, the distinctions between routine and contentious story subjects in relation to the boundaries of acceptable conflict suggest the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 7: Outrage rhetoric is more likely to appear in stories occasioned by movement activity, protest, or crime.*

The distinction between routine and contentious political coverage is also crucial to understanding how the constellation of sources is linked to the event being covered. Reporter’s notions of how actors and their speech fit the “script” of an unfolding story is likely to influence the attribution of outrage rhetoric. For instance, even when activists initiate protest coverage, journalists often rely on the responses of third parties or

authorities to whom they are more likely to be held accountable and who can certify the “real” importance of the story (e.g., Cook 1998). Rather than treating the initiators of such stories as sources, especially activists, they are routinely treated as *objects* to be discussed for the deviance of their behaviors (e.g., Ashley and Olson 1998; Dardis 2006; Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1986). It is not shocking that the coverage of movements and “anti-routine” political subjects are treated as a spectacle in the media if we consider not only protest but also contentious coverage in general as a part of the sphere of deviance.

Despite the lack of attention to the claims of movements in coverage, coverage other than protest, and in comparison to other actors, existing studies provide some guidance as to how activists and authorities will be portrayed in what I am calling contentious news stories. In contrast to the supposition that movements must abandon extreme action and speech to gain a voice in the media, there is some evidence that reporters are interested in the motivations of disruptive actors. The journalists Sobieraj (2010) interviewed said they wanted to know why activists were engaged in protest or violence even though they didn’t end up including these motives in most of their stories.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, when movements promote less disruptive, but still technically non-routine political activities, like press releases or lobbying, it is argued reporters take the demands of movement actors more seriously (e.g., Amenta et al. 2012). Furthermore, I anticipate that the familiar, enduring storylines of national leadership and social order should creep into contentious political news. When they do, authorities are likely to be cast as representatives of social order and movements as a challenge or threat to that order (Gans 1979). It would not be surprising to find both authorities and movements portrayed as deviating from civil political rhetoric in

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<sup>42</sup> This reinforces the idea that journalists have a difficult time consciously articulating the implicit rules they follow when newsmaking.

such coverage. Piecing together these links between the occasions and storylines of news to the character of claims actors will be attributed, I offer the following two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 8: State actors are likely to be cast as outraged in contentious coverage, especially through alarmist speech that identifies threats to social order.*

*Hypothesis 9: Movement actors are the most likely to be cast as outraged in contentious coverage.*

Finally, the canonical strategic ritual of “balancing” opposing viewpoints from “both sides” of an issue can also be viewed as a storytelling ritual for delimiting the boundaries of acceptable conflict. Despite being a fixture of objective journalism, the kind of story being told through the pairing of competing viewpoints is complicated. The balancing norm can skew coverage outcomes by suggesting parity between arguments when none may exist or when support is unevenly distributed (e.g., Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). In contrast to this interpretation, other scholars suggest that journalists can use balance as a means to guard consensus by cuing audiences to the illegitimacy of counter-consensus positions (Koopmans 2004; Wade 2012). Regardless of the intent of the journalist writing the story and the ways balance may be read by audiences, we know that balancing protocols are selectively applied.

Journalists abandon standard objectivity protocols, especially the balance norm, when an issue is deemed consensual or unacceptably contested, such as in times of national threat, public danger, or tragedy (Hallin 1986; Schudson 2002). This was supported in the previous chapter, when we saw journalists rhetorically guarded consensus by speaking on behalf of society and opining against polarization when reporting protest (but not when argument balance was applied). In contrast, one can expect that because argument balance

firmly positions journalists as uninvolved and not committed to any side, they generally perform the role of neutral observer while reinforcing the ideals of democratic discourse (i.e., inclusivity, civility, and dialogue). This leads me to argue that to understand the type of story being told through balance we must pay attention to where journalists rhetorically position themselves and others as outraged when applying the balance norm. For example, if alarmist speech points to violations of social order by groups challenging the status quo, public danger, or the sometimes tragic outcomes of violent tactics, balance is unlikely to be applied to such consensus-violating, deviant behaviors. Similarly, if journalists are to raise the alarm themselves by voicing outraged alarmist speech, they will not do so in balanced articles where they are performing the role of neutral observer. Using this same logic, journalists are unlikely to voice outraged attacks when they apply the balance norm. This leads me to the following two general hypotheses about balanced stories:

*Hypothesis 10: Outrage rhetoric is less likely to appear in balanced articles.*

*Hypothesis 11: Journalists are unlikely to voice outrage in balanced articles.*

#### **4.4 Data & Measures**

As the dataset should now be familiar to the reader, I only briefly review the sample used for the purposes of this chapter: investigating the appearance of outrage rhetoric across speakers and article characteristics, while controlling for broader political contexts. To examine the quality of arguments that are outraged, I limit the sample to those utterances that include some interpretation about the issue of abortion. Statements of facts, processes, procedures, and laws that provide no evaluation or justification are not considered

arguments in this research (Ferree et al. 2002).<sup>43</sup> As in the previous chapter on analytic rhetoric, the resulting sample consists of 6,646 evaluative utterances that appeared in a total of 1,113 articles (see Appendix A, Table A4.1 for descriptive statistics).<sup>44</sup>

### **Dependent Variables:**

To identify outrage rhetoric in the newspaper coverage of abortion, I drew on Sobieraj and Berry's (2011) definition and operationalization of "outrage" discourse:

"[A] particular form of political discourse involving efforts to provoke visceral responses (e.g., anger, righteousness, fear, moral indignation) from the audience through the use of overgeneralizations, sensationalism, misleading or patently inaccurate information, ad hominem attacks, and partial truths about opponents  
...In a sense, outrage is incivility writ large." (p. 20).

I utilized this general concept and many of their coding categories. However, when content-analyzing speech about abortion, a distinction emerged between outraged discourse that condemned the threatening behaviors or physical tactics of an actor (e.g., bombings, blockades, protests) and outraged discourse attacking a targeted group's ideas, motives or competence, or social associations. In addition to making the distinction between attack and alarmist speech, as I detail next, I ultimately relied on three features of outrage

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<sup>43</sup> While some additional insight could be gained from examining statements without evaluative content, it would prevent me from ensuring reliability (non-evaluative utterances are not contained in the utterance content data), from comparing across actors (especially my ability to examine journalists rhetoric), and, thus, is considered beyond the scope of this inquiry. And again, talk that provides no evaluation or justification were not considered arguments in the original data (Ferree et al. 2002). I apply the more inclusive operationalization of journalists as it best captures the concept of the author "speaking" in the text. Journalist commentary captures when the author does not attribute interpretations to other actors via quoting or paraphrasing. See Chapter 1 and Appendix A, tables A4.2 through A4.4 for a replication of the results.

<sup>44</sup> This constitutes 97 percent of the original sample of articles, 77 percent of quoted or paraphrased statements, and all evaluative utterances content. These figures reflect the unweighted, raw data.

discourse that are comparable to research on other forms of extreme discourse: ideologically extremizing language, character assassination, and emotional displays.<sup>45</sup>

To construct my dependent variables, I grouped specific idea elements into three special purpose argument clusters of outrage rhetoric: “anti-choice” attack speech, “anti-life” attack speech, and alarmist speech (see Methodological Appendix B for examples of coding elements, a more detailed codebook available upon request).<sup>46</sup> Ferree et al.’s (2002) original coding descriptions proved useful for identifying ideas that were outraged in attacking certain positions or outraged about alarming tactics. Beyond using these descriptions, I extensively examined the content of evaluative utterances with each idea to ensure that the argument fit the conceptualization of outrage. A number of iterative procedures were followed to ensure the validity and reliability of the coding categories.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, I constructed *outrage rhetoric* as a dichotomous measure of all claims-making that includes ‘anti-choice’ attack speech, ‘anti-life’ attack speech, or alarmist speech.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Extremizing speech: “The reference here is to extremist language used to critically describe a person, group of people, branch of the government, political party, or other organization or their behaviors, planned behaviors, policies, or views.” Character assassination: “Does the author or speaker *attempt to damage the reputation* of a person...or other organization by slander or misrepresentation of their views, motives, or behaviors?” Emotional displays: “This variable captures...emotional displays in reference to a person... or other organization... Emotional display is about the *form* of expression” (Sobieraj and Berry 2011, p. 40).

<sup>46</sup> It worth noting that the authors of the dataset used here operationalized argument clusters as well (Ferree et al. 2002). Some of the ideas that they identified as “hot-button” are included in my categorization of outrage rhetoric.

<sup>47</sup> I conducted content analyses of 50 percent samples of utterances including any potentially inflammatory claims. If an idea element contained less than 50 utterances, every utterance was examined to ensure accuracy. Categories were refined accordingly and I coded an additional 20 percent random stratified sample of arguments within each idea type. Second, I searched through the text of all utterances for certain catchphrases or terms that were coded in the original data, as well as ones that emerged from my examination of utterances, to ensure that my coding categories were accurate. Third, I examined the stances coded for speakers to affirm that the speech reflected direct attacks. I examined an additional ten percent sample of utterance content from each category to be certain of categorizations and their exhaustiveness.

<sup>48</sup> In line with prior studies using this same data, my dependent variable measures identify the presence of any one of these types of arguments, regardless of the other idea types included in the speaker’s utterances.



## **Attack Speech: Targeting Motives, Character, & Associations**

The different features of outraged attack speech are often overlapping, but I highlight a few using examples from the data. Attacks can be provocative and hostile by linking the target to highly charged symbols, such as slavery, genocide, and Nazism. The following quote from a pro-life advocate captures a clear instance of an attack using such an analogy:

“The logical sequel to the destruction of what are called ‘unwanted children’ will be elimination of what will be called ‘unwanted lives’ – a legislative measure that so far in all human history only the Nazi government ventured to enact.”

As anticipated, state actors were also attributed with such attack speech. For example, Republican Congressman Henry Hyde, the chief sponsor of the 1976 Hyde Amendment was quoted referring to abortion as “a sort of holocaust of the unborn.” Importantly, pro-choice supporters can also discredit the use of these symbols. For instance, a columnist wrote: “[Hyde] was appropriating the abortion debate’s nastiest canard – that making abortion available to the poor is deliberately tantamount to committing genocide.”

Attack speech can also highlight the hypocrisy, intentional dishonesty, or conspiratorial nature of opponents. For instance, an abortion provider was quoted with the following claim: “What about people starving in the South? What about all the deaths in Vietnam? Where were the right-to-lifers then? Don’t tell me they’ve got reverence for life – they don’t give a damn!!!” Character attacks and extremizing language are also evident in statements equating abortion with murder and mass murder. For example, “Anyone who participates in the act [abortion], no matter how small the contribution, is just as guilty of murder as the perpetrator of the abortion” (Catholic Church representative). Similarly, “God has always judged nations that have destroyed classes of people...[Abortionists] are brutally murdering the defenseless and innocent...We’ve got their blood on our hands”

(pro-life activist). It is worth noting that claiming abortion is some form of murder is distinct from claiming that a fetus is a child. The latter are not included as attack speech.

Lastly, although some of the given examples point to provocative emotional displays of anger or fear, the next two quotes highlight emotional displays more prominently. Referring to the controversial film *The Silent Scream*, a bystander describes one of its scenes: “We see the child’s mouth open in a silent scream. This is the silent scream of a child threatened imminently with extinction.” Another bystander quote demonstrates the ability to insert more general claims into attack speech: “the unholy alliance of the Catholic church's male hierarchy, the Ku Klux Klan, the Mormon Church and the John Birch Society...would rather have us maimed and killed by illegal abortions than allow us control over our own bodies.” As these examples indicate and as highlighted in previous research (Rohlinger 2002), it is fairly easy to identify ‘anti-life’ from ‘anti-choice’ attack speech.<sup>49</sup>

### **Alarmist Speech: Targeting Tactics**

Although they bear a strong resemblance to attack rhetoric, alarmist rhetoric differs conceptually in three main ways. For one, alarmist speech emphasizes the inappropriateness of the tactics of *challenge* more than conventional policy issues (e.g., the rights of the fetus versus the woman, the right to privacy). Secondly, unlike attack speech, alarmist speech does not require a clear policy stance regarding anything other than tactics (e.g., limiting the access to abortion in many cases). And third, alarmist arguments highlight threatening tactics of an individual actor or a group, but may not merit the label of an attack despite their outrage. In short, the tactics are the primary problem identified. In

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<sup>49</sup> Both idea elements and speakers were coded for their stance on abortion in the original data. This enabled me to pair these codes with my own intensive coding to test the reliability of these speech categories.

some cases, threatening tactics are linked to the unsavory character of those deploying them, but the actions are used to demonstrate this character.

“Even in wartime, an enemy hesitates before bombing the clinics and hospitals on the other side...Anti-choice fanatics are so callous, so cruel, that they bomb only the clinics. These are serious, horrible crimes being committed by those who oppose a woman’s right to choose” (pro-choice movement spokesperson).

While this example illustrates how anger is often conveyed, fear is also commonplace. Take the following quote: “Listening to the police tell you that you must now drive home a different way each night and check the mail and your automobile for bombs is frightening.”

To reiterate, alarmist speech primarily focuses on condemning or demanding intervention to halt the transgressive tactics of challengers and do not necessarily attack their ideas or character. As a result, pro-life activists can also identify threats stemming from the violence of other pro-life supporters:

“Knowing that violence begets violence, the pro-life movement has exercised its right to choose nonviolence in pursuing all legal means available to save unborn lives. Those who choose violence are not in touch with us.”

As these examples also suggest, all forms of outrage rhetoric may enable sources to insert their positions alongside their condemnation of an opponents character or tactics, such as advocating “a woman’s right to choose” or wanting to “save unborn lives.” However, a final example illustrates how condemning tactics can side-step other substantive policy components of abortion and constitute alarm rather than an attack: “Pledging full support from the FBI, ... condemned the ‘senseless, horrible tragedy’ of Friday’s shootings.”

## **Independent Variables:**

*Organizational Sources/Speakers.* – To capture who is attached to outrage rhetoric, I rely on the specific speaker information linked to each utterance, including the journalists writing the articles. Speakers were clustered into seven organizational categories: speakers embedded in the state (legislative, executive, judicial, and political parties at all levels of government), those affiliated with pro-life movement organizations (“Life SMOs”), speakers affiliated with pro-choice movement organizations (Choice SMOs), expert speakers affiliated with medical, legal, or academic institutions, speakers affiliated with church organizations, unaffiliated actors (bystanders), and the journalist/author.

*Contentious Coverage Occasions.* – To capture routine (0) versus non-routine, *contentious news* (1) occasions or story subjects, I constructed a dichotomous variable. The original data coded for articles reporting protest as well as the political “arena” of coverage. The latter is defined as the “the institutional realm in the society from which this activity [generating coverage] is coming.” Routine political coverage occasions include stories initiated by activities in legislative, judicial, executive, political party, church, medical and research institutions, and media/culture arenas. Contentious coverage occasions include stories that report protest, those emanating from social movement activity, and those driven by the activities of crime and law enforcement or covered on the crime “beat.”<sup>50</sup> Notably, measures for a diversity of organizational voices were highly correlated with contentious coverage occasions. In other words, contentious news was found to overwhelmingly proxy the presence of non-state speakers. This suggests that story templates for contentious politics are less likely to be dependent on state sources.

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<sup>50</sup> Models were also run with the original arena variable and protest variable and the findings were robust. Moreover, including crime coverage is a part of recognizing that contentious coverage can also be routinized.

*Argument Balance.* – As a premier protocol for demonstrating objectivity, *argument balance* measures the presence of both pro and anti abortion rights arguments in an article (1) versus one-sided arguments (0). This variable captures the standard media practice for constructing fairness through a balanced article structure and is also used to capture a “dialogue” between actors with opposing viewpoints.

*Control Variables: Media and Political Contexts.* – I also include six control variables that are associated with media coverage outcomes. The first three control for article characteristics. The length of an article is sometimes used as an indicator of the prominence of a story (e.g., Andrews and Caren 2010; Shoemaker 1984). Supporting this idea, in this data, front-page coverage (another measure of prominence) is positively correlated with article length. Therefore, I incorporate a count measure of the number of utterances in the article as a control for article *length/prominence*.<sup>51</sup> Editorial and news sections are clearly demarcated in newspapers as having different story formats that follow different reporting conventions. As features and editorials are argued to signal the absence of “straight objective” reporting (Gans 1979; Schudson 2001, Tuchman 1978), I also include a dummy variable for whether the article is a traditional *news report* (1) or not (0). And I control for the newspaper in which the article appeared (*NYT* =1, *LAT* =0).

Three measures are included to capture broader political contexts that can influence mass-mediated discourse. To capture Supreme Court decisions concerning abortion, I constructed a dichotomous variable for each year in which there was any major *court case* decision (see Methodological Appendix). I control for presidential elections as signaling changes in the political environment and because contests between the two major parties

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<sup>51</sup> An alternative measure for the number of paragraphs yielded robust results.

are argued to be legitimately controversial (Hallin 1896). The *election* variable is a dichotomous measure for each year in which a presidential election took place (1) versus no election (0). Lastly, I control for change over time as broad shifts between periods. The three *time periods* used for this analysis are the years 1972-76, 1977-88, and 1989-94, which are bracketed by three major “critical discourse moments” (see chapter 1 and 3).

## 4.5 Analysis

To give a sense of the prevalence of outrage rhetoric over the entire research period, Table 4.1 is descriptive. Looking at the bottom of the table, we see that twenty-four percent of all evaluative utterances and forty-nine percent of percent of articles included some form of outrage rhetoric. At the both levels, attack speech was more prevalent than alarmist speech. However, attacks on pro-choice positions made up the bulk of attack speech.

**Table 4.1** Outrage rhetoric frequencies and percentages

	Utterances		Articles	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Alarmist Speech	663	10	288	20
Attack Speech	1,009	15	494	43
‘Anti-choice’ attack	704	11	372	32
‘Anti-life’ attack	307	5	210	18
Any Outrage Rhetoric	1,612	24%	566	49%
N	6,646		1,146	

Note: percentages are unweighted and do not add up to the total percentages because speakers can include multiple arguments in a single utterance. I use a conservative estimate for articles by including all articles, whether framing occurred or not.

To test my hypotheses, I analyze the appearance of outrage rhetoric by looking at organizational speakers and story features (contentious coverage occasions and argument balance) using logistic regression. The logistic regression models presented here employ

survey weights adjusting for different inclusion probabilities of articles over the research period. The presence of outrage in an utterance was modeled as a binary outcome. It is straightforward to interpret the results as the relative chances of a claim communicating outrage (any outrage rhetoric, 'anti-life' attack, 'anti-choice' attack, and alarmist speech). Four different models were run on each dependent variable presented in Tables 4.2 and 4.3. I only present model building for the first dependent variable, the composite measure of outrage rhetoric (though all results not presented here are available upon request).

Model 1 (Table 4.2) includes the indicators for organizational speakers along with the control variables. In terms of the controls, we see that longer, more prominent articles and news report increase the appearance of outrage rhetoric. Although the influence of broader political contexts and more detailed longitudinal changes will be discussed in chapter 5, it is notable that outrage rhetoric decreases in years of major Supreme Court decisions on abortion. This is an interesting contrast to the significant positive relationship of court decisions on appearance of analytic rhetoric.

Turning to organizational sources, the category of state speakers is omitted because this reference group provides a theoretically relevant baseline of authorized actors against which we can assess how journalists cast themselves and other speakers as outraged. Lending support to my expectations, we see from Model 1 that state speakers are the least likely to be cast as outraged. Relative to state actors, all other speakers are significantly more likely to appear as outraged. That said, pro-life activists, church representatives, and bystanders are the most strongly distinguished in being cast as outraged.

**Table 4.2** Coefficients from logistic regression models of outrage rhetoric

Independent Variables	(1) Organizational Sources		(2) Contentious Coverage		(3) Balance		(4) Full	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
<i>Source (State Omit.)</i>								
Life SMOs	1.381***	(0.127)	1.044***	(0.130)	1.389***	(0.127)	1.049***	(0.130)
Choice SMOs	0.459***	(0.123)	0.146	(0.129)	0.453***	(0.123)	0.145	(0.129)
Experts	0.357**	(0.123)	0.315*	(0.125)	0.339**	(0.124)	0.309*	(0.126)
Church	1.177***	(0.132)	1.138***	(0.138)	1.193***	(0.132)	1.143***	(0.138)
Bystander	0.692***	(0.116)	0.418***	(0.122)	0.682***	(0.117)	0.417***	(0.122)
Journalist	0.273**	(0.090)	0.168+	(0.090)	0.255**	(0.090)	0.163+	(0.090)
Contentious news			1.139***	(0.070)			1.127***	(0.071)
Argument Balance					-0.254***	(0.069)	-0.075	(0.071)
<i>Controls</i>								
News Report	0.419***	(0.072)	0.295***	(0.074)	0.498***	(0.075)	0.319***	(0.077)
Length	-0.003	(0.004)	-0.011**	(0.004)	0.498***	(0.075)	0.319***	(0.077)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.194**	(0.062)	-0.107+	(0.064)	-0.185**	(0.062)	-0.108+	(0.064)
Court Case	-0.684***	(0.089)	-0.611***	(0.093)	-0.685***	(0.090)	-0.612***	(0.093)
Election	-0.016	(0.086)	0.006	(0.089)	-0.022	(0.087)	0.004	(0.089)
<i>Period (72-76 Omit.)</i>								
77-88'	0.028	(0.100)	0.101	(0.103)	0.039	(0.100)	0.004	(0.089)
89-94'	0.523***	(0.097)	0.583***	(0.100)	0.538***	(0.097)	0.585***	(0.100)
Constant	-1.595***	(0.167)	-1.893***	(0.174)	-1.581***	(0.168)	-1.882***	(0.174)

N= 6,646. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed test).



Model 2 introduces the influence of contentious news subjects on the appearance of outrage rhetoric. I anticipated that contentious coverage – articles occasioned by the protest, movement activity, and crime – would amplify highly polemical argumentation. Indeed, these stories significantly increase the appearance of outrage rhetoric. Once contentious coverage is accounted for, pro-choice movement representatives are no longer significantly different from state actors in being cast as outraged. Further, the differences between experts and journalists in relation to state actors diminish. These results suggest that pro-choice movement activists, expert, and journalists do not *generally* appear as outraged. Rather, they tend to be in stories occasioned by contentious political activity. In contrast, regardless of the coverage occasion, pro-life activists, church representatives are the most likely to be cast as outraged relative to state speakers.

Model 3 excludes contentious coverage and examines the influence of the canonical ritual of argument balance. I hypothesized the balancing norm to diminish outrage rhetoric because the latter tends to be applied for the coverage of legitimate controversy, when the ideals of deliberative democratic discourse and “objective journalism” should be applied. Supporting this hypothesis, balanced articles are significantly less likely to include outrage rhetoric. This suggests that the inclusion of outrage rhetoric in news stories may be a key part of constructing the limits of acceptable controversy by placing contentious politics within the sphere of deviance.

These main findings mainly hold up in the full model (Model 4). State speakers are significantly less likely to be attributed outraged forms of speech compared to other sources, with the exception of pro-choice activists. Following pro-choice actors, journalists and experts are just slightly more likely to be attached to outrage rhetoric compared to

state speakers. That leaves church representatives, pro-life activists, and bystanders as the story characters most likely to be cast as outraged. This result offers support to my hypotheses that state actors are less likely to be cast as outraged compared to other speakers and that bystanders are likely to be cast as outraged. But the results for social movement actors clearly differ for the two movements.

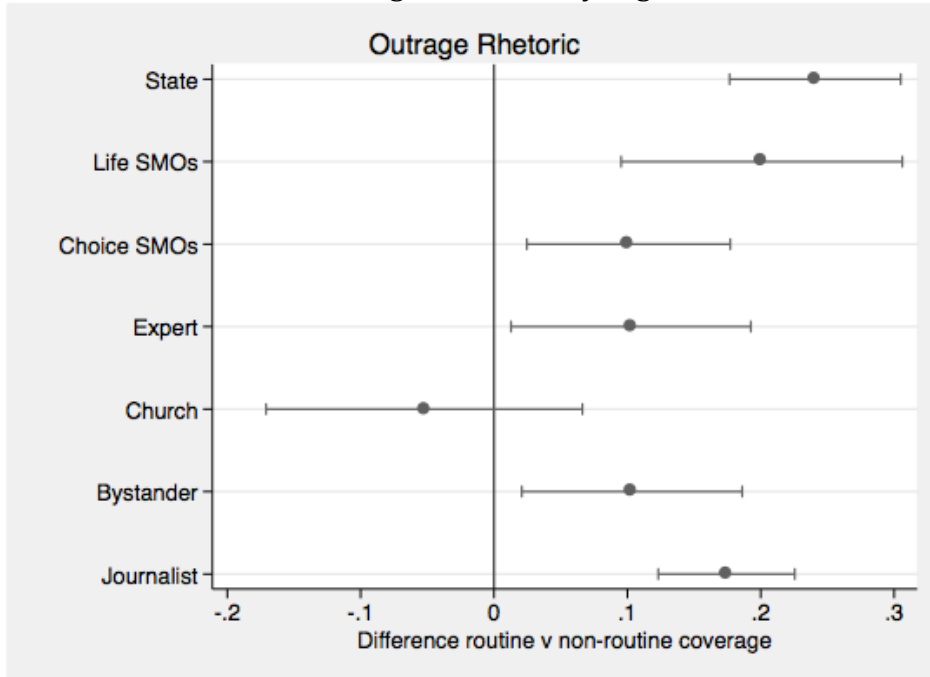
Turning to article attributes, the theorized negative relationship between balance and illegitimate controversy is no longer significant in the full model. This suggests that contentious coverage better accounts for the appearance of any outrage rhetoric than the presence of the balancing norm.<sup>52</sup> That contentious news strongly increases the inclusion of outrage rhetoric suggests the coverage of crime, protest, and movement activity does not demand the civil discourse that the idealized vision of a democratic public sphere warrants. However, these findings do not address which actors are more likely to be cast as outraged in articles initiated by contentious activities and those that are balanced.

To test my hypotheses positing state actors and movement actors are more likely to be cast as outraged in contentious coverage, I ran supplementary analyses. An additional model was estimated on the outcome of outrage rhetoric with interactions between the variables of organizational speaker and contentious news occasions. Using the marginsplot command in Stata 13, I plotted predicted probabilities for the appearance of outrage rhetoric and each source type under the condition of routine coverage vs. non-routine coverage (holding other explanatory variables at their means). Figure 4.1 graphs these results.

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<sup>52</sup> I also added an interaction term between non-routine coverage and argument balance in order to test for the possibility that the balancing norm would counteract the appearance of outrage rhetoric (results not shown). The effect was negative, which points in this direction, but it turned out to be statistically insignificant.

**Figure 4.1:** Difference in predicted share of outrage rhetoric in routine political news vs. contentious news coverage condition by organizational source.



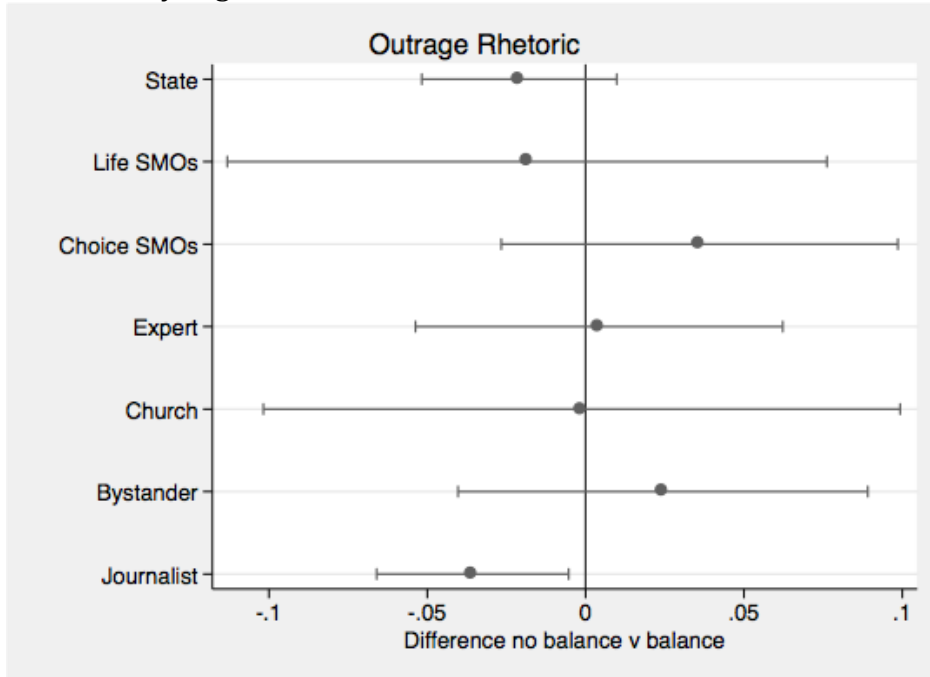
Note: 95% confidence intervals.

Interestingly, Figure 4.1 shows that under the condition of contentious coverage outrage rhetoric significantly increases for all speakers, with the exception of church representatives. In partial support of the two hypotheses, state actors and, to a lesser extent, pro-life movement representatives stand out relative to other speakers in being more likely to be cast as outraged in the coverage of contentious politics than in the coverage of routine politics. Notably, so do journalists.

To test my hypothesis that journalists are unlikely to voice outrage in balanced articles because doing so would contradict the performance of neutral observation so crucially linked to the balance norm, I ran another model. In this case, the model contained interactions between the organizational speaker variable and the argument balance variable. I followed the same procedure outlined above to predict the different probability

of each speaker category appearing with outrage rhetoric under the condition of the absence of balance vs. balance in an article.

**Figure 4.2:** Difference in predicted share of outrage rhetoric in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source.



Note: 90% confidence intervals to better display results. Other variables held at means.

Figure 4.2 confirms the hypothesis that journalists are unlikely to express outrage when they apply the balance norm. Furthermore, if, as I argue, the balance norm establishes or identifies a *subject* as legitimately controversial, it is interesting to note the trends in the positioning of the actors. For instance, the positive relationship of pro-choice activists and bystander sources to outrage rhetoric in balanced articles may suggest that their outrage is slightly more “acceptable” than that of state actors and pro-life activists. To better account for these results, it is necessary to look at the effects of the main explanatory variables on the appearance of different types of outrage. Table 4.3 presents logistic regression results for outraged ‘anti-life’ attack, ‘anti-choice’ attack, and alarmist speech separately.

**Table 4.3** Coefficients from logistic regression models of attack and alarmist speech

Independent Variables	'Anti-choice' Attack		'Anti-life' Attack		Alarmist	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
<i>Source (State Omit.)</i>						
Life SMOs	1.974***	(0.151)	-0.490	(0.420)	-0.648**	(0.219)
Choice SMOs	-2.259***	(0.490)	0.969***	(0.222)	0.489**	(0.167)
Experts	0.121	(0.185)	0.719**	(0.245)	0.297+	(0.179)
Church	1.914***	(0.154)	-0.460	(0.405)	-0.784**	(0.277)
Bystander	0.703***	(0.160)	1.055***	(0.216)	-0.489*	(0.204)
Journalist	-0.304*	(0.141)	0.407*	(0.192)	0.396**	(0.126)
Contentious News	0.614***	(0.102)	0.348*	(0.139)	1.603***	(0.105)
Argument Balance	0.274**	(0.097)	-0.151	(0.144)	-0.260*	(0.103)
<i>Controls</i>						
News Report	-0.040	(0.104)	-0.283+	(0.148)	0.851***	(0.120)
Length	-0.023***	(0.006)	-0.023*	(0.010)	0.006	(0.005)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.078	(0.090)	-0.235+	(0.123)	-0.042	(0.093)
Court Case	-0.417**	(0.131)	0.101	(0.168)	-1.089***	(0.145)
Election	0.154	(0.121)	-0.022	(0.178)	-0.211	(0.148)
<i>Period (72-76' Omit.)</i>						
77-88'	-0.313*	(0.133)	-0.160	(0.204)	1.253***	(0.237)
89-94'	-0.317*	(0.129)	0.092	(0.183)	2.120***	(0.238)
Constant	-2.160***	(0.234)	-2.683***	(0.346)	-4.794***	(0.327)

N= 6,646. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed test)

Looking across the models, some distinct patterns emerge. As hypothesized, pro-life movement actors were the primary sources cast as outraged through speech attacking pro-choice positions ('anti-choice' attacks) and unlikely sources for identifying threats (alarmist). Findings also show that the outrage rhetoric of church actors and bystanders is largely comprised of attack rather than alarmist speech relative to state speakers. That representatives of the Catholic Church were vocal critics of abortion liberalization during this period helps to account for their alignment with pro-life movement speakers

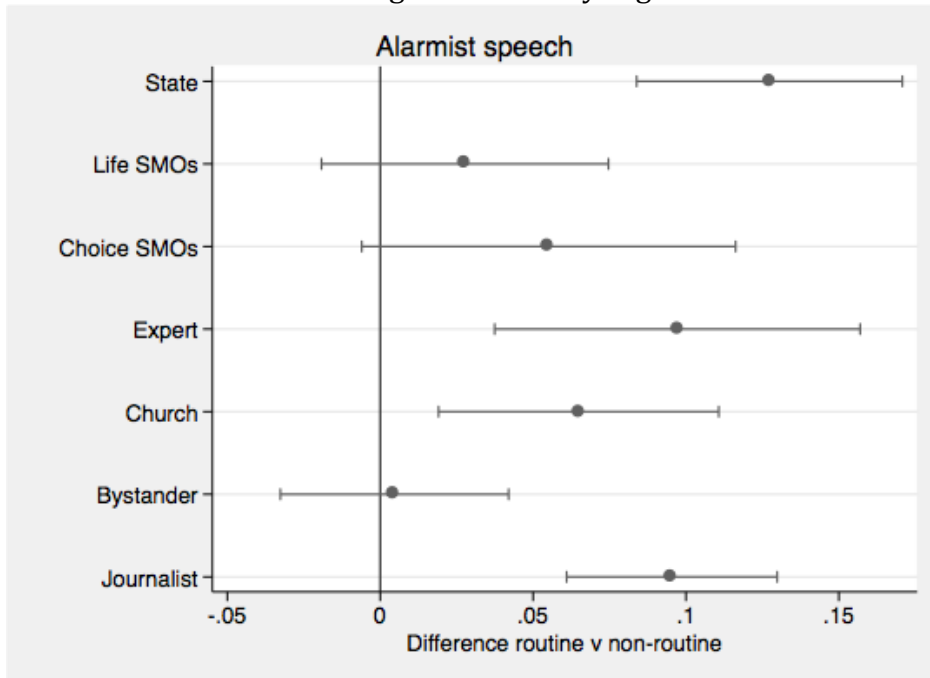
(Staggenborg 1989). In some contrast, bystanders were likely to be cast as outraged through speech attacking *both* pro-life and pro-choice positions. This provides support for the hypothesis that journalists incorporate bystanders for quotes that can liven up debate and to informally represent the public through the views of the “man on the street.”

Unlike pro-life speakers, while pro-choice sources were routinely cast as outraged partisans attacking pro-life positions (‘anti-life’ attack speech), they were also cast as outraged defenders of the social order (alarmist speech). Moreover, pro-choice activist speakers do not stand out nearly as much compared to other sources. Experts, bystanders, and even journalists were also more likely than state sources to convey attacks on pro-life positions. Although pro-choice outrage was not common in the abortion debate, this confirms the expectation that pro-choice movement speakers would not dominate ‘anti-life’ attack speech. Equally interesting, bystanders are even more likely than pro-choice activists to be attached to ‘anti-life’ attack speech. As for alarmist speech, pro-choice movement, journalists, experts, and state speakers were, respectively, the most common voices for harsh condemnations of threatening tactics. These results point to the utility in distinguishing outraged attacks on the character of actors from outrage speech directed at the threatening nature of a group’s tactics.

In terms of article attributes, the positive influence of contentious news occasions holds across all three outraged speech constructions. However, the influence is greatest for alarmist speech. The influence of argument balance varies. Balance increases ‘anti-choice’ attack speech while it decreases alarmist and ‘anti-life’ attack speech. As I suggested earlier, it is necessary to investigate the interaction between storytelling rituals (contentious news and balance) and the ways different speakers are portrayed to interpret

these patterns. To this end, I again conducted supplementary analyses. The interactions show that movement activists from *both* sides of the debate are significantly more likely to be cast as outraged through attack speech in contentious coverage (see Appendix A, Figures A4.1 and A4.2).<sup>53</sup> This provides further support to my hypothesis that movement activists are the most likely to be cast as outraged in contentious news. But which actors account for the strong influence of non-routine coverage on alarmist speech? To address this question, Figure 4.3 shows the predicted appearance of alarmist speech connected to each source type under the condition of contentious news coverage.

**Figure 4.3:** Difference in predicted share of alarmist speech in routine political news vs. contentious news coverage condition by organizational source.



Note: 95% confidence intervals.

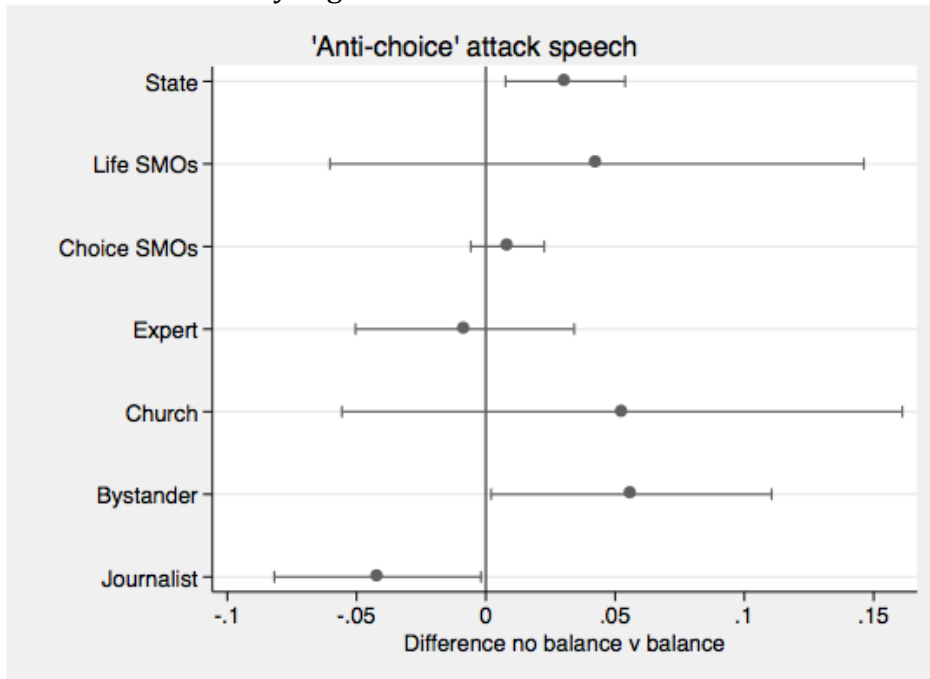
<sup>53</sup> Where each movement falls relative to other speakers differs, however. ‘Anti-choice’ attack speech significantly increases ( $p < 0.05$ ) for state actors, pro-life activists, bystanders, and even journalists ( $p < 0.10$ ) in contentious news. ‘Anti-life’ attack speech only significantly increases for pro-choice activists in contentious news.

We can clearly see that state speakers, experts, journalists, and church representatives are the most likely to raise the alarm against threatening tactics in stories occasioned by contentious politics. This result supports my expectation that state actors are especially likely to be cast as outraged in contentious coverage through alarmist speech identifying threats to the social order. It also broadly supports the idea that actors with the most habitual, routine political access to the media are those whose activities are considered legitimate. And, finally, these results suggest that institutionally legitimated actors are the primary sources journalists rely on to identify breaches of acceptable conflict. To explore this interpretation and to account for the interaction between article balance and the ways different speakers are portrayed, Figures 4.4 through 4.6 show the appearance of each type of outrage rhetoric connected to each source type under the condition of the absence of balance versus balance in an article.

Across all three figures, we can see that journalists remain consistent in their performance by abstaining from expressing any form of outrage rhetoric when they apply the balance norm. Not only does this reinforce the argument that balance signals the reporter's role as a neutral observer, it also supports my argument that we must examine where journalists position themselves when applying the balancing norm to understand the implications of the norm for constructing legitimate controversy, consensus, or deviance. In other words, by balancing articles journalists commonly frame the subject as legitimately controversial and represent the actors attached to outraged rhetoric as legitimately outraged.

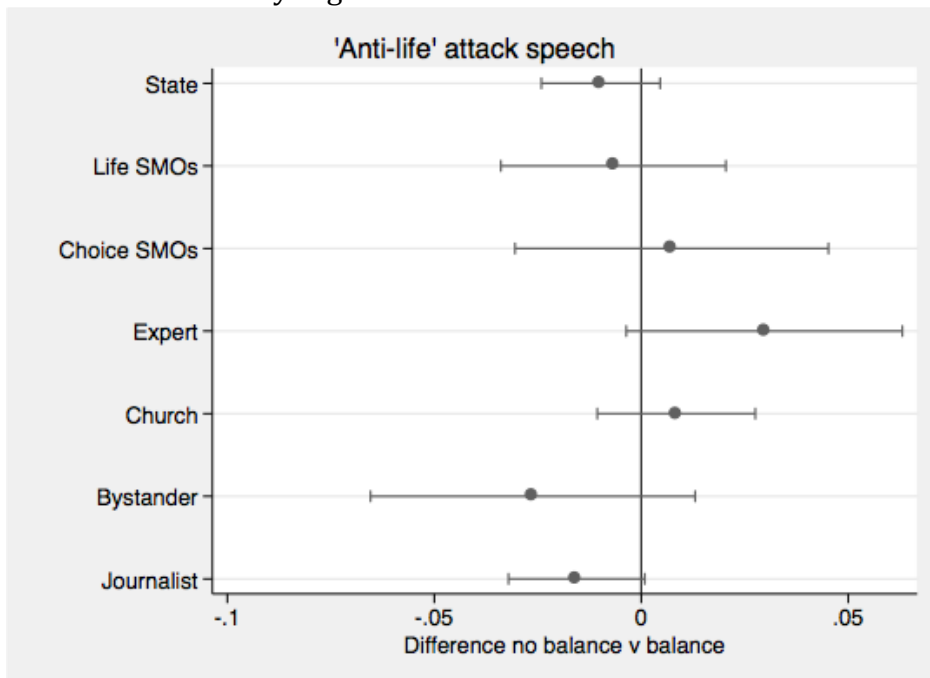


**Figure 4.4:** Difference in predicted share of ‘anti-choice’ attack speech in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source.



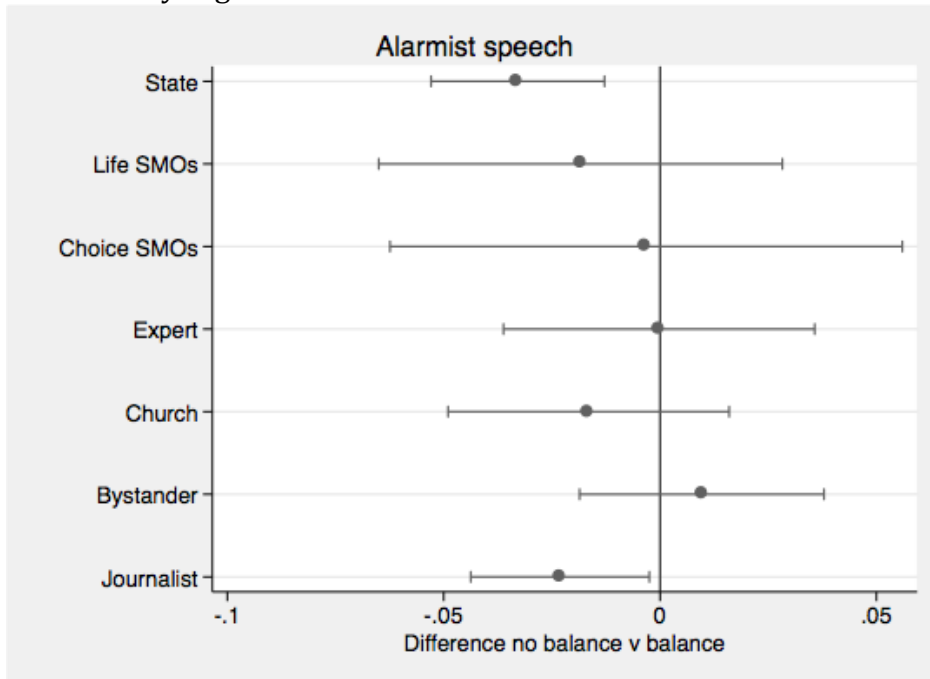
Note: 95% confidence intervals.

**Figure 4.5:** Difference in predicted share of ‘anti-life’ attack speech in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source.



Note: 90% confidence intervals to better display results.

**Figure 4.6:** Difference in predicted share of alarmist speech in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source.



Note: 95% confidence intervals.

Starting with Figure 4.4, we see that only state actors and bystanders are significantly more likely to be ascribed attacks on pro-choice positions within balanced articles. In contrast, the positive, but insignificant relationship between pro-life activists and church representatives suggests these speakers are cast as outraged to highlight the deviance of their counter-consensus arguments. In Figure 4.5, the general trends must be taken as rough indicators of the ascription of legitimacy because the values are not significant.<sup>54</sup> Consistent with my line of reasoning, experts stand out in their positive relationship to ‘anti-life’ attack speech in balanced coverage. This suggests that they are primarily represented as legitimately outraged about the character of pro-life positions.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Figure 4.6 generally suggests that alarmist speech is not routinely a part of the

<sup>54</sup> The lack of significance here is unsurprising due to the infrequency of attack speech on pro-life positions.

<sup>55</sup> Notably, pro-choice activists and church representatives are the only two other sources bearing a positive relationship to ‘anti-life’ attack speech in balanced articles.

sphere of legitimate controversy. Or it may indicate that alarmist speech appears just as frequently in articles that apply the balance norm as those lacking balance.

Given the distinctive results for the increased appearance of alarmist speech in articles covering contentious activity and its decrease in articles with balance (recall Table 4.3), I decided to explore the relationship between these article characteristics influencing alarmist speech. To do so I ran another model adding an interaction term between contentious news and argument balance in order to test their influence on one another (see Appendix A, Table A4.2). What I found is that the usually negative effect of the balancing norm on alarmist speech during routine coverage was exactly offset in the case of contentious news. What this means is that in routine coverage, an article that applies the balancing norm will contain fewer alarmist utterances. By contrast, in contentious coverage, when the article does not apply the balancing norm, alarmist utterances strongly increase. When we have a combination of a contentious story occasion and the balancing norm in an article, the balance does not matter. It does not reduce alarmist speech probably because alarm is raised from both sides that are then pitted against each other. In short, balanced contentious coverage appears much more "shrill" in comparison to balanced routine coverage. But this is because, in contentious news, an alarmist argument needs another alarmist argument to be balanced out. This supports the argument that routine political coverage is treated as legitimate whereas contentious coverage is treated as a site of deviant contests. The tenor of disputes within routine stories is kept more civil compared to the incivility of contentious ones.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Despite visions of a normatively democratic mass-mediated public sphere (e.g., civility and dialogue), outrage rhetoric was a common discursive style in the media coverage of the abortion debate. Even the descriptive analyses are telling in this regard by demonstrating the prominence of outrage rhetoric, the dominance of outraged attacks on pro-choice positions, and the more common appearance of claims that disparaged the tactics of period over those attacking the character of pro-life advocates. The results from the logistic regression analyses broadly suggest that journalists guard the boundaries of political acceptability by selectively voicing outrage and by routinely portraying some actors as outraged beyond the bounds of the social good and others as outraged co-defenders of consensus values. They also show how storytelling rituals or institutional scripts are central to these outcomes.

Three main results support these interpretations. First, political “outsiders” were more commonly cast as outraged than political “insiders” (i.e., state actors), but these boundaries were not clear-cut. Next, coverage occasioned by contentious activities or actors and articles lacking argument balance substantially increased the appearance of outrage rhetoric. Finally, by combining source expectations with storytelling expectations, journalists situated some actors as legitimate sources of outrage and others as illegitimate voices of outrage. These results merit additional discussion to better present their implications for the coverage of social movements and the journalistic culture of objectivity.

Social movement activists, church representatives and bystanders stood out as typical sources for outrage, but in different ways and in different degrees. Journalists

routinely treated church representatives as outraged partisans alongside pro-life movement activists. However, they were also presented as distancing themselves from the extreme or threatening tactics of the period. Interestingly, bystanders were routine sources for attacks on both pro-life and pro-choice positions, but not key sources for alarmist speech. Bystanders, pro-choice activists, and experts were, respectively, the most commonly attached to attacks on pro-life positions. Thus, not only was 'anti-life' attack speech not relegated to pro-choice activists but also bystanders were even more likely to be cast as outraged than pro-choice activists. A similar pattern emerged for alarmist speech. Pro-choice activists, experts, and even journalists routinely represented claims raising the alarm on threatening tactics. Overall, if being portrayed as an outraged relative to authorities or to the opposing movement marginalizes movement actors, then pro-life activists received the least favorable coverage in this regard.

Turning to storytelling conventions, the contentious news occasions of crime, protest, and movement activity were the primary venues for outrage rhetoric. And storytelling that balanced opposing viewpoints generally dampened outrage rhetoric. Importantly, however, when combined with the positioning of journalists and other speakers, these story features sent two distinct messages. The coverage of routine politics and balanced articles generally demarcated coverage as within the bounds of acceptable conflict – as legitimately controversial. By contrast, contentious news stories and those lacking balance, generally situated conflict as beyond the bounds of political acceptability. To really highlight the function of these storytelling forms, I show how they influence one another for the appearance of alarmist speech. Whereas balanced routine coverage contained less alarmist speech, balanced stories of contentious events incorporated more

“shrill” polemical argumentation by pitting alarmist arguments against one another. In sum, the tenor of disputes within routine stories is kept civil and respectful compared to the incivility and hostility of contests occurring in contentious political news.

When paired with these storytelling conventions that delimit acceptable controversy, some actors appear to have been positioned as legitimately outraged and others as illegitimately outraged. For one, state actors and bystanders were more commonly situated as legitimate sources for outraged attacks on pro-choice positions. Second, journalists primarily situated experts as legitimate sources of outraged attacks on pro-life positions. And reporters certified sources embedded within already legitimated institutions (including themselves) as the legitimate voices for raising the alarm on the need to defend the social order. For movements, the implications here were more mixed. The findings suggest that pro-life activists were cast as outraged deviants compared to other actors across storytelling contexts, but pro-choice activists were positioned as more acceptably outraged relative to other sources and depending on storytelling contexts. Although these findings warrant further examination because balance can be used to highlight deviance or to treat the topic of coverage as legitimately controversial, for journalists the results are a bit more straightforward. When performing as neutral observers, journalists avoided outrage rhetoric, but when performing as guardians of consensus they were among the key sources of outrage.

The results presented in this chapter are important for movements, for whom favorable media coverage – coverage which treats them as legitimate players, conveys their claims, or encourages sympathy for their cause – is rare (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker 1982). In accord with classic arguments in the literature on

movements in the media (e.g., Lipsky 1968; Gamson 1992), outraged communicative bids to prompt individuals to assume the risks of activism, to mobilize public support, and to appeal to the powerful can run at cross-purposes (as protest does), especially when relying on the mass media to convey those claims. Considering that state sources were sometimes presented attacking pro-choice positions in balanced coverage, the deviant positioning of pro-life activists in using these claims is likely to have varied over time. Similarly, pro-choice activists may have been positioned as deviant in relation to other sources at different times in the abortion debate. While this gap will be addressed in the next chapter, the findings here show that while movement actors are typified in the media, this typification is not monolithic.

The results are also important for the culture of objective journalism. Broadly speaking, when journalists perform objectivity by guarding consensus, they violate the ideals of an inclusive, civil, and dialogic public sphere as well as the rules of "objective journalism" (e.g., attribution of interpretation to sources and balance). But when do journalists adopt a role of guardian of public consensus rather than a role of neutral observer and what are the consequences of these performances for the actors being covered? These questions are taken up in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONSTRUCTING CONTROVERSY AND CONSENSUS OVER TIME

“[T]he news is not simply a compliant supporter of elites or the Establishment or the ruling class; rather, it views nation and society through its own set of values and with its own conception of the good social order”  
-Herbert Gans 1979, p. 62

Even if the American abortion debate is what we tend to think of when we think of political incivility, I have already shown that the discourse surrounding the issue from 1972 through 1994 was as much (if not more) about moderating the tenor of debate as it was outraged. A substantial amount of rhetoric attributed to the key players was noncommittal, took a middle ground position, or even asserted that consensus existed or was possible. Thus, rather than assuming a uniform degree of controversy or polarization on the abortion issue that the media passively reflects, we need to develop an understanding of how the media at some points constructs its own conception of the public interest. In this chapter I ask when the media sought to establish consensus on the issue of abortion and at others presented the issue as legitimately controversial. I also investigate how the legitimating or discrediting portrayals of actors – authorities, experts, movements, and so on – varied in relation to these shifts.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In my own efforts to remain “neutral” I use the terms *pro-abortion* or *pro-abortion-rights* to refer to people who seek to remove or reduce restrictions on abortion and *anti-abortion* for those people seeking to increase



To tease out these distinctions over time, I draw upon Daniel Hallin's (1986) theory that the application of objectivity protocols varies depending on whether an issue resides within what he termed the sphere of consensus, the sphere of legitimate controversy, or the sphere of deviance. According to Hallin, changes in the broader political environment determine whether or not reporters follow the core principles of objective journalism: political independence, presenting the "facts" without interpreting them, and balance. He found that reporters departed from these reportorial obligations to neutral observation both at the beginning of the Vietnam War when they treated it as a consensual political issue and near the war's end when they presented it as a violation of consensual public values. More specifically, in the early years of the war, reporters voiced support for the war and let political "establishment" representatives set the terms of the value of the war. In the years following the Tet Offensive (1968), reporters began to question the war as well as the authority of state sources and began covering the issue as legitimately controversial by following the traditional protocols of objectivity (see also Gitlin 1980). By escaping the traditional arrangements of state censorship during wartime, at times journalists were able to take a more "adversarial" role towards the policies of the state – once again abandoning objective reporting but this time to voice some criticism of the war.

In the previous two chapters, I elaborated on Hallin's theory. I demonstrated that patterns in distinct objectivity performances, which I am calling the role of guardian of consensus and the role of neutral observer, shifted according to the enactment of specific rituals that depend on the actors being covered and the storyline being used. By combining

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restrictions – even if these may not be the preferred term for all parties involved. Similarly, I call the two sides of the abortion issue the *pro-life* (or *right-to-life*) and *pro-choice* movements. I also use the appellations Pro-Choice SMOs and Pro-Life SMOs in some instances to refer to the constellation of social movement and political advocacy organizations (SMOs) grouped by issue-focus.

my findings on journalists' use and mediation of analytic and outrage rhetoric, I developed a clearer picture of how objectivity is accomplished.

Table 5.1 presents how journalists perform objectivity when they follow either the norms for the guardianship of consensus or the norms for neutral observation. The left-hand column represent the strategic rituals for guarding consensus and the right-hand column represents rituals that are used to report as a neutral observer. While the determination of which objectivity rituals to apply is based on assumptions in the background of newsmaking, the patterns result in two distinct performances. Because the norms for the guardianship of consensus are not as familiar as those for neutral observation, I review some of them.

Table 5.1: Journalistic norms and practices and their effects on news content

	<i>Norms for the guardianship of consensus</i>	<i>Norms for neutral observation</i>
Who Offers Interpretations	Journalists voice ostensibly analytic as well as outrage rhetoric to offer interpretations.	Sources offer interpretations and opinions, not journalists.
Acceptable Discourse	Rhetoric can be analytic (highlight the incivility of others) or outraged (uncivil)	Rhetoric is civil even if partisan and even during political contests.
How Actors are Portrayed	State and expert actors are treated as voices of consensual politics (analytic rhetoric) and legitimate outrage. Movement actors, church representatives and bystanders infrequently treated as voices of consensual politics and are treated as deviant sources of outrage.	Actors are treated as voices of partisan politics with clear policy positions, but not analytic or outraged.
Article Structures	Balance is unnecessary unless to highlight deviance. A diversity of voices is used to highlight deviance.	Balance is essential. A diversity of voices reinforces accuracy and reflects independence from the state.
Typical Story Subjects	News occasioned by contentious political activity or actors (e.g., crime, protest).  Media-initiated coverage.	News occasioned by routine politics, primarily that of legitimated institutions (e.g., the courts, medical).  Source-initiated coverage.

To guard consensus values, rather than letting sources offer the only interpretations, journalists themselves speak on behalf of the public interest. They voice analytic rhetoric – opinions about what is at stake in the debate without taking a side, opinions about the public’s perception, and opinions about the polarizing nature of debate. They also voice outrage rhetoric – opinions raising the alarm on threatening tactics and even inflammatory attacks on pro-life positions. Reporters act as guardians of consensus also by, on the one hand, casting experts and elites as co-arbiters of consensual political values and, on the other, by generally casting activists, church representatives, and bystanders as the most extreme sources of outrage.

Reporters stick to performing either the role of guardian of consensus or the role neutral observer. For example, when reporters do voice their own interpretation in a story, they do not enact the canonical objectivity ritual of providing a balance of opposing viewpoints. If journalists do use balance in their role as the guardian of public consensus, they do not use it to demonstrate the legitimacy of the two sides. Rather they use balance to highlight the deviance of counter-consensus positions. More precisely, when covering protest and other contentious occasions for news stories, reporters commonly represent the non-institutional activities generating this coverage as beyond the bounds of acceptable conflict. In particular, results showed that journalists generally typify stories occasioned by political outsiders and their events as uncivil – as sites where the speech of almost every character populating the story becomes more heated, including the journalist and those sources usually cast as cool-headed partisans. Thus, acrimonious debates within contentious political news coverage usually mark out the deviance of actors using threatening tactics, which is in sharp contrast to the absence of outrage in routine stories of

institutional conflict. Importantly, though, where journalists position themselves is crucial to understanding how they frame debate.

In this chapter, I build on this typology to examine how the language of reportage was structured at different times and in different political contexts to set the boundaries of consensus, legitimate controversy, and deviance. Through this examination, I also shed light on how these shifts influenced the representation of different political actors and the two opposing social movements in particular. In sum, what is clearly missing from the table is the answer to the question of when journalists turn to the role of guardian of consensus and the implications of their performances for political contention.

One small part of this question, however, was addressed by controlling for specific changes in the political environment when investigating the appearance of analytic and outrage rhetoric. Therefore, I begin with a closer examination of the impacts of presidential elections and major Supreme Court case decisions on how journalists performed their objectivity. This helps to set the stage for examining changes in reportage over the research period.

## **5.1 Political Contexts: Presidential Elections & Court Cases**

Scholarship on the media coverage of public interest issues has long recognized the link between major political events and the level of attention paid to an issue (e.g., Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008). In chapters 3 and 4, we saw that presidential elections decreased the appearance of analytic rhetoric. By contrast, analytic rhetoric increased and outrage rhetoric decreased during years in which the Supreme Court made a major decision on abortion.

These findings provide some support to Hallin's (1986) arguments linking the modes of reportage to broader changes in the way an issue is viewed. The election results support his argument that journalists deem contests between the two major political parties legitimate controversies that demand neutral observation (also see Hallin 1984). Subsequent research lends further support to this assessment by showing the media treatment of elites and their disputes with one another during elections to be objective in the sense of balanced, nonpartisan, and respectful (e.g., D'Alessio and Allen 2000; Niven 2003; Sobieraj 2010; 2011). The findings on Supreme Court cases extend Hallin's account. They hint at the idea that highly visible Court decisions proffer a status quo or national-level consensus that enables journalists to report as partisans of consensual political values without appearing biased. However, why Court decisions would turn journalists toward the role of guardians of consensus merits further attention.

The Supreme Court is known to play an important role in the making and legitimation of national policy (e.g., Dahl 1957). Although there is some debate as to the extent of the persuasive impacts of the Court on public opinion (for a review see Hoekstra and Segal 1996), there is little doubt that the Court tends to be viewed as a credible institution (Johnson and Martin 1998). Research even suggests that the media coverage of this political institution helps to buttress its esteem and may enhance support for the position taken by the Court (Caldeira 1986; Mondak 1994). Moreover, some research indicates not only that the public's confidence in the Court rose dramatically in the wake of the 1972 Watergate scandal and the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision (regardless of agreeing with the decision) but also that this "landmark" decision had a greater effect on opinion

compared to subsequent decisions in a legacy effect similar to that of other policy reform (Amenta et al. 2012; Caldeira 1986; Johnson and Martin 1998).

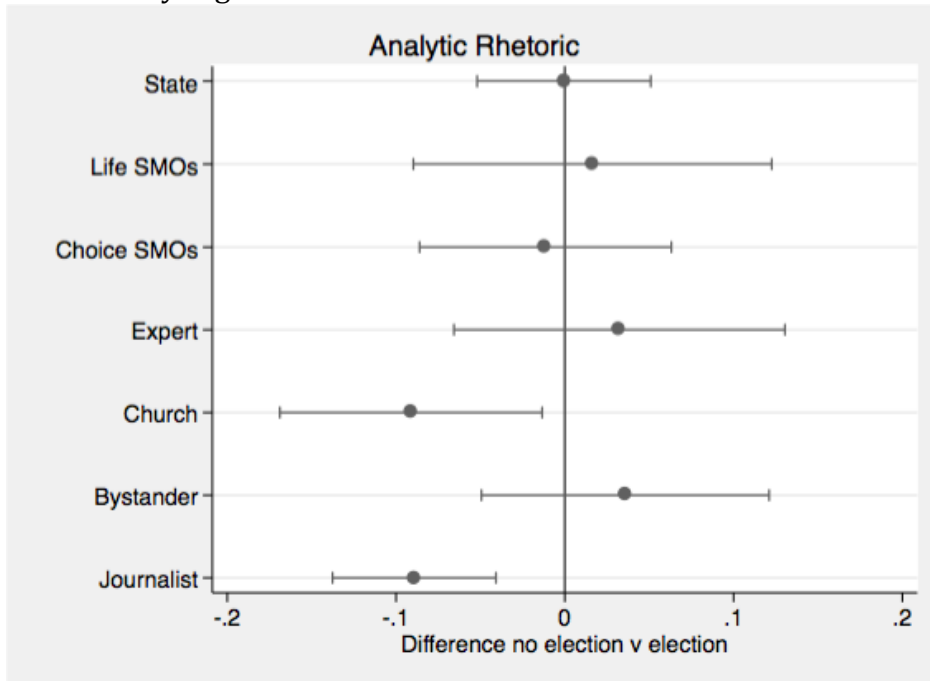
This literature broadly suggests that the recursive relationship between the media and the Court impacts the political salience of issues and the legitimacy of policy related to the issue. It also indicates that landmark Court decisions can establish a status quo on political issues whether the public agrees or disagrees with that moral sanction. Therefore, the chapter 3 findings that analytic rhetoric increased during years in which the Supreme Court made a major ruling on abortion are not surprising. If presidential elections are precisely when politicians should be able to offer unencumbered interpretations in a media system that is highly cautious of political partisanship (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002; Hallin 1986; Hallin and Mancini 1984), the proscriptive decisions (i.e., what is not allowed) of the Supreme Court demand some interpretation from reporters and one that reporters may use to protect their own vision of the public interest (a very different form of partisanship).

To explore these interpretations, I employed simple logistic regression models with survey weights adjusting for the inclusion probabilities of articles and the sample size over the research period. Analytic and outraged arguments about abortion policy were modeled separately as binary outcomes.<sup>57</sup> I plotted the appearance of analytic rhetoric and each source type under the condition of no presidential election versus an election year. Other variables are held at their means and the figures use 95 percent confidence intervals (see Appendix A, Table A5.1 for descriptive statistics). The same procedure was followed for outrage rhetoric and for the condition of no major Supreme Court case decision on abortion versus a case abortion. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 graph the results for presidential elections.

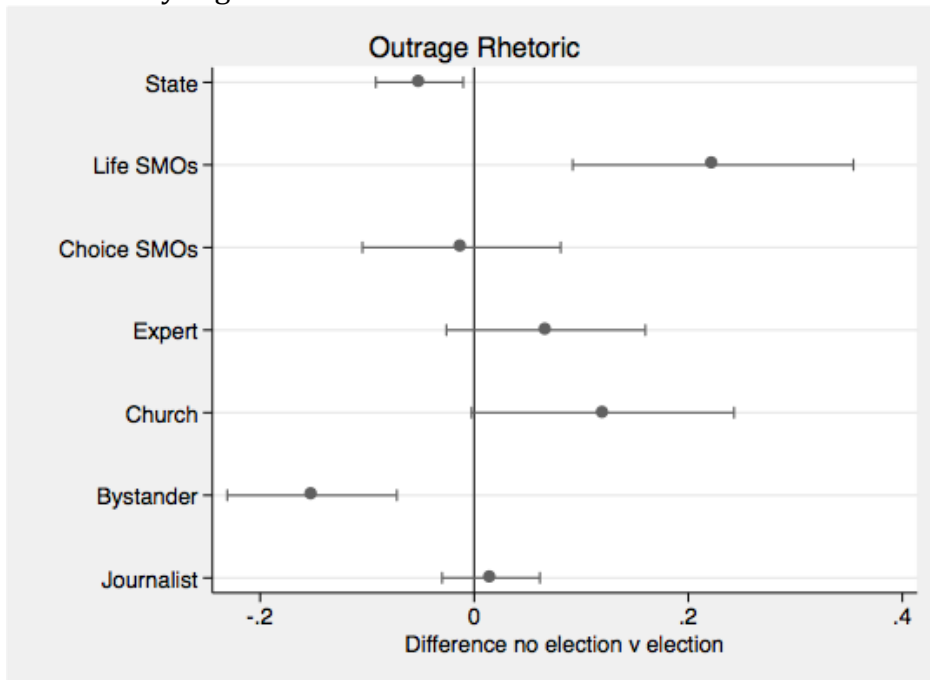
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<sup>57</sup> It is straightforward to interpret the results as the relative chances of an argument belonging to a certain coded type (i.e., analytic rhetoric, outrage rhetoric).

**Figure 5.1:** Difference in predicted share of analytic rhetoric in no-election vs. election condition by organizational source.



**Figure 5.2:** Difference in predicted share of outrage rhetoric in no-election vs. election condition by organizational source.

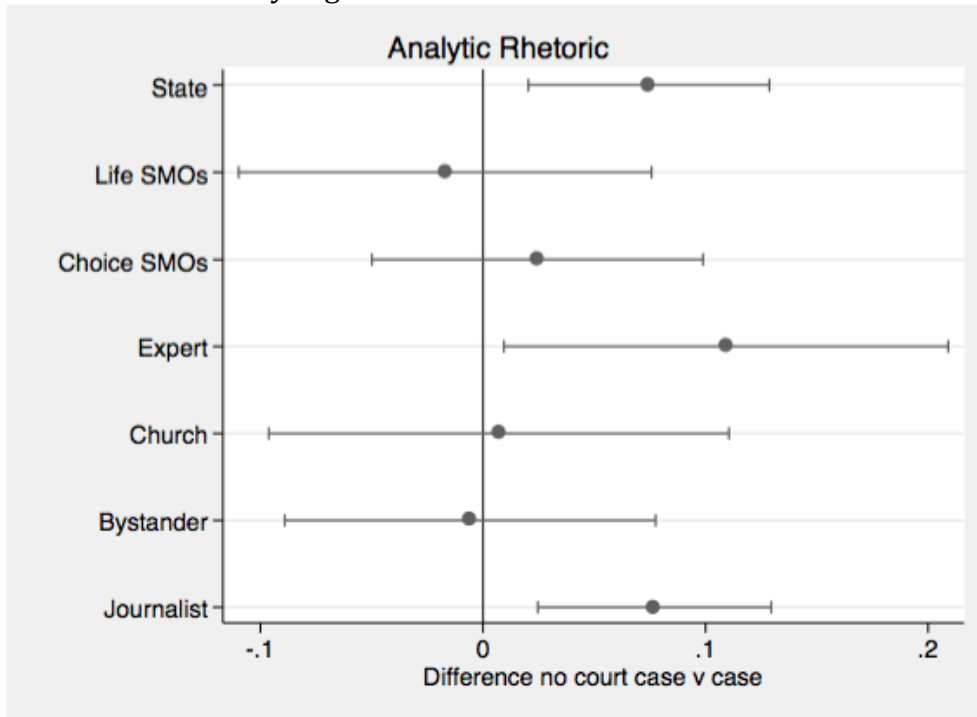


In line with Hallin's theory and subsequent scholarship, reportage appears to turn toward neutral observation and the framing of debate as legitimately controversial in presidential election years. Specifically, Figure 5.1 shows journalists are significantly less likely to espouse analytic rhetoric in presidential election years. By contrast, Figure 5.2 shows that pro-life speakers and church representatives are routinely cast as outraged in election years, while state sources and bystanders are noticeably less likely to be presented as outraged. This provides some support to Sobieraj's (2010) findings that journalists portray activists as emotional amateurs compared to their respectful, legitimating portrayals of state actors during presidential campaigns. However, in this case, pro-life activists and church representatives are more likely to be portrayed as outraged and pro-choice activist portrayals remain stable – raising some question as to the strictness of the implicit boundaries demarcating political insiders from political outsiders.

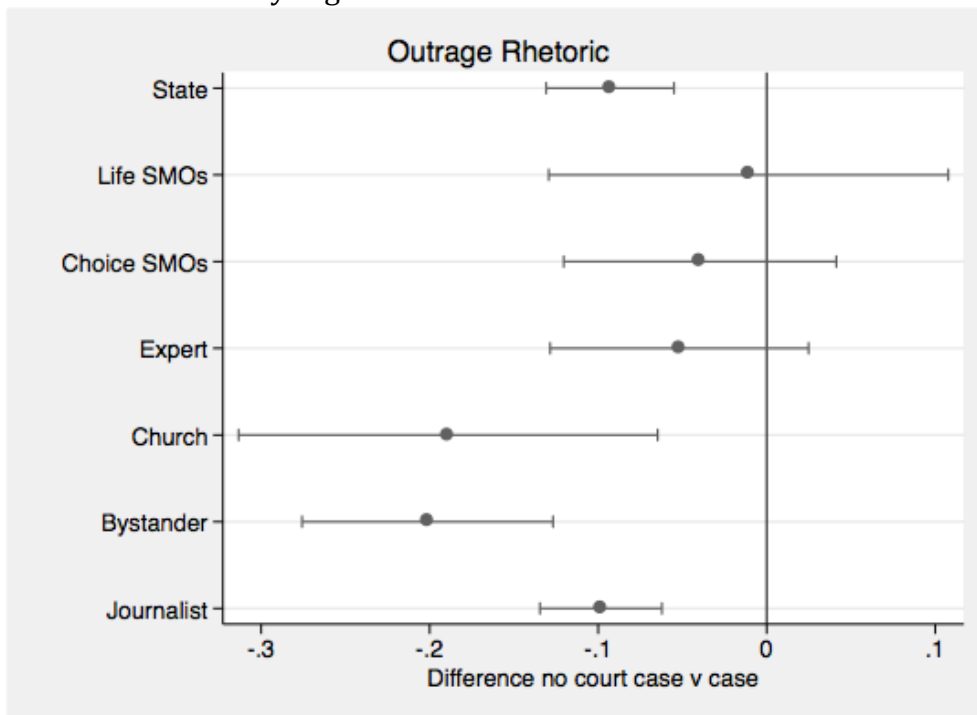
Turning to Supreme Court cases, Figures 5.3 and 5.4 graph the appearance of analytic rhetoric and outrage rhetoric respectively by speaker. Figure 5.3 helps to confirm the interpretation that journalists guard consensus during years when the Supreme Court makes key decisions on abortion. It shows journalists were more likely to position themselves, state sources, and experts as voices of consensual politics through their use of analytic rhetoric on abortion. Figure 5.4 provides additional support. The results suggest that outrage is not considered acceptable rhetoric for the public sphere when highly visible Court decisions provide a new status quo. Notably, almost all sources are significantly less likely to be attached to outrage rhetoric. This is interesting in light of the fact that Court decisions often increase the salience of an issue for political elites as well as the mass public and, thus, they are when we might expect to find outrage among sources.



**Figure 5.3:** Difference in predicted share of analytic rhetoric in no Supreme Court case vs. case condition by organizational source.



**Figure 5.4:** Difference in predicted share of outrage rhetoric in no-Supreme Court case vs. case condition by organizational source.



This evidence adds another important row to the typology of the norms governing journalistic performances of objectivity. Journalists are generally found to be more likely to present an issue as legitimately controversial in election years and more likely to guard consensus by voicing analytic rhetoric in years with key Supreme Court decisions. The evidence also provides support for identifying major Court decisions, key presidential elections, and other major federal legislation as decisive moments in larger issue debates. However, the foregoing findings do not quite get at which of these events proved meaningful to the construction of the limits of acceptable conflict. It also complicates the question of how different actor portrayals shifted in relation to these events, especially the two opposing social movements. Based on these findings, historical accounts of the abortion issue, and the media attention paid to the issue over the research period, I break the period down into distinct time periods. These phases of debate are separated by “critical discourse moments” that made the issue particularly salient to audiences (e.g., Ferree et al. 2002, p. 24; Meyer and Staggenborg 2008; Rohlinger 2002).

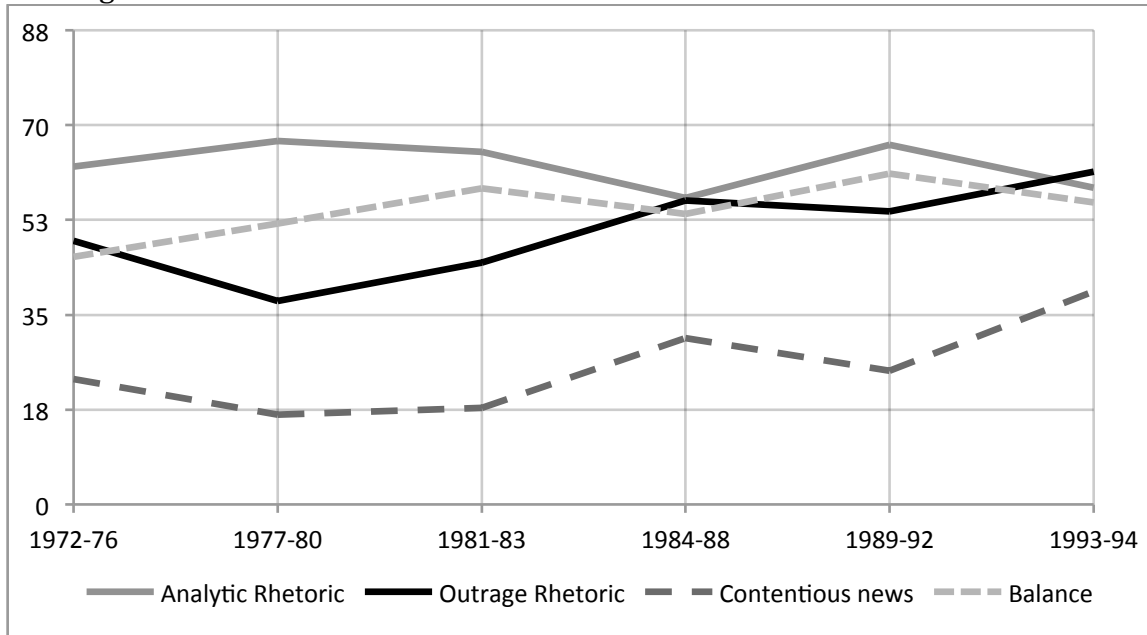
As outlined in chapter 2 and in line with previous scholarship, I identify six periods bracketed by critical moments: The years 1972-1976, during and following the *Roe* decision that spurred national debate, the years 1977–1980, which constitute the first phase of legal decisions that upheld the federal funding restrictions of the Hyde Amendment, the years 1981-1983 immediately following the election of staunch abortion opponent Ronald Reagan, the years 1984-1988 marked by his reelection victory and increasing violence at abortion clinics, the years 1989–92 following the *Webster* decision which significantly revised the law as well as George H.W. Bush’s Presidency, and the years 1993-94, following pro-choice ally Bill Clinton’s entry into the White House.

Combining my typology of norms with Hallin's theory, there is strong reason to look at patterns in the application of the balance norm and the coverage of contentious events in relation to the appearance of analytic and outrage rhetoric over the research period. How the interplay among these rituals structured rhetoric in the abortion debate can provide unique insight into which objectivity norms were followed by reporters at different points in time. In other words, how language was structured offers an initial sense of when reportage was predominantly that of neutral observation and debate was framed a legitimately controversial versus when journalists turned to the norms of the guardianship of consensus and framed debate as consensual or deviant.

## **5.2 Over Time Trends: Broad Rhetorical Patterns**

Based on the foregoing findings, we would expect analytic rhetoric to increase and argument balance to decrease following the 1973 *Roe* and the 1989 *Webster* decisions in order to mirror a new political consensus that the Court established. Conversely, we would expect an increase in balance and a moderate increases in outrage rhetoric after Reagan's 1980 election victory and Clinton's election victory in 1992 because these two administrations took the clearest partisan stands on abortion. To examine these hunches, Figure 5.5 presents a descriptive picture of the percent of articles including analytic rhetoric, outrage rhetoric, balance, and contentious news coverage at each time period.

**Figure 5.5:** Trends in analytic rhetoric, outrage rhetoric, balance, and contentious news coverage over time.



Note: Percentages are for all article N=1,146.

A few obvious patterns emerge from this graph. Generally, we can see that analytic and outrage rhetoric bore an inverse relationship to one another over the research period. We can also see that the coverage of contentious news (i.e., crime, protest, movement activity) tracks pretty closely with outrage, which is in line with the findings from chapter 4. Finally, analytic speech and balance follow a similar pattern starting in the third period that followed Reagan’s election (1981-83) and one that is in counter position to the trends in outrage and contentious coverage. The implications, though less obvious, broadly suggest the first period following *Roe* was characterized by consensus reporting. Even if we only look at balance and analytic rhetoric, they not only point to increasing controversy in the next period (1977-80), which followed the Hyde Amendment’s reduction of federal funding for abortion, but also to a relatively high degree of analytic interpretations. Again, just looking at the decrease in analytic rhetoric and the increase in balance during the third

period (1981-83), we see the strongest evidence of neutral observation framing legitimate controversy starting when Reagan began his Presidency.

A distinct pattern emerges in 1984 on the heels of Reagan's landslide reelection victory and the intensified mobilization of pro-life activists on multiple fronts. We see the largest spike in both contentious news and outrage rhetoric paired with a reduction of balance and analytic rhetoric in this fourth period (1984-88). This pattern suggests that journalists adhered to the norms for the guardianship of consensus because the issue entered the sphere of deviance. The fifth period (1989-92), which begins with the *Webster* decision and the Bush presidency, points to a fuzzier boundary between consensus and legitimate controversy because we see an increase in both analytic rhetoric *and* balance. Finally, the final period ushered in by Clinton's 1993 election mirrors that of the fourth period (1984-88). Given Clinton's pro-choice stand and decisive actions to protect clinics, this suggests that journalists worked to defend a new consensus by framing dissent as illegitimate.

Based on these trends, Table 5.2 summarizes expectations for when journalists turned to the role of guardian of consensus versus the role of neutral observer. Of note, certain periods are indicated as having elements of both the guardianship of consensus and legitimate controversy. As Hallin (1986) observed in his study, "each 'sphere' has internal gradations, and the boundaries between them are often fuzzy" (p. 117). While the boundaries do appear to be "fuzzy" at different points in time, the typology identifying certain rituals for objectivity performances makes it possible to further explore the construction of these boundaries.

**Table 5.2:** General expectations for reportage in each time period

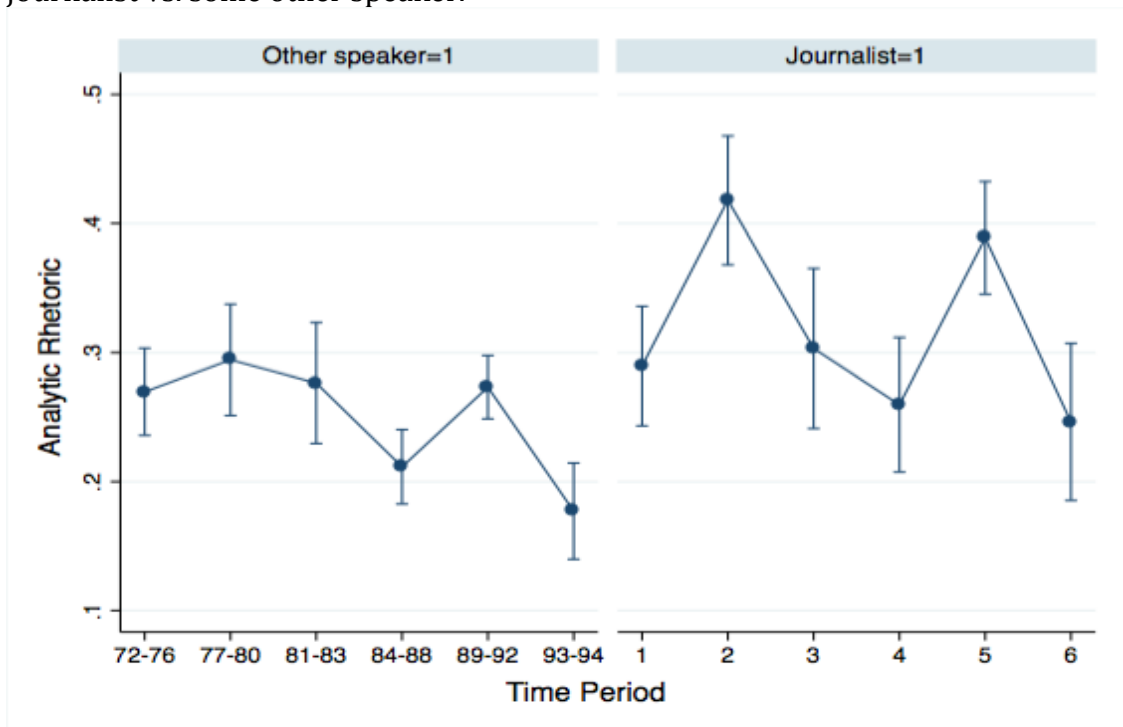
<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Guardianship of Consensus</i>		<i>Neutral Observation</i>
	Consensus	Deviance	Legitimate Controversy
(1) 1972-76	X		
(2) 1977-80	X		X
(3) 1981-83			X
(4) 1984-88		X	
(5) 1989-92	X		X
(6) 1993-94		X	

### 5.3 Over Time Dynamics: Journalists & Sources

The general expectations for when consensus, deviance, or controversy were constructed in the press can be systematically tested in many ways. A first step is to investigate variation in how journalists positioned themselves as voices of analytic and outrage rhetoric compared to their sources over time. Based on my typology, we would expect reporters to construct debate as consensual or deviant by voicing these two forms of rhetoric. A second step is to examine when analytic and outrage rhetoric appeared in relation to the balancing norm. This approach takes advantage of the finding that balancing opposing viewpoints in an article is a core strategic ritual for performing the role of neutral observation. My typology would lead us to expect argument balance to decrease the appearance of analytic speech for guarding consensus. A final step is to examine the appearance of analytic and outrage rhetoric when the coverage was driven by contentious story occasions – initiated by protest, crime, or social movement activity – as compared to the routine coverage of “politics as usual.” This approach takes advantage of my finding that contentious political stories tend to be characterized as deviant through reporters’ use and attribution of outrage rhetoric.

To analyze how journalists positioned themselves as analytic or outraged voices in relation to their sources over time, I ran logistic regression models with analytic and outrage rhetoric as dependent variables. The models were run using the same independent variables from chapter 4 (minus the controls for broader political contexts and with the addition of the six time periods). I also included an interaction between a version of the organizational source variable that captures when the journalists was the speaker versus another speaker and the time periods. To better present the outcomes of the interactions, I plotted predicted probabilities with 95 percent confidence intervals (other variables are held at their means).<sup>58</sup> Figure 5.6 graphs the results for analytic rhetoric.

**Figure 5.6:** Predicted share of analytic rhetoric over time for the source being the journalist vs. some other speaker.



<sup>58</sup> In some cases, the differences between predicted probabilities were examined, for example when another conditioning factor changed. These are called ‘marginal effects.’ They can be interpreted along the following lines: “Is there a significant difference between the predicted probability of an outcome when a factor x is present vs. factor x is not present?” Figures 5.1-5.4 and 5.14-5.15 are presented in this way.

Figure 5.6 shows that journalists adopted the role of guardian of consensus through their use of analytic rhetoric in the second (1977-1980) and fifth (1989-92) time periods. They were also significantly more likely to voice analytic interpretations in these two periods than in those that preceded and followed them.<sup>59</sup> The results point to the idea that it was not until the second period that the media began to guard the consensus established by the 1973 *Roe* decision. Thus, despite the passage of the Hyde Amendment reducing federal funding for abortion in 1976 and the Court's decision to uphold it in 1980, it appears as though the media did not treat this encroachment by the state into the 1973 landmark decision as legitimate. In some contrast, the *Webster* and the *Casey* decisions bracketing the 1989-92 period, both of which reaffirmed the fundamental right to abortion while increasing state's rights to restrict abortion, pushed journalists to speak for the public interest in the face of President George H.W. Bush's pro-life stance.

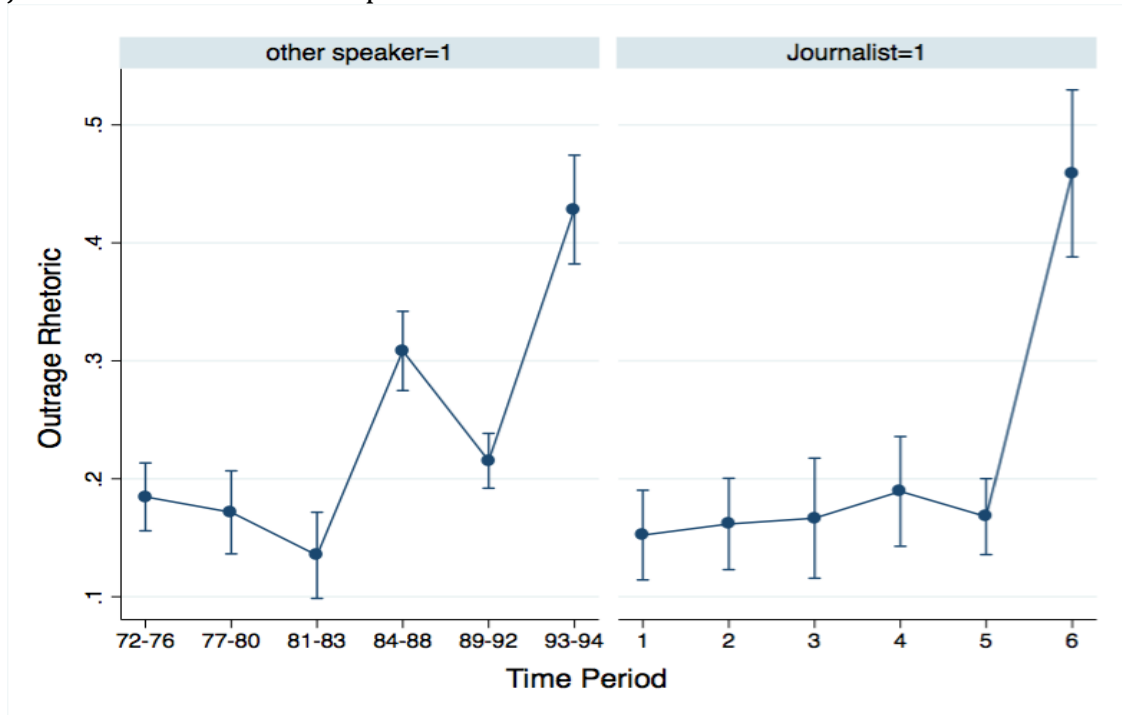
Figure 5.7 buttresses these interpretations by graphing journalists' use and attribution of outrage rhetoric. Reporters were significantly more likely to voice outrage in the last period (1993-94) than in any of the preceding periods. However, we see that they were not more likely to do so than their sources. In short, outrage was a substantial portion of the rhetoric of the 1993-94 *overall* compared to earlier years. Journalists were also much more likely to cast sources as outraged following Reagan's reelection in the third period (1984-88) than they were to voice outrage. These results closely mirror the increases in contentious news coverage seen in Figure 5.5.

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<sup>59</sup>Of note, and in line with the chapter 3 findings, experts were also more likely than other (non-author) sources to voice analytic rhetoric during the 1981-83 and the 1989-92 periods (see Appendix Figure A5.1). This suggests that experts guarded consensus during the legitimate controversy of this period.



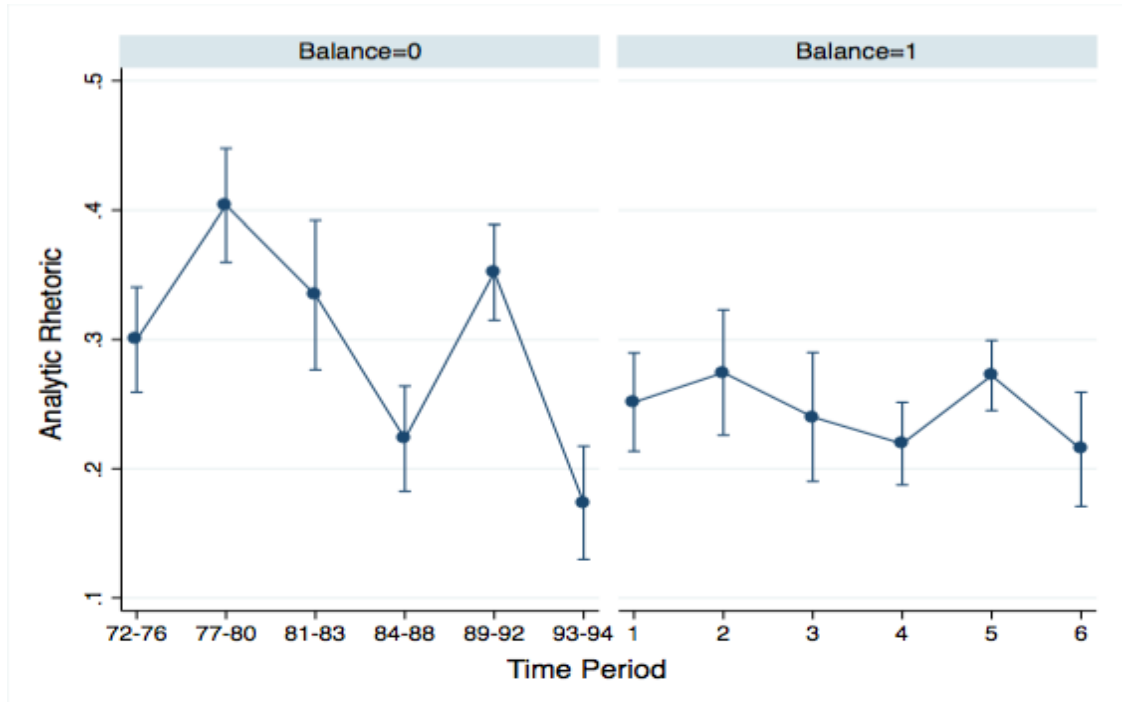
**Figure 5.7:** Predicted share of outrage rhetoric over time for the source being the journalist vs. some other speaker.



Taken together and when combined with the descriptive trends, findings suggest that through their use and mediation of analytic rhetoric journalists guarded the consensus established by the Court in 1973 during the second (1977-80) and the fifth period (1989-92). Findings also provide some support for the expectation that reporters guarded consensus by framing debate as deviant in the third period (1984-88) and in the sixth period (1993-94) through their use and mediation of outrage rhetoric. This leaves the third period (1981-83) as the only time when reporters treated abortion as legitimately controversial.

To reinforce these assessments, I use the same methods to examine the relationship between the strategic objectivity ritual of argument balance and the appearance of analytic and outrage rhetoric. Figures 5.8 and 5.9 graph the results derived from logistic regression models that included an interaction between argument balance and the time periods.

**Figure 5.8:** Predicted share of analytic rhetoric over time and under the condition of no balance vs. balance.



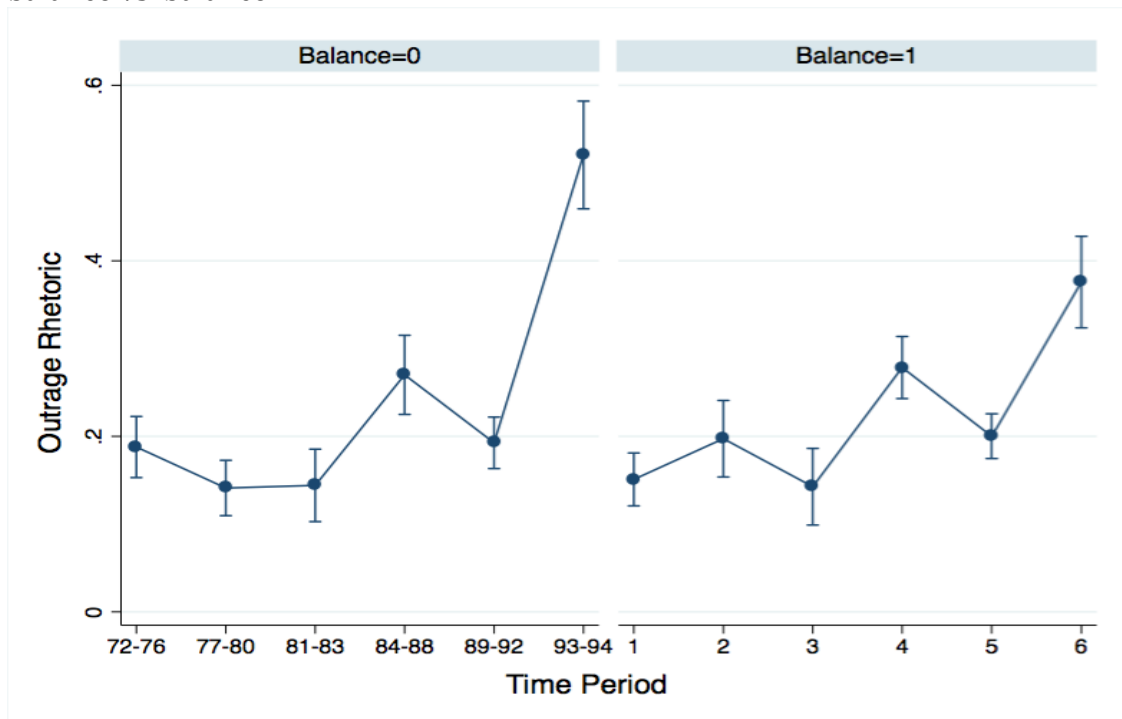
Starting with Figure 5.8, we see that the appearance of analytic rhetoric in articles lacking balance shows significant variation (left side graph) and mirrors the results from Figure 5.6. More specifically, analytic rhetoric appeared most commonly in articles where the balancing norm was *not* applied in the second (1977-80) and fifth (1989-92) phases of debate, the same periods in which journalists were more likely to use analytic speech. In contrast, the relationship between the application of the balance norm and the appearance of analytic rhetoric was relatively stable over the entire research period (right side graph).

These findings accord with those presented in chapter 3, wherein journalists are less likely to incorporate analytic rhetoric when they apply the balance norm in an article. Whereas balance is generally applied to perform the role of neutral observation, analytic rhetoric is routinely used to perform the role of guardian of consensus. Thus, we see

further support for understanding the second (1977-80) and fifth (1989-92) time periods as when journalists guarded consensus through their structuring of analytic rhetoric.

Moving on to Figure 5.9, we see a similar pattern in the appearance of outrage rhetoric as was shown in Figure 5.7 regardless of the application of the balance norm. This is not to say, however, this central ritual for demonstrating objectivity had no influence on outrage rhetoric. Instead, comparing across the graphs, we can see that the primary influence of argument balance occurs during the sixth period. From 1993 through 1994, reporters were significantly more likely to include outrage rhetoric in articles that lacked a balance of opposing viewpoints than in articles where they applied the balance norm.

**Figure 5.9:** Predicted share of outrage rhetoric over time and under the condition of no balance vs. balance.



Overall, the results also reinforce the evidence pointing to the fourth (1984-88) and sixth (1993-94) periods as moments when journalists guarded consensus by framing

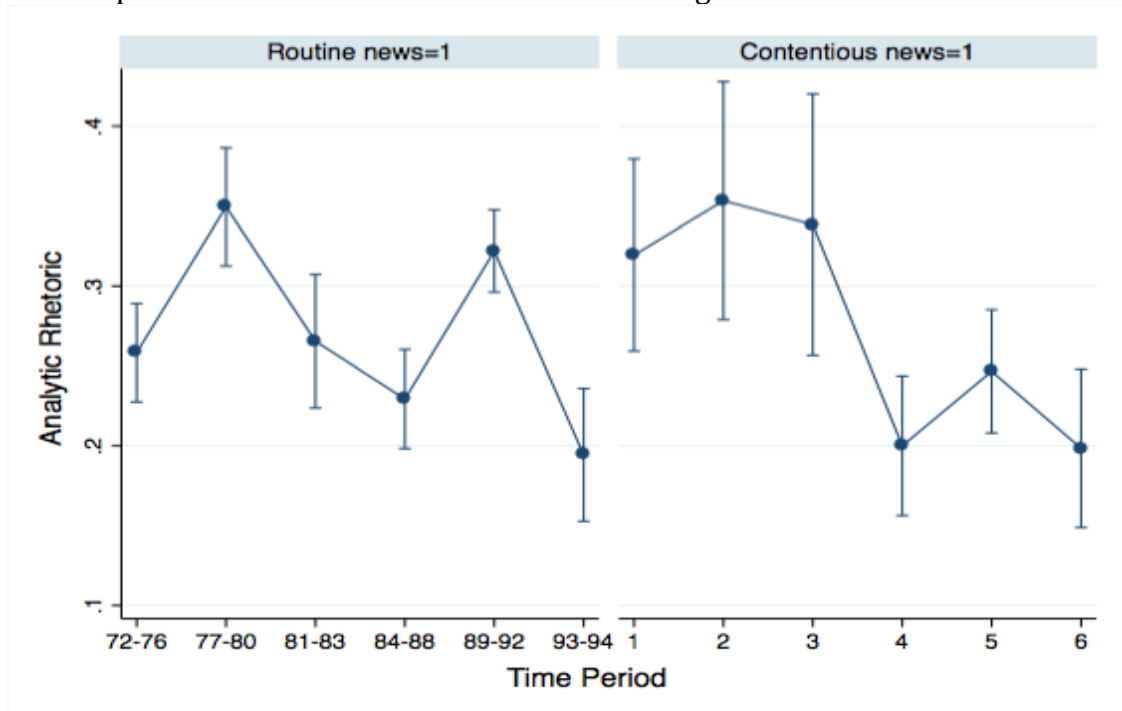
debate as deviant. This interpretation is in line with what was argued in chapter 4: the balance norm is sometimes applied to highlight the deviance of outraged actors rather than to demarcate legitimate controversy, especially in the case of contentious coverage. However, to take these findings as indications of deviance, it is necessary to explore the relationship between contentious news and analytic and outrage rhetoric over time.

To recall, chapter 4 showed that contentious coverage tended to be characterized as deviant and uncivil. All forms of outrage rhetoric were far more likely to be incorporated into these “anti-routine” stories (i.e., protest, crime, and social movement activity) than into coverage generated by elites and more institutionally legitimated actors. Outrage speech that raised the alarm on threatening tactics was found to be especially common in contentious news stories. To systematically examine the relationship between contentious coverage and the appearance of analytic and outrage rhetoric, I ran separate models on the two dependent variables with interactions between the time period and the contentious news variable. To present the results of the interactions, I again plotted predicted probabilities using 95 percent confidence intervals. Figure 5.10 (below) compares when analytic rhetoric appeared over time in routine versus contentious news coverage.

Right away, we can see a very similar pattern in routine coverage (left side graph) for analytic rhetoric as we saw for journalists and for articles that lacked balance (Figures 5.6 and 5.8). Once again, the second (1977-80) and fifth (1989-92) time periods are characterized by increases in analytic discourse compared to other years. Although analytic rhetoric increased slightly in contentious coverage during these periods (right side graph), only a few significantly varied over time. When compared to the first half of the research period (1972-83) analytic interpretations became significantly less common in contentious

news coverage in the fourth (1984-88) and the sixth (1993-94) time periods. These results support my argument that these two periods are when the media typified the debate surrounding abortion as deviant in order to guard consensus.

**Figure 5.10:** Predicted share of analytic rhetoric over time and under the condition of routine political news vs. contentious news coverage.

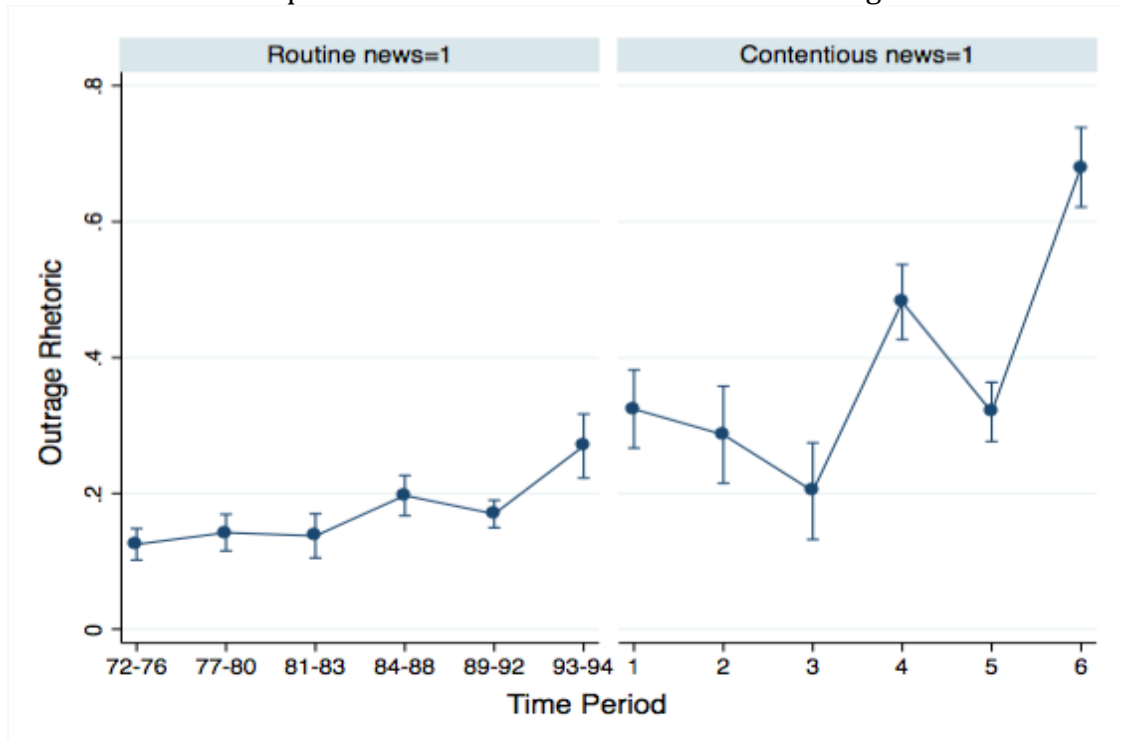


Comparing across the two graphs, the only significant distinction between routine and contentious coverage on the appearance of analytic rhetoric occurred in the fifth period, from 1989 through 1992. That is, analytic speech that distances the speaker from incivility or extreme positions was more likely to appear in the routine coverage of this period. This offers additional evidence for identifying the fifth period as one when journalists advocated for consensus values. Notably, this period begins with the *Webster* decision and the Bush presidency in 1989 and closes with the *Casey* Court decision and Clinton’s election in 1992. The interplay of elections and major Court decisions during this

period may help to account for why journalists appear to have more firmly protected consensus values in routine coverage.

Turning to outrage rhetoric, Figure 5.11 graphs when outrage rhetoric appeared in routine and contentious coverage over time. Comparing across the two graphs, outrage rhetoric was more common in stories occasioned by contentious politics. This is in line with my typology, however, we do see some distinct patterns in the relationship between the appearance of outrage rhetoric and these storytelling contexts in different years.

**Figure 5.11:** Predicted share of outrage rhetoric over time over time and under the condition of routine political news vs. contentious news coverage.



Notably, the third period (1981-83) is the only one that displays no difference in the incorporation of outrage rhetoric between routine and contentious news stories. This reinforces my identification of this phase as the only one in which the dissent surrounding a woman's right to choose abortion was treated as legitimately controversial. Also of note,

we can clearly see that outrage rhetoric was much more prominent in contentious coverage in period four (1984-88) and period six (1993-94). This supports my identification of these two periods as moments when journalists guarded consensus by constructing controversy on abortion as deviant.

Taken together, these findings make clear that journalists delimited the boundaries of acceptable conflict in different ways and in different time periods. The findings are also in line with those from earlier chapters on specific objectivity rituals that journalists use to rhetorically perform their objectivity. Across the results, it became clear that when performing the role of the guardian of consensus journalists routinely constructed the abortion issue as either demanding consensual politics be advocated for or as demanding that consensus be defended from deviant politics. At the broadest level, reporters appear to have used and mediated analytic rhetoric to delimit the issue as consensual during the second (1977-80) and the fifth (1989-92) time periods. By contrast, reporters used and mediated outrage rhetoric to delimit the issue as an affront to consensus – as deviant – in the fourth (1984-88) and sixth time periods (1993-94). Table 5.3 breaks down the more specific results for the reportage of consensual versus deviant politics.

**Table 5.3:** The reportage of consensual versus deviant politics

	<u>Consensual Politics</u>	<u>Deviant Politics</u>
Acceptable discourse	Analytic rhetoric interpreting the issue as consensual.	Outrage rhetoric interpreting the issue as deviant.
Time periods	Period 2: 1977-80 Period 5: 1989-92	Period 4: 1984-88 Period 6: 1993-94
Who Speaks	Journalists voice analytic rhetoric to offer interpretations advocating for consensual politics. They also use certain sources to buttress this view.	Journalists voice outrage rhetoric to offer interpretations defending against deviant politics. They also use certain sources to buttress this view.
Acceptable storytelling forms	Balance is unnecessary and absent from stories with reporter interpretations. The coverage of routine politics.	Balance can be used to highlight deviance, but is not always necessary. The coverage of contentious politics.
Acceptable Contexts & actor portrayals	Major Supreme Court decisions. Experts, state actors, and journalists are attached to analytic rhetoric during years with major Court decisions	Presidential elections. Church representatives and pro-life activists are attached to outrage in election years.

As reflected in Table 5.3, journalists were the main voices of analytic rhetoric to advocate for the consensual nature of the issue in the second and fifth time periods. While they also used outrage rhetoric to guard consensus, they were just as likely to let sources help frame the debate as deviant in the fourth and the sixth time periods. Balance was found to be unnecessary for reportage of the issue as consensual, whereas it was sometimes used to highlight deviance in the fourth and sixth periods of debate. And while journalists incorporated analytic rhetoric into routine political coverage, outrage rhetoric was far more common in contentious political coverage. The questions that remain to be answered are: what were the consequences of journalists’ construction of the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable conflict for different political actors? How did the shifts between periods of legitimate controversy, consensus, and deviance result in legitimating or discrediting portrayals of different actors?



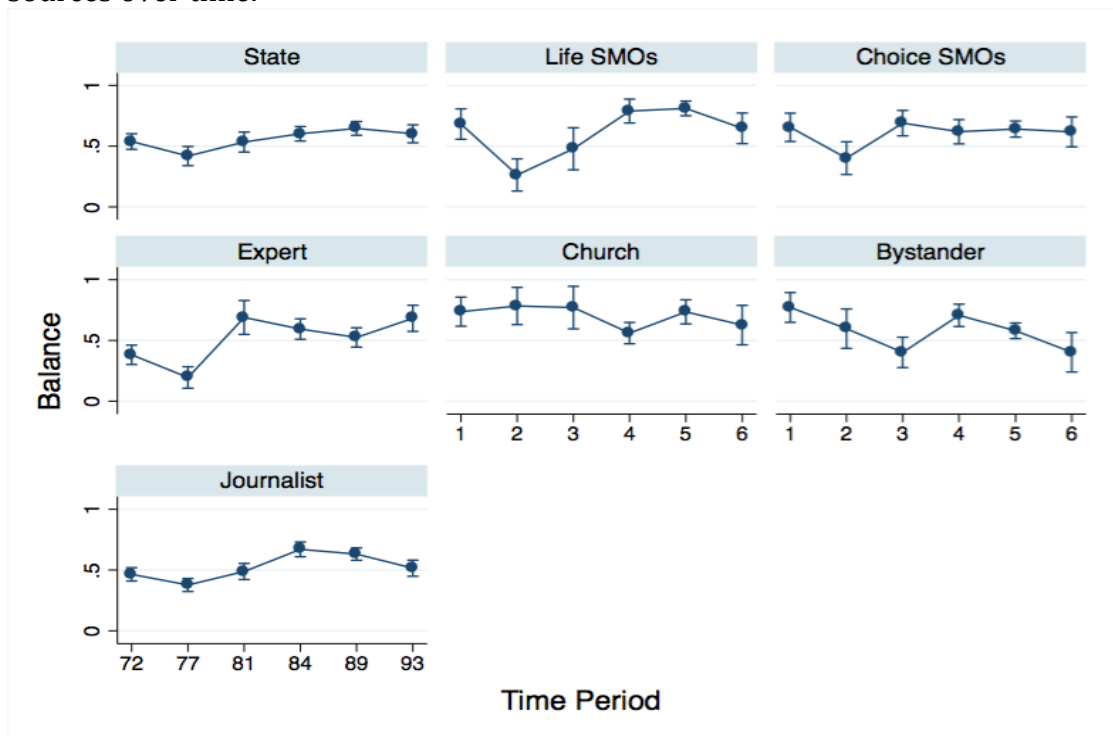
## 5.4 Over Time Dynamics: Portraying Different Political Actors

To address the question of the implications of journalists' reportage of the abortion debate at different times for the representation of different political actors, I explore how different sources were incorporated into media coverage as the issue became contentious. More specifically, to better understand how journalists performed the role of guardian of consensus when they were presenting the abortion issue as a part of consensual politics or as part of deviant politics, I first look at when speakers were attributed any claims in balanced coverage. The idea here is that when an issue is characterized as legitimately controversial (1981-83), the actors given greater voice are legitimated as credible sources with relevant demands. Secondly, I investigate which actors were predominantly cast as outraged across the different periods because journalists did not dominate the use of outrage rhetoric in the fourth (1984-88) and sixth (1993-94) time periods. This approach, when combined with the earlier findings and historical contexts, helps to reveal the actors presented as co-defenders of consensus values and those presented as unacceptably defying shared values.

I begin with an analysis of the variation in speakers who appeared in balanced articles. I used similar methods to run the analyses and plot predicted probabilities. Figure 5.12 shows which speakers were likely to appear in balanced articles in each time period. Unsurprisingly, we see in the top left graph, that state speakers were consistently brought into balanced articles across the research period. However, we see a slight decline in the balanced representation of state sources as well as most other speakers during the second period (1977-80). This supports my argument that journalists began to guard the

consensus of the 1973 *Roe* decision as the state began to reduce funding for abortion in this period. Importantly, though, we see that both expert and pro-choice activists were more likely to be brought into balanced articles starting in the third period (1981-83) of legitimate controversy that was ushered in by the pro-life Reagan presidency. This suggests that experts and pro-choice activists were cast as legitimate challengers to Reagan’s administration.

**Figure 5.12:** Predicted share of claims making in balanced articles by organizational sources over time.



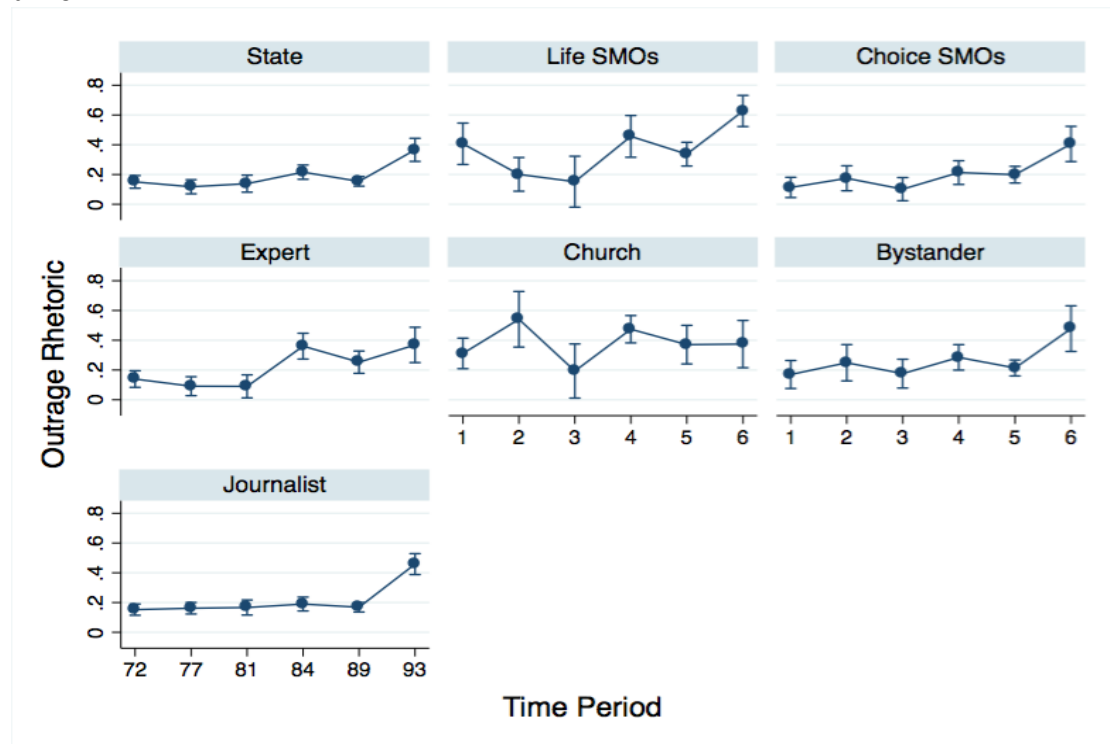
Note: 90% confidence intervals are used to better show results with other variables held at their means.

It is not until the second Reagan election victory in the fourth period (1984-88) that pro-life movement activists, bystanders, and journalists themselves are significantly more likely to voice claims in balanced articles. Pro-life actors and bystanders were also represented less frequently in balanced articles in the sixth period (1993-94). This not only provides some additional support to identifying these two periods as when reporters

typified the contest as deviant in order to guard consensus but also that they portrayed pro-life activists and bystanders as illegitimate challengers. When we consider the violence of this period, it is not surprising to see these two categories of speakers treated as deviating from shared political values in their efforts to overturn the fundamental rights of established by the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

To reinforce my interpretation that experts and pro-choice speakers were treated as legitimate voices whereas pro-life and bystander speakers were treated as illegitimate, I turn to an examination of when different sources were cast as outraged over time. In particular, it is useful to examine which actors contributed to the large increases in outrage rhetoric in the fourth (1984-88) and sixth (1993-94) time periods of deviance reporting. Figure 5.13 graphs which sources were cast as outraged from one period to the next.

**Figure 5.13:** Predicted share of outraged claims making by organizational source over time.



Note: 95% confidence intervals with other variables held at their means.

The most obvious pattern is that almost every speaker was more likely to voice outrage in the sixth (1993-94) period than at any other time during the debate. The notable exceptions make it clear that experts, pro-life activists, and church representatives were largely responsible for the significant increase in outrage rhetoric in the fourth period (1984-88). To be clearer on this interpretation, I ran supplementary analyses using a more detailed breakdown of outrage rhetoric into speech attacking the character of the opposition (attack speech) and speech raising the alarm on the threatening tactics of an actor or group of persons (alarmist speech) (results not shown, see Appendix A, Figures A5.2 and A5.3). These analyses showed that the increase in outrage during the 1993-94 period was driven by alarmist rhetoric. By contrast, the increase in outrage in the 1984-88 period comes not only from experts and pro-choice speakers raising the alarm on threatening tactics, but also from state sources and church representatives. Finally, for pro-life activists alone, both attack and alarmist speech began to increase in the years following Reagan's 1984 reelection and again after Clinton took the office in 1993.

These results reinforce the assertions derived from Figure 5.12. Experts and pro-choice activists were predominantly cast as legitimately outraged defenders of the social order in the fourth (1984-88) and sixth (1993-94) time periods of deviance reportage. In the latter period, they were clearly joined by journalists and state authorities as legitimate defenders against the threatening tactics of challengers to a pro-choice status quo. By contrast, pro-life activists stand out as having been cast as beyond the pale of acceptable conflict during these periods and despite having a pro-life ally in the White House from 1984-88. Supplementary analyses support these interpretations.

To further ensure that pro-choice activists were portrayed as legitimate challengers and pro-life activists as illegitimate challengers, I also examined which speakers were brought into balanced coverage initiated by the state (results not shown, see Appendix A, Figure A5.4). Both experts and pro-choice movements actors were more likely to appear in state-initiated coverage in the 1981-83 period of legitimate controversy. Pro-life activists and bystanders, on the other hand, were more likely to appear in balanced articles that did not stem from state-initiated occasions for coverage in the 1984-88 period of deviance. Also of note, in the 1993-94 period of deviance, pro-life activists and bystanders were significantly less likely to be brought into state-initiated coverage that had balance. As balance declined in general during this period (see Figure 5.5), this suggests that balance was not necessary to highlight the deviance of controversy from 1993 through 1994. Instead, the clear pro-choice policies of the Clinton administration and the rise of alarmist speech firmly placed pro-life positions beyond the bounds of acceptable conflict.<sup>60</sup> All in all, the results show how the shifts between periods of legitimate controversy, consensus, and deviance legitimated some actors and discredited others (see Table 5.4).

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<sup>60</sup> I also examined the appearance of outrage rhetoric by organizational source and time period under the condition no balance versus balance (see Appendix A, Figure A5.5). To highlight a few notable results, during the 1981-83 period of legitimate controversy, pro-choice activists were more likely to be presented as outraged in balanced articles and experts more likely to be presented as non-outraged in balanced articles than during the 1977-80 period. By contrast, pro-life activists were much more likely to voice outrage in articles that lacked balance during the 1984-88 period of deviance than in the period of legitimate controversy that came before. Lastly, I compared the positioning of actors voicing outrage in articles without balance or with balance in the 1984-88 and 1993-94 periods (see Appendix A Figures A5.6-A5.9). While affirming my general interpretations, I also find that bystanders and, to a lesser extent, church representatives were more likely to voice outrage in balanced articles during the 1984-88 period of deviance than in the period of legitimate controversy that came before. Pro-life activists appear to have benefited from this by being more frequently cast as non-outraged, or simply as partisan speakers relative to other sources in balanced articles. This is in line with historical accounts of the internal divisions within the pro-life movement and the ambiguous responses many pro-life organizations gave regarding the acceptability of the violence leveled at abortion clinics and providers during this period (e.g., Rohlinger 2015). With this in mind, the 1989-92 period proves interesting as well. It appears as though the deviance of the 1984-88 period stuck with pro-life activists and church representatives while it declined for bystanders in the 1989-92 period.

**Table 5.4:** Specific findings for reportage and actor portrayals in each time period

	Consensus	Consensual Politics	Legitimate Controversy	Deviant Politics	Consensual Politics	Deviant Politics
Time Period	1972-1976	1977-1980	1981-1983	1984-88	1989-1992	1993-1994
Legitimizing portrayals	All sources	Journalists guard consensus values through what they say (analytic rhetoric) and state sources represent the middle-ground (hedging rhetoric)	Experts are legitimate voices (analytic rhetoric) and pro-choice activists are legitimate voices (outrage rhetoric)	Experts and state speakers are legitimate voices (outraged alarmist speech)	Journalists guard consensus values through what they say and experts are legitimate voices of consensual values (analytic rhetoric)	Journalists as well as experts, pro-choice activists, and state actors are legitimate voices (outraged alarmist speech)
Delegitimizing portrayals				Pro-life activists, bystanders, and church sources are illegitimate voices (outraged attack and alarmist speech)	Pro-life activists are illegitimate voices (outraged attack and alarmist speech)	Pro-life activists are illegitimate voices (outraged attack and alarmist speech)
Analytic rhetoric	High	Increases	Slight decrease	Decreases	Increases	Decreases
Outrage rhetoric	Middle	Decreases	Slight increase	Increases	Slight decrease	Increases
Balance	Middle	Increases	Slight increase	Decreases	Increases	Decreases
Contentious news	Low	Decreases	Stable	Increases	Decreases	Increases

The overarching story is that by 1977 journalists turned to the role of guardian of consensus to defend the clear pro-choice consensus established by the Court in 1973. Around the time of the 1981 Reagan election victory, reporters shifted to the role of neutral observer in the face of clear pro-life administration. In doing so, they cast experts and pro-choice activists as legitimate challengers to the administration's stance. By the time of Reagan's reelection in 1984, reporters shifted back to the role of guardian of consensus by highlighting the deviance of the ongoing controversy surrounding abortion, especially that driven by the mobilization of pro-life activists. From 1989 through 1992, when the ambiguity of pro-choice policy came to the forefront, journalists positioned themselves and experts as guardians of consensual, pro-choice politics. They also continued to position pro-life activists as illegitimate voices in this new issue terrain. Finally, in 1993, with the clear pro-choice Clinton administration, reporters framed abortion debate as deviant and overwhelmingly cast pro-life activists as representatives of counter-consensual values.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

The evidence presented in this chapter overwhelmingly supports the expectations presented in Table 5.2, which I re-present below. The evidence also strongly indicates that journalists guard consensus by voicing analytic rhetoric, whereas they framed periods of deviant controversy by voicing alarmist rhetoric and by positioning certain sources as outraged defenders of the social good. This is important for distinguishing between the ways in which journalists construct not only consensus versus legitimate controversy but also deviance when covering public interest issues. It is also crucial to understanding that the relationship between the media and the political authority of the state is often

ambivalent and that media practices must be examined over time to understand their full implications.

**Table 5.5:** General findings for reportage in each time period

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Guardianship of Consensus</i>		<i>Neutral Observation</i>
	Consensus	Deviance	Legitimate Controversy
(1) 1972-76	X		
(2) 1977-80	X		X
(3) 1981-83			X
(4) 1984-88		X	
(5) 1989-92	X		X
(6) 1993-94		X	

This investigation showed that journalists guarded the weakening consensus of established by the 1973 landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision by voicing analytic rhetoric more than they attributed it to their sources from 1977 to 1980. They did so again when they guarded the “uneasy compromises” of the *Webster* decision in 1989 and the *Casey* decision of 1992. While journalists were unabashed at typifying the coverage of abortion controversy as deviant in the 1993-94 period, they were more cautious in how they presented the 1984-1988 period as one of political deviance. In both periods, state and expert actors made the deviance of extreme pro-life positions clear by raising the alarm on threatening tactics. However while reporters cast experts and state speakers as legitimate voices of outrage and pro-life movement spokespersons, bystanders, and church representatives as illegitimate voices of outrage from 1984 through 1988, they themselves voiced outrage in the 1993-94 period to highlight the deviance of pro-life activism. Thus, when deviance again became the primary frame, it affirmed the Clinton administration’s establishment of a new pro-choice consensus in 1993. Journalists directly voiced outrage



and represented a range of political “insiders” and “outsiders” as outraged against tactics threatening a woman’s right to choose to terminate a pregnancy.

Gans’ (1979) and Hallin’s (1986) explanations for how journalists can interpret the news without appearing to depart from objectivity prove useful for understanding how reporters performed their objectivity when covering abortion. While both scholars offer a vision of a relatively stable professional ideology made up of a mixture of newsgathering routines and values that tend to reinforce the authority of the state, they also suggest that the authority of the state is not the only thing bounding journalistic autonomy. For Gans, traditional political values, such as moderatism, national leadership, social order, and altruistic democracy help to reinforce the state’s power in deciding what’s news. For Hallin, the dependency of the media on state sources is complicated by a political mainstream that is not always in alignment with political elites and by divisions among state actors themselves.

Combining the two explanations, the over time shifts in reportage on abortion can also be seen in terms of the clarity or cohesiveness of the state’s position on abortion. For example, it can help to account for why reporters cast experts as legitimate voices of consensual, pro-choice politics and pro-life activists as legitimate voices of pro-choice outrage at the start of the first Reagan administration rather than voicing these views themselves. It may also help to account for the periods when journalists guarded consensual pro-choice politics in the face of state challenges to that consensus (1977-80 and 1989-92). But it does not fully account for this or for the fact that reporters joined the fray of contentious and routine acrimonious debate from 1993 through 1994. Nor does it account for why experts (i.e., professionals from scientific, medical and legal fields) were

cast as advocates of consensual political values in the 1981-83 and 1989-92 phases of debate.

As argued in chapter 3, journalists sometimes enacted their commitment to objectivity not by being impartial but by being partial to their own professional understanding of public consensus. Notably, this did not always align with the views held by those within the political establishment or among the public. As the foregoing discussion alludes to, if journalists were partisan to one particular consensual value over the entire research period it was to the fundamental right to abortion established by the Court in the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that launched the issue of abortion to the national level of debate. As has been speculated in previous research (Caldeira 1986), the media appear to have a far less adversarial relationship with the Court than they have with Congress or the presidency. Supporting the pro-choice slant of reportorial norms, reporters routinely cast experts, who were key pro-choice players early in the abortion debate, as advocates and defenders of pro-choice values. Furthermore, reporters cast state speakers as “objective” in the sense of representing the middle ground (hedging speech) during the years when they themselves framed debate as a part of consensual politics.

Despite following these unspoken norms, journalists mostly managed to appear impartial during this period. Yet by attending to their strategic rituals for performing objectivity as either guardians of consensus or as neutral observers it is clear that at different times reporters framed the abortion debate and the actors involved in very different ways. As argued in chapter 4, these practices have consequences. Journalists excluded pro-life representatives and bystanders from routine coverage of state activity, they presented them as more uncivil than other speakers, and the “dialogue” or balance

that was provided to these challengers was often used to highlight their incivility and deviance. Reporters also excluded most sources from the coverage of the 1977-80 and 1989-92 periods when they guarded consensus themselves. And during the 1981-83 period of legitimate controversy, journalists let pro-choice activists and experts serve as the legitimate pro-choice opponents to the Reagan administration.

Overall, when journalists performed objectivity by typifying debate as consensual or deviant they routinely violated the ideals of an inclusive, civil, and dialogic public sphere as well as the rules of "objective journalism." They were exclusive when they cast themselves and certain other actors as legitimate advocates or defenders of the social good, mainly pro-choice activists, experts, and state sources. They allowed the debate to become uncivil at times and even emphasized this incivility themselves. And they undermined the values placed on a balanced dialogue between equally relevant opponents. This reinforces what was argued in chapter 4: that by inadvertently defending the normative ideals of a democratic public sphere that are closely interwoven with the principles of objective journalism, journalists may undermine both ideologies when they guard their own vision of consensual political values.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION: PROTECTING IDEALS BY VIOLATING THEM

“In addition to the fact that different routines may employ the same front, it is to be noted that a given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations to which it gives rise, and tends to take on a meaning and stability apart from the specific tasks which happen at the time to be performed in its name. The front becomes ‘collective representation’ and a fact in its own right.”

- Erving Goffman 1959, p. 27

How and when do the media define the boundaries of acceptable controversy while conforming to the norm that news appear objective? To answer this central question, I have shown how reporters structure language in news stories to rhetorically perform their objectivity. More specifically, by paying attention to how specific rituals of objectivity are employed in news content – for example, when reporters use analytic or outraged speech, how they rhetorically position themselves relative to other speakers, how they structure stories, and how this changes over time – a number of things became clear. It is clear that journalists can perform their objectivity in different ways. I fleshed out a journalistic role I call the guardianship of consensus, showing the kind of writing in which it is expressed and how it is distinctive from the role of neutral observer we tend to associate with journalistic objectivity. Reporters adopt the role of guardian of consensus by advocating for consensual politics and defending against deviant politics. They adopt the role of neutral observer by

conforming to the norms of nonpartisanship, accuracy, and balance.<sup>61</sup> Which role reporters perform is based on their expectations of the kinds of accounts both they themselves and their sources should provide in relation to unfolding events.

As I profiled these performances of objectivity in the previous chapters, it also became clear that these roles are not only shaped by the strictures of routine of newsgathering for media organizations and state authority. They also reflect the media's "own set of values and...own conception of the good social order" (Gans 1979, 62). By acting either as neutral observers or as guardians of consensus journalists enact their commitment to objectivity not by being impartial but by being partial to their understanding of shared public values. That is, when reporters perceive issues to be settled, they adopt the role of guardian of public consensus. And when they perceive issues to be legitimately contested, they adopt the role of neutral observer.

These performances are rooted in journalism and have consequences for the key players involved in political contention. Depending on the role reporters adopt, different groups of actors are portrayed as either co-representatives of the public interest or as illegitimate challengers to those interests. Importantly, though, reporters privilege certain political positions over others and themselves make normative statements not because they eschew objectivity. Rather they assume that issues, actors, or events that are not legitimately controversial should be covered in a different way than those that have become objects of legitimate controversy (see Table 6.1). This account, while building on

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<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, journalists must produce "quality" stories, that is stories that are accurate, important, and interesting to their audiences. On the other hand, they must follow the "core principles" of "objective journalism:" independence, the exclusion of the author's opinions or interpretations, and fairness or balance (Hallin 1986, p. 68). The routines and values of media institutions that have developed to meet these competing standards are themselves far from "objective."

insights from previous scholarship, challenges the standard vision of the culture of the mass media and its consequences for political contention.

**Table 6.1:** Journalistic norms for consensual, deviant, and legitimately controversial politics

	<i>Norms for the guardianship of consensus</i>		<i>Norms for neutral observation</i>
How debate is framed	<i>Consensual politics</i>	<i>Deviant Politics</i>	<i>Legitimate Controversy</i>
Journalists' role	Advocate for consensual politics	Defender against deviant politics	Neutral observer
Who Offers interpretations	Journalists use analytic rhetoric to offer interpretations.	Journalists use outrage rhetoric, especially alarmist speech, to offer interpretations.	Sources offer interpretations that take a clear policy stance, not journalists.
Acceptable Discourse	Rhetoric highlights the incivility of others	Rhetoric is uncivil or outraged.	Rhetoric is generally civil, even if partisan and even during political contests.
How Actors are Portrayed	State and expert actors are treated as voices of consensual politics. Movement actors, church representatives and bystanders are not treated as voices of consensual politics.	State actors, expert actors, and pro-choice activists are treated as voices of legitimate outrage, especially alarmist speech. Pro-life activists, church representatives and bystanders are treated as illegitimate sources of outrage.	Actors are treated as voices of partisan politics with clear policy positions. The state can be challenged.
Article Structures	Balance is unnecessary and absent from stories with reporter's interpretations. A diversity of voices is unnecessary and absent from stories with reporter's interpretations.	Balance is unnecessary unless to highlight deviance. A diversity of voices is used to highlight deviance.	Balance is essential. A diversity of voices is not essential, but reinforces accuracy and reflects independence from the state.
Typical Story Subjects	News occasioned by routine political activity as debate becomes contentious and news initiated by the media (e.g., polls, investigative reports).	News occasioned by contentious political activity or actors (e.g., crime, protest).	News occasioned by routine politics, primarily that of legitimated institutions (e.g., the courts, medical).
Acceptable Contexts	Years with major Supreme Court decisions.	Years lacking major Supreme Court decisions.	Presidential Elections.

To review, in the third chapter I conceptualized five analytic speech constructions journalists use to demonstrate their objectivity: *diagnostic* speech, highly qualified or *hedging* speech, speech about the public's perception (*society*), and commentary about the prospects for resolving the issue (*polarization* and *consensus*). I showed how journalists use this speech to perform the role of guardian of consensus. I also showed how the attribution of analytic rhetoric to different sources in the abortion debate was politically skewed, most in favor of journalists themselves. Whereas experts were cast as co-guardians of debate alongside reporters, state actors were primarily cast as objective in the sense of representing middle ground or anti-extreme views on the issue of abortion. Also reflecting a hierarchy underlying sourcing rituals, bystanders, movement activists, and church representatives were unlikely to be cast as objective. In terms of article structures, the balancing norm, reduced all forms of analytic rhetoric and dampened the author's analytic voice. Finally, when coverage touched on protest, journalists turned to the role of guardian of consensus by speaking on behalf of the public, emphasizing their position as above the fray of such polarizing activity, and casting experts as co-defenders of the public interest.

In the fourth chapter, I demonstrated how outrage rhetoric was a common discursive style in the media coverage of the abortion debate. Results showed that journalists guard the boundaries of political acceptability by selectively voicing outrage and by routinely portraying some actors as outraged beyond the bounds of the social good (speech attacking the character or motives of opponents) and others as outraged co-defenders of consensus values (speech raising the alarm on threatening tactics). Notably, political "outsiders" were more commonly cast as outraged than political "insiders" (i.e., state actors), but these boundaries were not clear-cut. Whereas journalists routinely

treated church representatives as outraged partisans alongside pro-life movement activists and bystanders were routine sources for attacks on both pro-life and pro-choice positions, pro-choice activists were not generally attributed outrage. Not only were attacks on pro-life positions not relegated to pro-choice activists but pro-choice movement representatives were no more extreme than state actors in raising the alarm on threatening tactics in coverage generated by contentious political activity (e.g., crime and protest). I also showed that the tenor of disputes within routine stories was kept civil and respectful compared to the incivility and hostility of contests occurring in contentious political news.

Finally, in the fifth chapter I explored how journalists performed the role of guardian of consensus when they were presenting the abortion issue as a part of consensual politics or as a part of deviant politics. I also addressed how this critically influenced the ways different sources were portrayed at different points in debate. The overarching story for the abortion issue is that by 1977 journalists turned to the role of guardian of consensus to defend the pro-choice consensus established by the Supreme Court in the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision (1973). From 1977 to 1980 journalists presented abortion as consensual political issue by voicing analytic rhetoric and portraying state sources as objective in the sense of representing the middle ground on abortion (hedging speech). Then, around the time of the 1981 Reagan election victory, reporters shifted to the role of neutral observer and framed debate as legitimately controversial. Here, they cast experts and pro-choice activists as legitimate challengers to Reagan's pro-life administration.

By the time of Reagan's landslide reelection victory in 1984, reporters shifted back to the role of guardian of consensus by framing the controversy surrounding abortion as



deviant. During the 1984-88 phase of debate, pro-life activists, bystanders, and church sources were portrayed as illegitimate voices of outrage in relation to the legitimate outrage leveled by state and expert sources against the threatening tactics of pro-life supporters. Following the 1989 *Webster* decision through the 1992 *Casey* decision, journalists again positioned themselves guardians of consensual, pro-choice politics. They rhetorically positioned experts as co-advocates of consensus values, state actors as representing the middle ground of debate, and pro-life activists as illegitimate speakers. Finally, in 1993, with the pro-abortion Clinton administration, reporters overwhelmingly cast pro-life activists as representatives of counter-consensual values. Journalists as well as experts, pro-choice activists, and state actors were represented as legitimate voices of outrage that condemned the threatening tactics of pro-life supporters. Overall, through my analyses of media coverage I showed that if journalists were partisan to any consensual value over the entire research period it was to the fundamental right to abortion.

## **6.1 Synthesizing Theory: Journalism & the Public Sphere**

One reason I embarked on this research is because although it is commonly recognized that the mainstream media shape American political life, scholars have struggled to understand the version of political reality the mainstream media presents. I wanted to reanimate this discussion because I think it is critical for understanding dissent and contention. As Gamson (1998) notes, “[t]he *mass media* are the most important forum for understanding cultural impact since they provide the major site in which contests over meaning must succeed politically” (p. 59). However, the culture and consequences of media institutions, as central to our political system, have been understood in very different ways.

While some researchers have treated the media as a forum or conduit for political communication, others have treated the media rather as dominating the construction of political reality. Research emphasizing the media as a site where different political actors contest meanings is valuable because it suggests that movements can play an important role in shaping the boundaries of acceptable politics. However, this approach does not adequately recognize the media as key players in the representation of political rhetoric. Research emphasizing the culture of media production is valuable for recognizing that journalists maintain or construct the boundaries of acceptable politics. But this work tends to assume that media practices are largely driven by a reliance on state actors as the primary sources of legitimate politics. The possibilities for synthesizing these perspectives on the media to better understand the dynamic role of media institutions, the dynamic nature of controversial issues, and the dynamics of political contention in the public sphere was intriguing.

Another reason I chose this study was a realization that research focusing on the norms governing media practices often paid more attention to the actions of newswriters in the newsroom or on the beat than to what actually gets produced. By treating the culture of news production as something best understood through news professionals' conscious articulation of institutional rules or through direct observation, such scholarship overlooked the performative rituals governing news production that can be found between the lines of what gets reported. Thus, despite recognizing that media workers constructing stories for mass publics and policymakers are signifying agents, that they typify political actors in relation to events and other actors in the context of the stories they tell (Tuchman 1978), these studies shed little light on how journalists perform their own objectivity

rhetorically when they mediate all that is said in news stories. More specifically, the textual work journalists do to position themselves in relation to their sources, the issue, and the audience in a way that will appear unbiased to the reader has been under examined.

I also thought that the culture of controversy surrounding political issues, like the American abortion debate, could be better understood by examining the coverage of issues as co-produced by the media and their sources because journalists as well as the actors they cite construct the “reality” that comes to dominate public discourse (Alexander and Smith 1993; Ferree 2003; Gamson 1992; Oliver and Johnston 2000). In sum, I synthesized perspectives on the media as both a site of and key player in political contests by approaching news content as a performative construction of political reality. And I took a more relational view of this process by placing what journalists report as well as how they report it at the center of study – investigating how the roles of journalists shift in relation to the expectations they have about different sources, in relation to the types of stories they are telling, and in relation to unfolding events. This revealed a great deal about the culture of the mass media and its consequences for political contention. It also pointed to why abortion has been viewed as a “culture war” issue despite relatively stable public opinion that was neither entirely for nor against abortion.

In terms of the culture of media, this study suggests that the role of guardian of consensus conflicts with the principles of “objective journalism” (i.e., independence, accuracy, and balance). Ironically, by defending the normative ideals of a democratic public sphere (i.e., civility, inclusivity/representativeness, and dialogue) that are closely interwoven with the norms of objective journalism, the media may undermine both ideologies by guarding consensual political values. Put differently, reporters may

undermine their other bases of authority – organizational principles of objective journalism and a deference to legitimated institutions like the state – when they turn to the normative rhetorical style of the guardianship of consensus.

In the contemporary media system, we may be able to identify some of the important repercussions of this particular performance. Fox News reporters may be adopting a role that *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* reporters adopted around abortion: both groups see themselves as providing “fair and balanced” news insofar as they voice a putative public consensus. In line with this comparison, recent research also finds that outrage discourse is on the rise among conservative and progressive media personalities, especially within television, blogs, and radio platforms (Berry and Sobieraj 2014; Sobieraj and Berry 2011). Against this backdrop, the public’s view of the performance of the national news media has become increasingly negative since 1985 and yet news organizations are more trusted than government and business institutions (Pew Research Center 2011). The research presented in this project points to the existence of these forms of guarding public consensus as early as 1977 and in prestigious, professionalized mainstream news outlets. It also illustrates how journalism can still appear objective by adapting its performances a to shifting political environment.<sup>62</sup> As staunch partisanship on abortion has become salient again, the media are likely to play a central role in which view of what the public wants may come to be accepted as consensual or legitimately controversial.

This study also has implications for understanding the course of political contention.

I found that in the American abortion debate social movements were not uniformly cast as

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<sup>62</sup> An environment that includes drastic changes in the media landscape brought about by new information and communication technologies (Gardner, Mason, and Glickstein 2015).

deviant sources of political dissent. Instead, pro-life activists and sometimes bystanders as well as church representatives were treated as illegitimate sources, especially as the debate became controversial in the early 1980s. By contrast, pro-choice activists were treated as legitimate challengers even when they voiced outrage. This reinforces existing research indicating that divisions within the state on certain issues offer opportunities for movements to convey their messages about that issue (e.g., Hallin 1984). It also suggests that social movements may find unique opportunities to insert their views by voicing alarm about opponents who have threatened or may be argued to threaten public safety through their tactics or behaviors.<sup>63</sup> Take the following quote attributed to Vicki Cowart, president of Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, in a more recent *New York Times* article about a recent clinic attack in Colorado:

“We share the concerns of many Americans that extremists are creating a poisonous environment that feeds domestic terrorism in this country. We will never back away from providing care in a safe, supportive environment that millions of people rely on and trust.”

More broadly, this study reinforces the idea that activists may find sympathetic allies in the mass media when their ambitions align with what reporters assume is in the best interest of the public.

The foregoing discussion of current trends in the mass media is also interesting in regard to the coverage of social movements. For one, movements have often been at the forefront of leveling attacks on the accuracy and fairness of news organizations. Some movements, like the right-wing populist Tea Party movement in the United States, develop positive social relationships with media outlets and personalities that favor their cause and

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<sup>63</sup> Turkewitz, Julie and Jack Healy. November 27, 2015. “3 Are Dead in Colorado Springs Shootout at Planned Parenthood Center.” *New York Times*.

negative social relationships with the media they perceived to be hostile to their claims (e.g., Berry and Sobieraj 2014). If these alliances are lasting we can easily see a more divided public sphere and more divided public (Mutz 2001). Although even middle of the road media also seek to guard their version of public consensus, if some groups don't ever consume media that adhere to the norms of neutral observation and only seek out media that guard their same version of public consensus as accurate news as much evidence suggest (e.g., Pew Research Center 2011), the ideals of a popular and democratic public sphere that helps to resolve political problems through civil deliberation is severely undermined (Mutz 2007). The authority, reach, and importance of different media institutions and news outlets are further problematized as a result. The limitations of this study prevent me from doing more than speculate about these dynamics.

## **6.2 Limitations & Next Steps**

This research has several limitations, some of which may be addressed by further study. First, by placing the media at the center of investigation in this study, I cannot say precisely how well what was reported conformed to "what actually happened." Although I examine coverage once it already appeared in the media, selection bias is often shown to be quite stable overtime and within newspapers (e.g., Barranco and Wisler 1999; McCarthy et al. 1996). Moreover, given my focus on the institutional processes of the media over time, the evidence I provide offers sufficient support for my core arguments about why language was structured the ways that it was and the messages it conveyed about the politics of dissent. However, it is certain that because some movement organizations are virtually a part of the political process while others engage in sporadic protests that don't get coverage at all, my

findings speak more to broader trends in the coverage of dissent than they do to the coverage of specific groups of political actors.

A related limitation is the issue of how representative coverage by the two newspapers studied here is for understanding the field of journalism and the broader national news public. As discussed in the introduction, mainstream news outlets play an agenda setting role for one another, less elite media, and local news (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004; Fishman 1980; Myers and Caniglia 2004). Furthermore, newer social media and online media platforms often reproduce the dominance of a few news producers wherein audiences remain highly concentrated around a small number of top outlets (Hindman 2009). Even if we have more media today, we do not necessarily have more news. As a result, the discourse dynamics studied here serve as a pertinent point of comparison to other news mediums (e.g., Sobieraj 2011; Sobieraj and Berry 2014). Future research, however, could work to blend insights from recent studies on incivility in the public sphere across a range of media formats to better understand how the culture of the American media system has shifted over time.

I can also only provide a partial picture of how these language norms may operate in other issue contexts, including the contemporary abortion debate. Given my focus on how journalistic norms are employed, there is reason to believe the processes identified would hold up in other issue debates, especially within prestigious newspaper outlets. My typologies for analytic and outrage rhetorics could be explored in other mediums and news outlets, on other public interest issues, and in relation to other social movements. It would be particularly interesting to see if the media have been adversarial toward the Supreme Court on other issue debates because I found them to be highly deferential to this

institution. This question and many others could also be taken up in an examination of the contemporary abortion debate, which has once again taken center stage in contests over the presidency and within the Supreme Court.

Overall, understanding how reporters position themselves and others as guardians of consensual political values is likely to be particularly important in shaping the outcomes of contested issues. As Gamson (2004, 246) argues, “The perception of public opinion by officials who will be making policy decisions is the outcome of a framing contest in which certain claimants have succeeded in getting their particular interpretation of ‘what the public thinks’ accepted.” Given the potential influence of “what the public thinks,” further attention is needed to understand how journalists, including citizen-journalists, construct the public when they present themselves as speaking on its behalf. In line with this issue of representing the public, the positioning of bystanders as sources for outraged attacks on both sides of the abortion issue merits further study. The media portrayal of bystanders provides an interesting link to both the power journalists have in selecting these sources and to the media representation of social movements.

In addition, based on what I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, I can only speculate about the consequences of being attributed analytic and outrage rhetoric for future coverage and for outcomes outside of the news media. Although the expansive media effects literature indicates that credibility has many dimensions, a core finding is that less opinionated, less partisan or biased communicators have higher credibility (e.g., Perloff 2010). But different sources are likely to be judged by different criteria, making objective positions more credible for some sources than others. It is possible that if analytic speech deflects criticism, its ability to provoke a response or resonate in the media could be



diminished, which may be particularly problematic for social movements (Koopmans 2004; Lipsky 1968). An interesting question raised but not addressed here is whether “objective” positions or “outraged” ones serve political actors better.

Does being cast as outraged, in particular benefit or hinder the future coverage of movement groups? Studies examining similar forms of extreme speech suggest that the answer is both, depending on the contexts. Even so, I can only speculate about the consequences of being attributed outraged attack and alarmist speech. While there would seem to be many benefits to being presented as defenders of the social good by demanding the suppression of threats, it is also possible that being presented as outraged can improve the chances for support or future coverage. As Ruud Koopmans (2014) smartly argues, “the career of a discursive message is likely to remain stillborn if it does not succeed in provoking reactions from other actors in the public sphere” (p. 374). The following quote from the data as well as studies on extreme forms of rhetoric suggest provocative speech is likely to provoke a response:

“[Police] Officer Carvajal wondered if Operation Rescue supporter’s hell-fire-and-brimstone approach might alienate outsiders sympathetic to the anti-abortion cause. ‘Policemen by nature tend to be conservative, so it’s likely that a lot of us are pro-life,’ he observed. ‘But these people are religious zealots. You can’t rationalize with them.’ ”

Outrage rhetoric seems to be an option for getting one’s claims into the media even if it runs the risk of backfiring, but further research is needed to investigate whether outrage serves political actors in the longer run.

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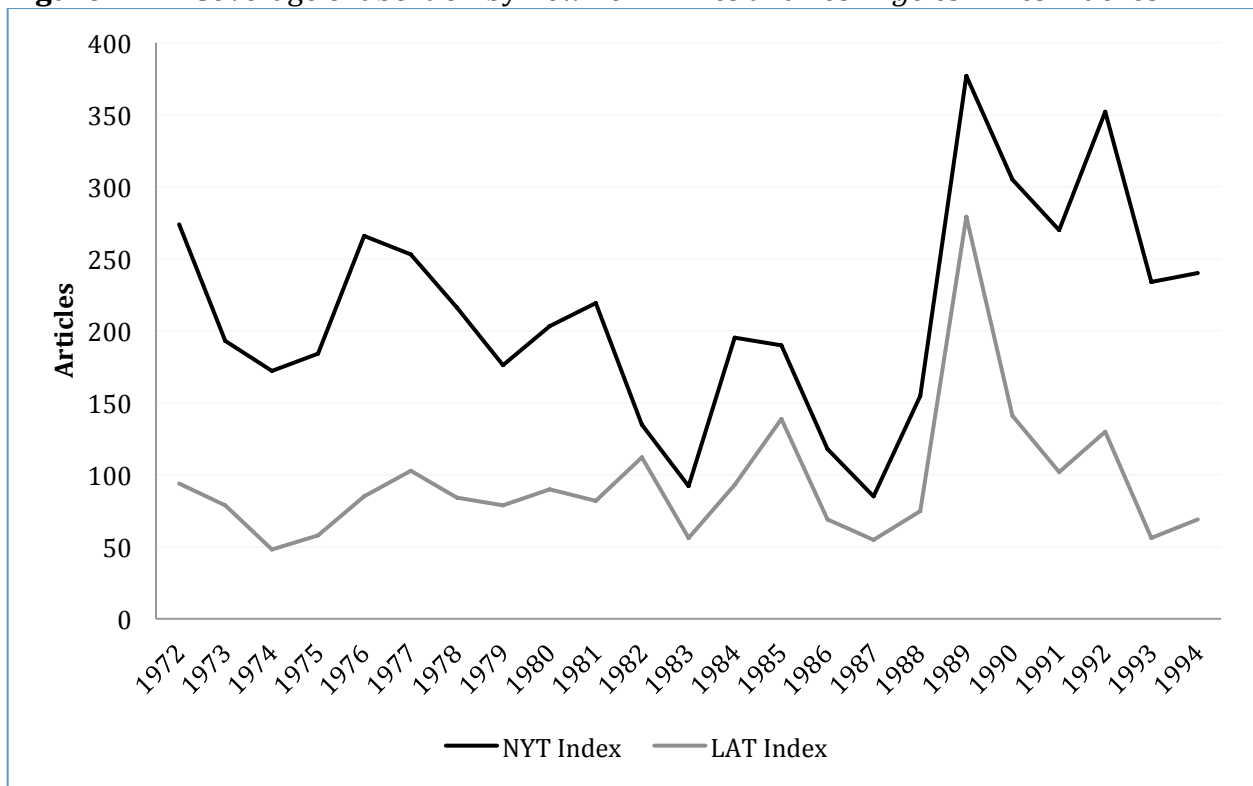
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## APPENDIX A: Supplementary Figures and Tables

**Figure A1.1:** Coverage of abortion by *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* indexes



Data source: Ferree et al. (2002): [www.ssc.wisc.edu/abortionstudy/Sampling/samplingmainframeset.htm](http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/abortionstudy/Sampling/samplingmainframeset.htm)



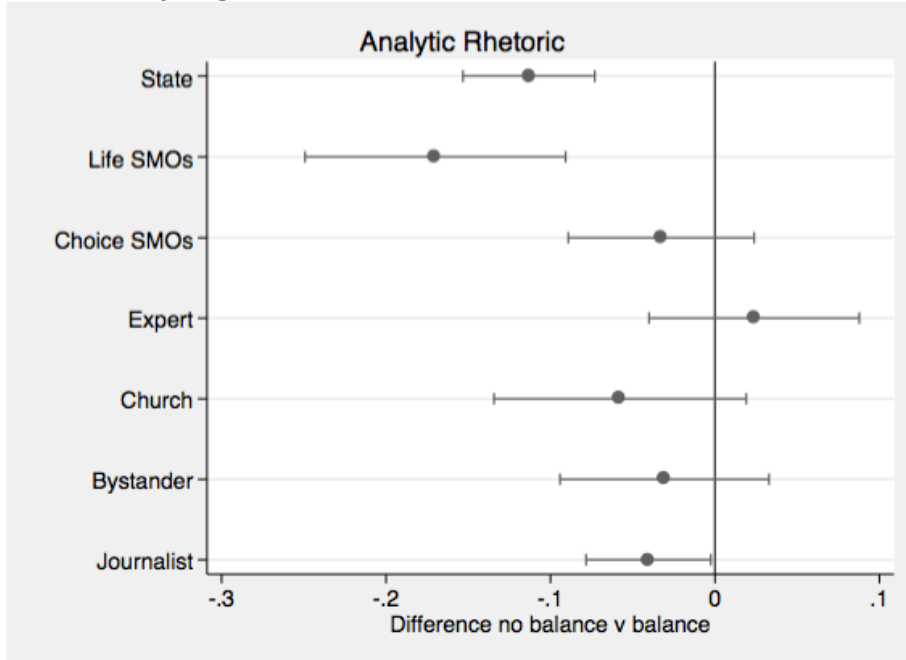
**Table A3.1: Descriptive statistics for chapter 3 modeling**

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Analytic Rhetoric	0.2597951	0.4385551	0	1
<i>Analytic Constructions</i>				
Diagnostic	0.0877034	0.2828844	0	1
Hedging	0.1244726	0.3301448	0	1
Society	0.1241712	0.3298016	0	1
Polarization	0.0714286	0.2575588	0	1
Consensus	0.0346594	0.1829295	0	1
<i>Organizational Source</i>				
State	0.2557263	0.4363016	0	1
Life SMOs	0.0669078	0.249881	0	1
Choice SMOs	0.0917722	0.2887258	0	1
Expert	0.1086498	0.3112228	0	1
Church	0.060428	0.238296	0	1
Bystander	0.0913201	0.2880854	0	1
Journalist/Author	0.3251959	0.4684833	0	1
Protest Reported	0.14783	0.3549582	0	1
<i>Arena</i>				
Media-initiated	0.0549203	0.2278417	0	1
State-initiated	0.5678604	0.4954108	0	1
Non-State-initiated	0.3772194	0.484727	0	1
<i>Article Structure</i>				
Arg. Balance	0.5455093	0.4979621	0	1
Org. Diversity	0.6069922	0.4884554	0	1
<i>Controls</i>				
News Report	0.6677215	0.4710657	0	1
Length	12.03903	8.247773	1	62
Newspaper (NYT)	1.462929	0.4986615	0	1
Court Case	0.2891802	0.4534159	0	1
Election	0.2943038	0.4557635	0	1
<i>Time Period</i>				
72-76'	0.1823388	0.3861526	0	1
77-88'	0.3979807	0.4895183	0	1
89-94'	0.4196805	0.4935438	0	1

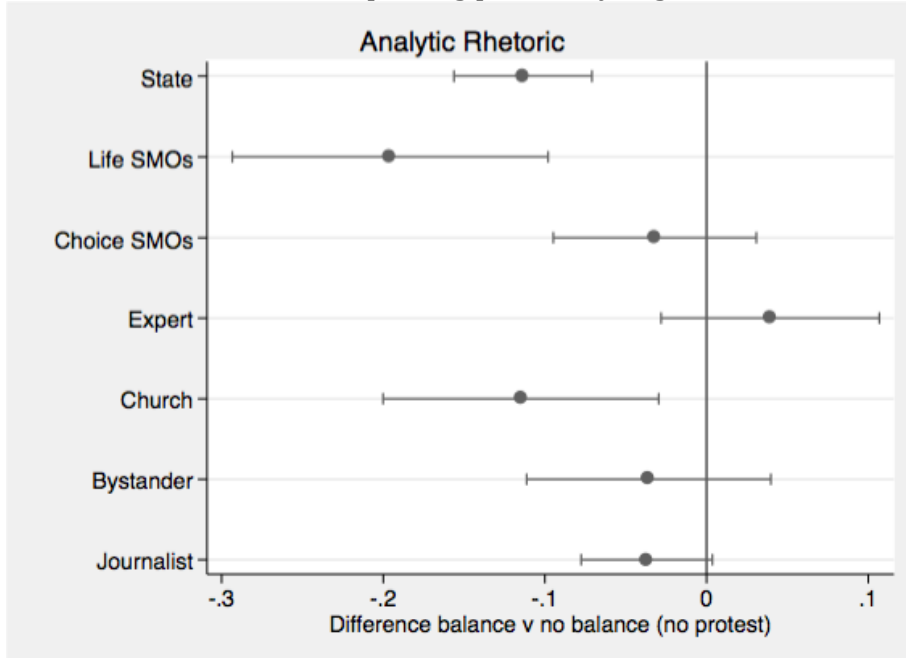
\*Note: N=6,646. Descriptive statistics reflect raw data (unweighted)

## Analytic rhetoric: No balance vs. balance<sup>64</sup>

**Figure A3.1a:** Difference in predicted share of analytic rhetoric no-balance vs. balance condition by organizational source.



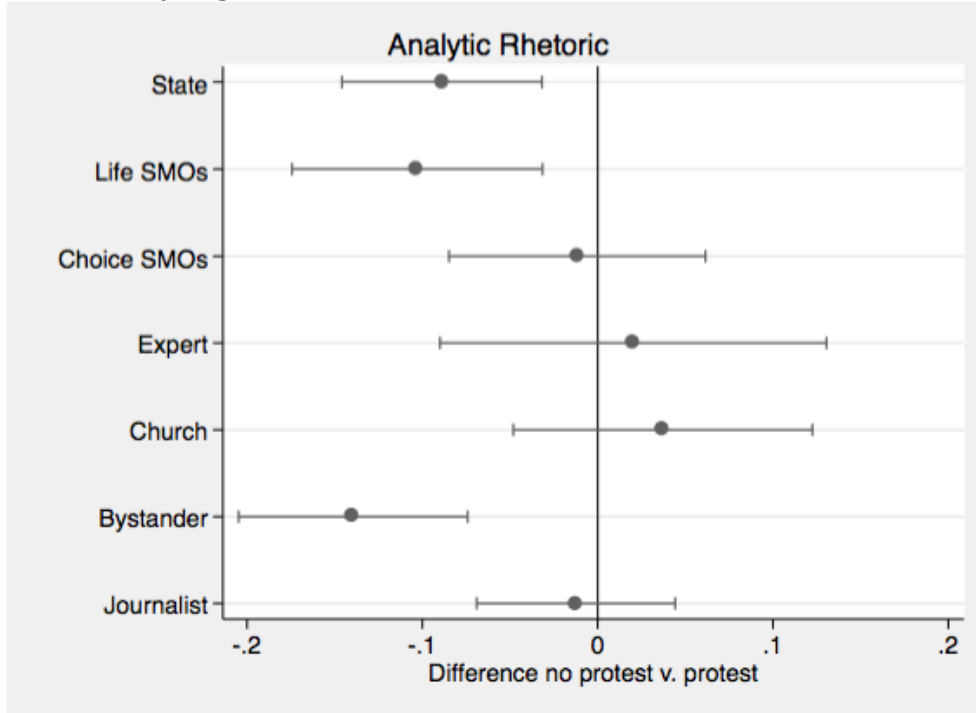
**Figure A3.1b:** Difference in predicted share of analytic rhetoric no-balance vs. balance condition in articles not reporting protest by organizational source.



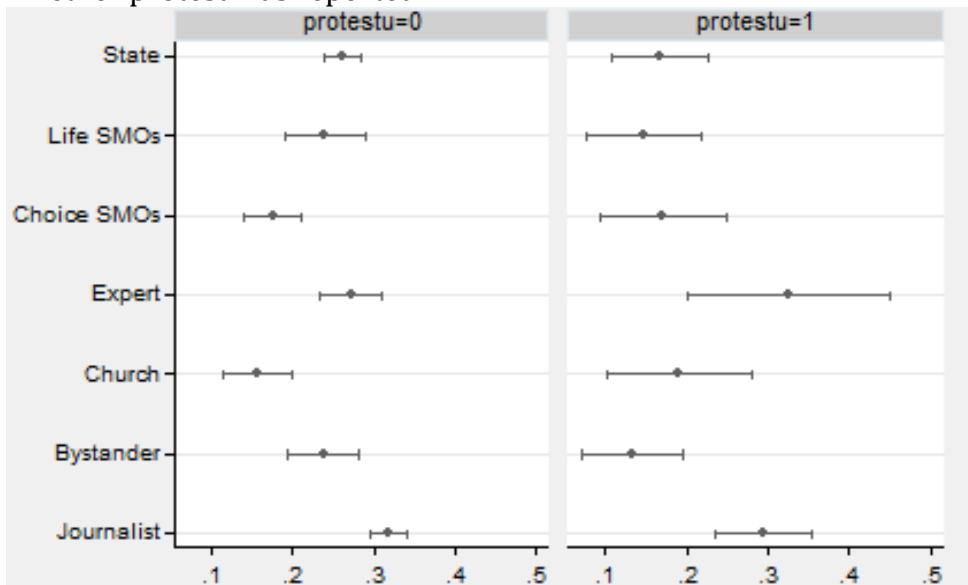
<sup>64</sup> Note: Adjusted predictions with 90% confidence intervals for both figures (marginal effects).

## Analytic rhetoric: No protest vs. protest

**Figure A3.2a:** Difference in predicted share of analytic rhetoric no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.<sup>65</sup>



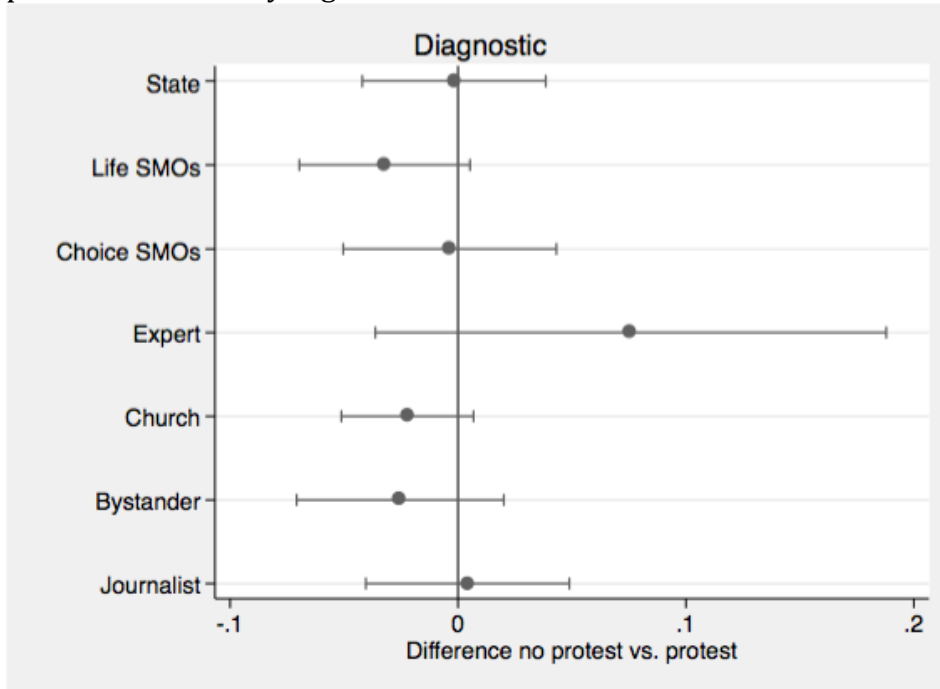
**Figure A3.2b:** Predicted share of analytic rhetoric by organizational source conditional on whether protest was reported.



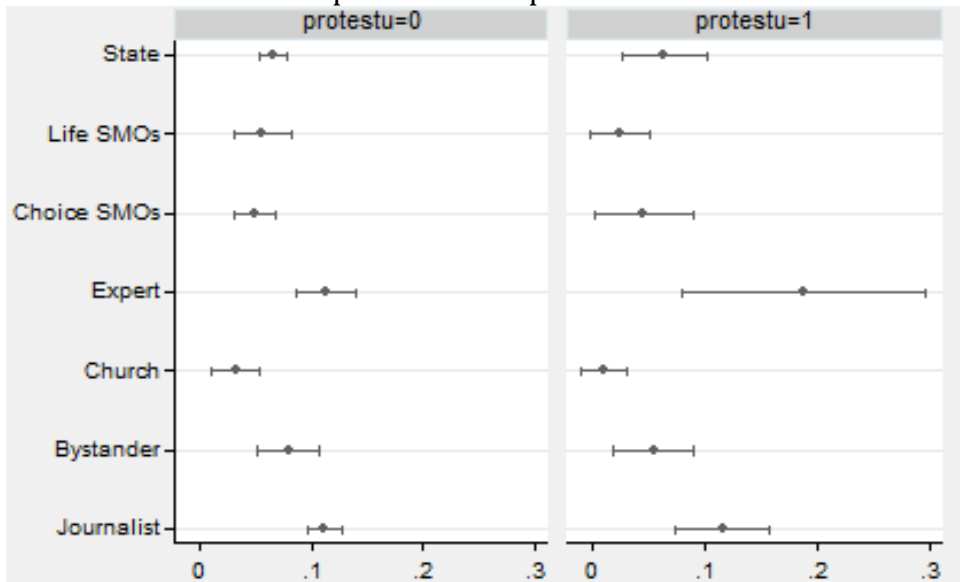
<sup>65</sup> Note: Adjusted Predictions with 95% Confidence Intervals for all figures.

## Analytic speech constructions: No protest vs. protest<sup>66</sup>

**Figure A3.3a:** Difference in predicted share of diagnostic utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.

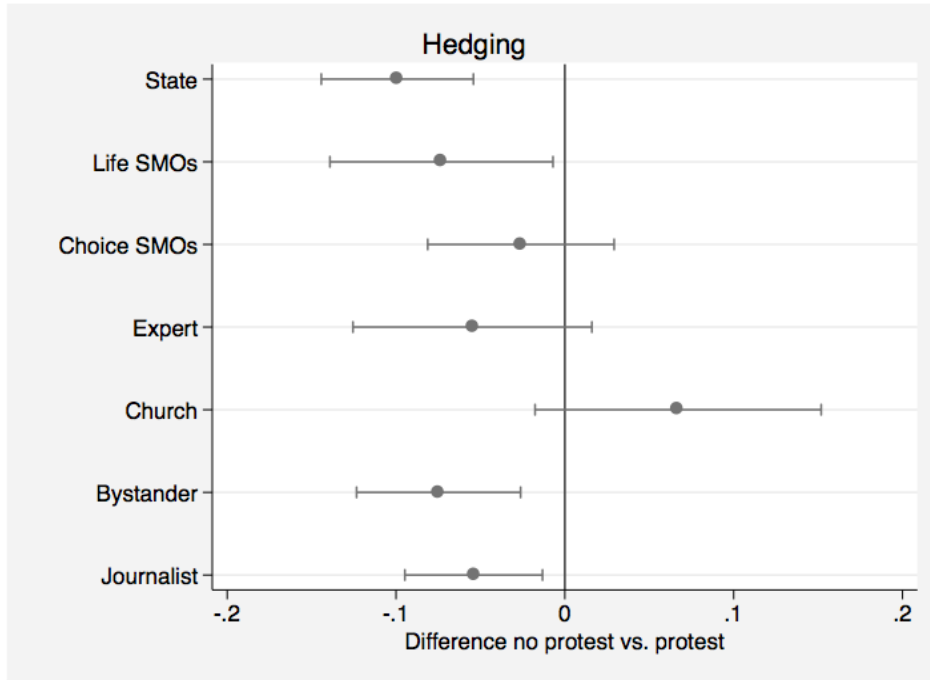


**Figure A3.3b:** Predicted share of diagnostic utterances by organizational source conditional on whether protest was reported.

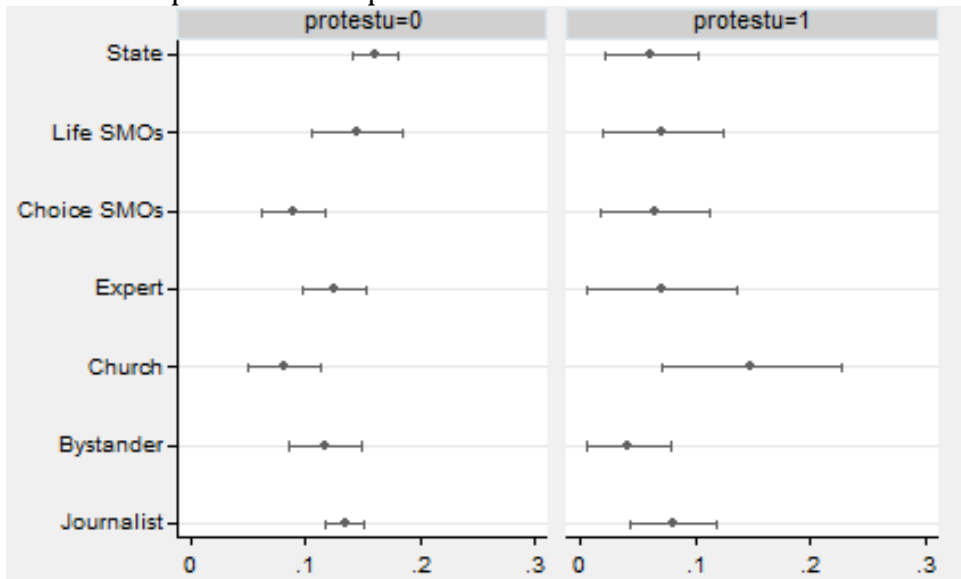


<sup>66</sup> Note: Adjusted Predictions with 95% Confidence Intervals for all figures.

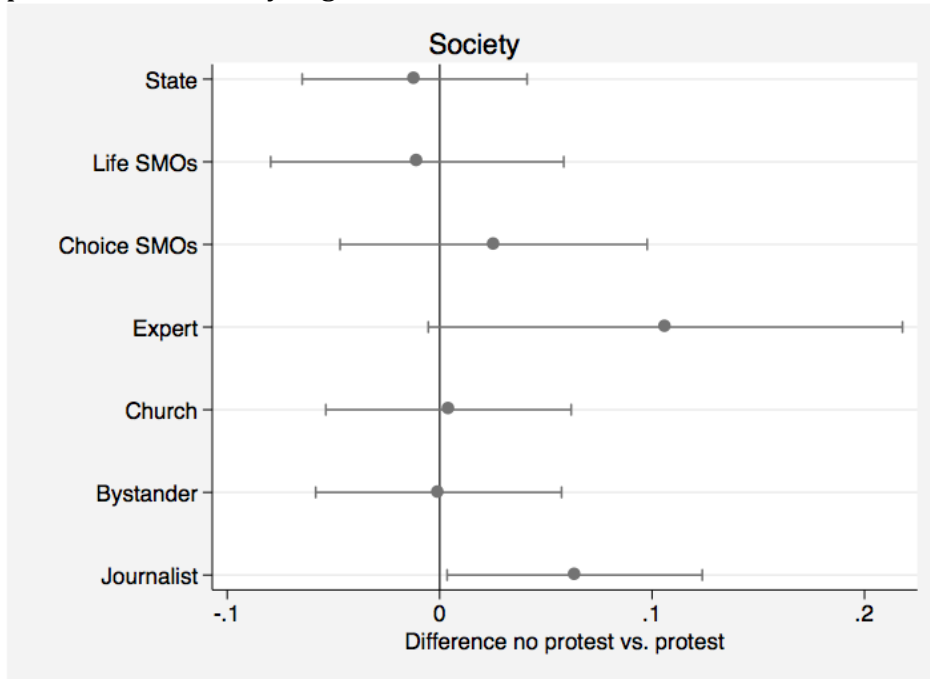
**Figure A3.4a:** Difference in predicted share of hedging utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



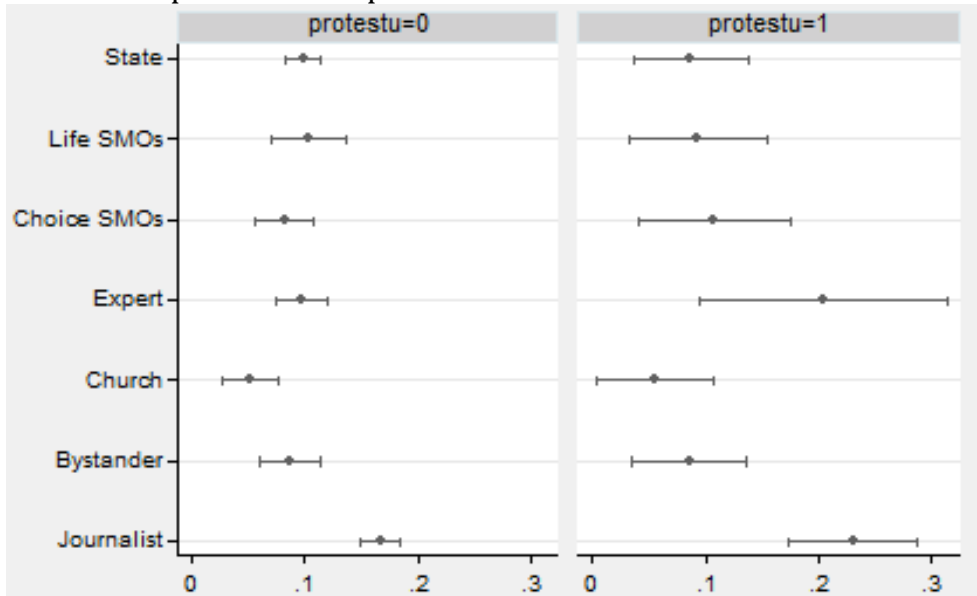
**Figure A3.4b:** Predicted share of hedging utterances by organizational source conditional on whether protest was reported.



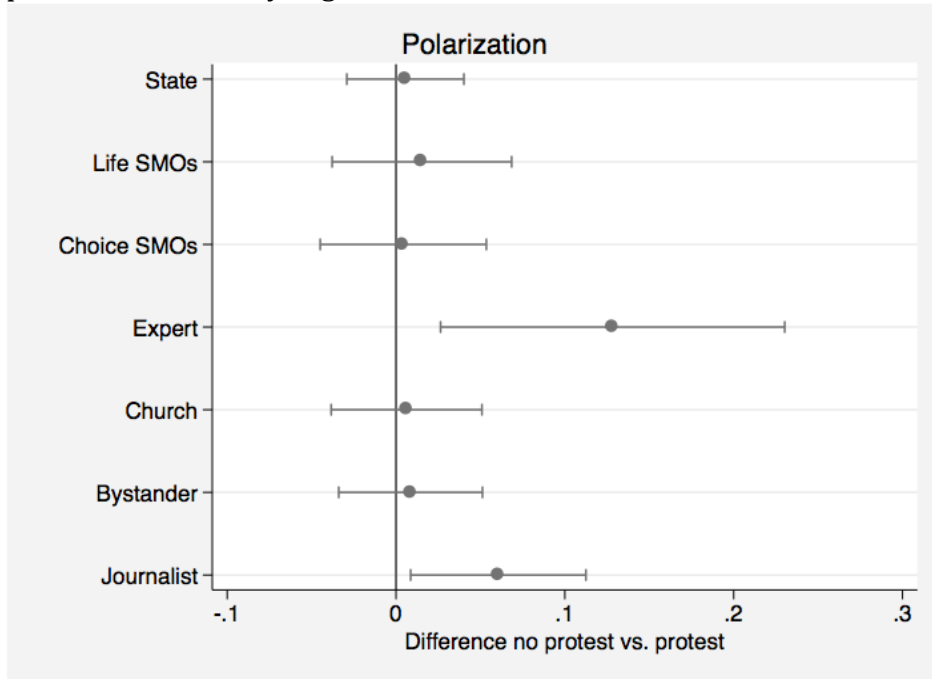
**Figure A3.5a:** Difference in predicted share of society utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



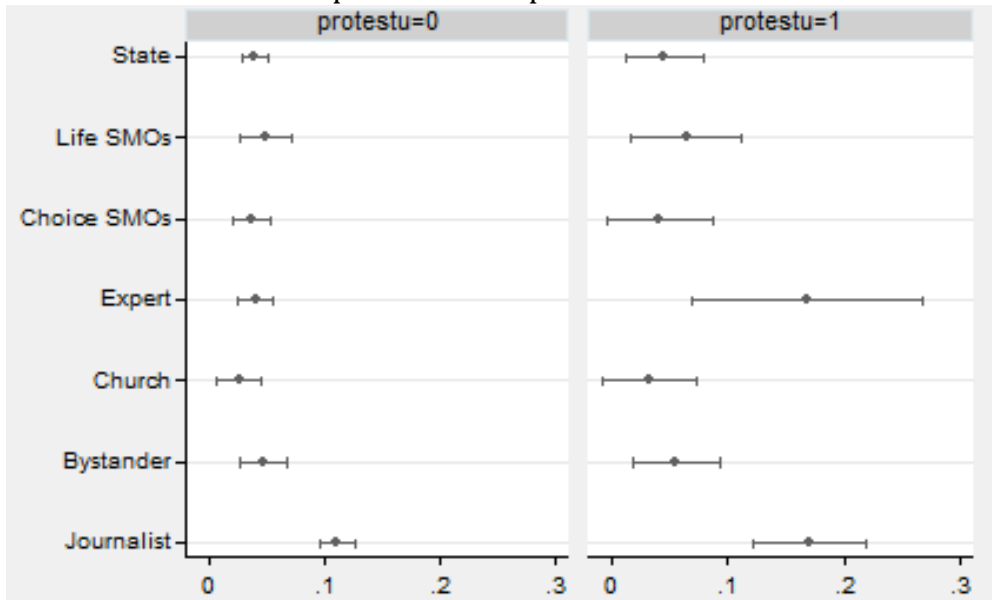
**Figure A3.5b:** Predicted share of society utterances by organizational source conditional on whether protest was reported.



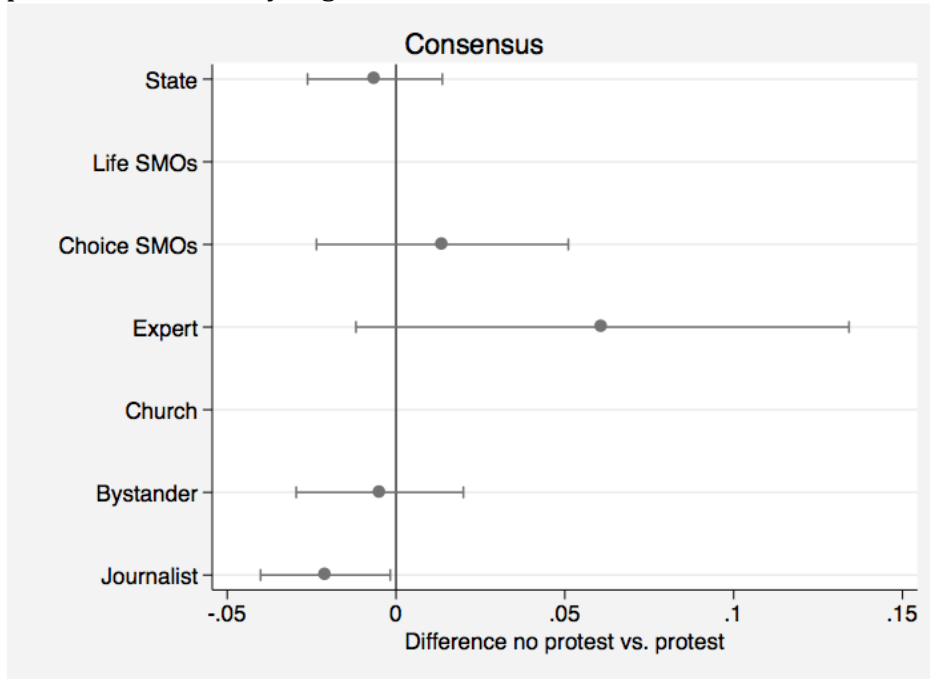
**Figure A3.6a:** Difference in predicted share of polarization utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



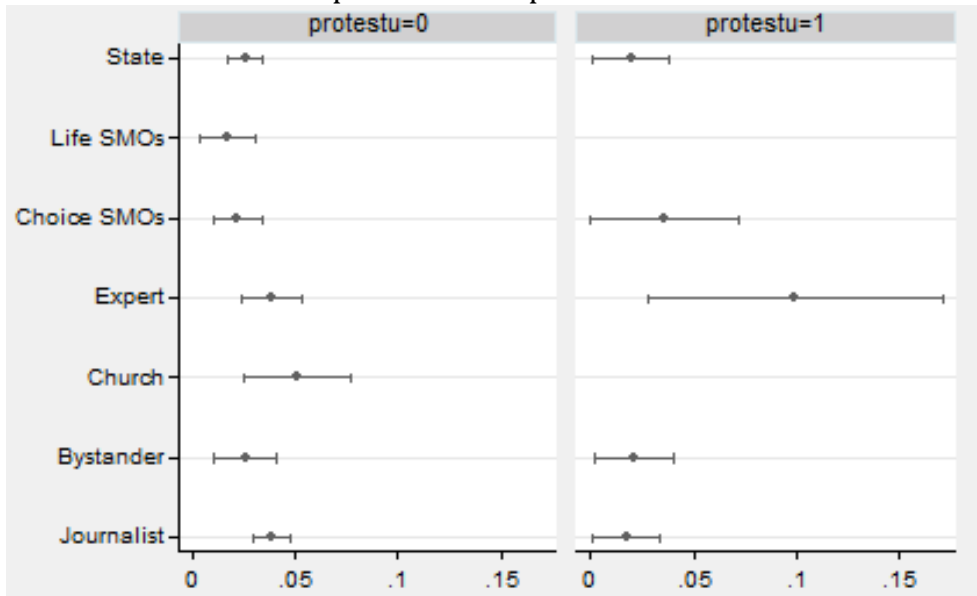
**Figure A3.6b:** Predicted share of polarization utterances by organizational source conditional on whether protest was reported.



**Figure A3.7a:** Difference in predicted share of consensus utterances in no-protest vs. protest condition by organizational source.



**Figure A3.7b:** Predicted share of 'consensus' utterances by organizational source conditional on whether protest was reported.





**Table A3.2** Logistic regression models of analytic rhetoric with author as actor\*

Independent Variables	(1) Org. Sources	(2) Story Subject	(3) Balance Structure
Life SMOs	-0.258+ (0.137)	-0.235+ (0.141)	-0.173 (0.143)
Choice SMOs	-0.474*** (0.125)	-0.458*** (0.126)	-0.408** (0.130)
Experts	0.180 (0.110)	0.165 (0.115)	0.185 (0.117)
Church	-0.452** (0.149)	-0.444** (0.159)	-0.397* (0.160)
Bystander	-0.165 (0.117)	-0.169 (0.124)	-0.126 (0.127)
Journalist/Author	0.129 (0.126)	0.134 (0.126)	0.176 (0.135)
Protest-Event		-0.227* (0.116)	-0.233* (0.116)
State		-0.276+ (0.166)	-0.223 (0.166)
Non-State		-0.269 (0.168)	-0.241 (0.168)
Argument Balance			-0.271*** (0.079)
Org. Diversity			-0.146+ (0.079)
News Report	-0.322*** (0.082)	-0.279*** (0.084)	-0.145 (0.092)
Length	0.006 (0.005)	0.006 (0.005)	0.013** (0.005)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.096 (0.067)	-0.113 (0.069)	-0.096 (0.070)
Court Case	0.187* (0.094)	0.175+ (0.094)	0.158+ (0.096)
Election	0.036 (0.089)	0.039 (0.089)	0.025 (0.090)
77-88'	0.004 (0.104)	0.009 (0.105)	0.022 (0.106)
89-94'	-0.072 (0.101)	-0.059 (0.102)	-0.030 (0.103)
Constant	-0.699*** (0.177)	-0.426+ (0.233)	-0.472* (0.238)

N= 5,073 across models. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed). \*More restrictive operationalization of Journalist/Author.

**Table A3.3** Logistic regression models of analytic constructions with author as actor\*

Independent Variables	Diagnostic	Hedging	Society	Polarization	Consensus
Life SMOs	-0.331+ (0.190)	-0.037 (0.181)	0.161 (0.195)	0.231 (0.272)	-0.766+ (0.466)
Choice SMOs	-0.184 (0.159)	-0.557** (0.180)	-0.061 (0.184)	-0.092 (0.277)	-0.081 (0.297)
Experts	0.501*** (0.140)	-0.289+ (0.160)	0.156 (0.169)	0.285 (0.246)	0.502+ (0.266)
Church	-0.331 (0.213)	-0.379+ (0.205)	-0.421 (0.268)	-0.274 (0.411)	0.408 (0.348)
Bystander	0.083 (0.155)	-0.406* (0.177)	-0.110 (0.188)	-0.012 (0.251)	-0.185 (0.317)
Journalist/Author	0.547*** (0.164)	-0.336+ (0.178)	0.537** (0.177)	0.776** (0.248)	0.764** (0.290)
Protest-Event	0.035 (0.139)	-0.574*** (0.171)	0.292+ (0.158)	0.695*** (0.211)	-0.140 (0.262)
State	-0.369* (0.188)	0.036 (0.233)	-0.101 (0.218)	-0.522* (0.266)	-0.486 (0.331)
Non-State	-0.324+ (0.191)	0.029 (0.235)	-0.381+ (0.226)	-0.637* (0.278)	-0.277 (0.329)
Argument Balance	-0.365*** (0.098)	-0.144 (0.103)	-0.338** (0.108)	-0.320* (0.150)	-0.487* (0.193)
Org. Diversity	-0.031 (0.097)	-0.192+ (0.104)	-0.127 (0.109)	-0.161 (0.152)	-0.172 (0.186)
News Report	-0.030 (0.115)	-0.243* (0.122)	-0.162 (0.126)	-0.276 (0.183)	0.183 (0.209)
Length	0.024*** (0.006)	-0.006 (0.007)	0.015* (0.007)	0.015+ (0.008)	0.015 (0.010)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.159+ (0.086)	-0.025 (0.093)	0.123 (0.100)	-0.061 (0.144)	-0.302+ (0.168)
Court Case	0.020 (0.114)	0.310* (0.127)	0.356** (0.130)	0.200 (0.183)	-0.105 (0.238)
Election	0.165 (0.107)	-0.170 (0.123)	-0.119 (0.125)	0.010 (0.179)	0.401+ (0.206)
77-88'	0.052 (0.128)	-0.080 (0.139)	0.013 (0.150)	0.115 (0.229)	0.898** (0.332)
89-94'	-0.072 (0.128)	-0.032 (0.132)	-0.206 (0.143)	0.263 (0.215)	1.180*** (0.326)
Constant	-1.371*** (0.279)	-1.266*** (0.325)	-2.099*** (0.326)	-2.599*** (0.398)	-3.612*** (0.531)

N= 5,073 across models. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed). \*More restrictive operationalization of Journalist/Author

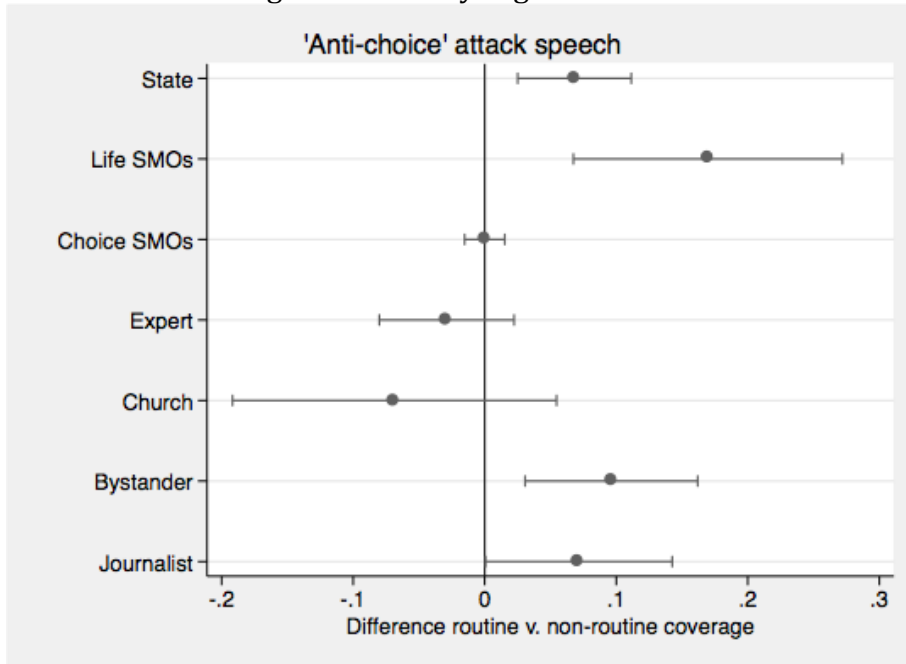
**Table A4.1:** Descriptive statistics for chapter 4 modeling

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Max	Min
Outrage Rhetoric	0.2425519	0.4286585	0	1
<i>Outrage Speech Constructions</i>				
Anti-choice' attack	0.1059284	0.3077691	0	1
Anti-life' attack	0.0466446	0.2108923	0	1
Any attack	0.1518206	0.358874	0	1
Alarmist	0.0997593	0.2997013	0	1
<i>Organizational Source</i>				
State	0.2557930	0.4363388	0	1
Life SMOs	0.067108	0.2502278	0	1
Choice SMOs	0.0917845	0.2887433	0	1
Expert	0.1087872	0.3113955	0	1
Church	0.0604875	0.2384058	0	1
Bystander	0.0913331	0.2881039	0	1
Journalist/Author	0.3247066	0.4683004	0	1
<i>Article Subject &amp; Structure</i>				
Contentious News	0.2831779	0.450576	0	1
Argument Balance	0.5452904	0.497982	0	1
<i>Controls</i>				
News Report	0.668071	0.4709411	0	1
Length	12.03385	8.244782	1	62
Newspaper (NYT)	1.462985	0.4986655	0	1
Court Case	0.2888956	0.4532834	0	1
Election	0.2488715	0.4323917	0	1
<i>Time Period</i>				
72-76'	0.1823653	0.3861744	0	1
77-88'	0.3984351	0.4896128	0	1
89-94'	0.4191995	0.4934652	0	1

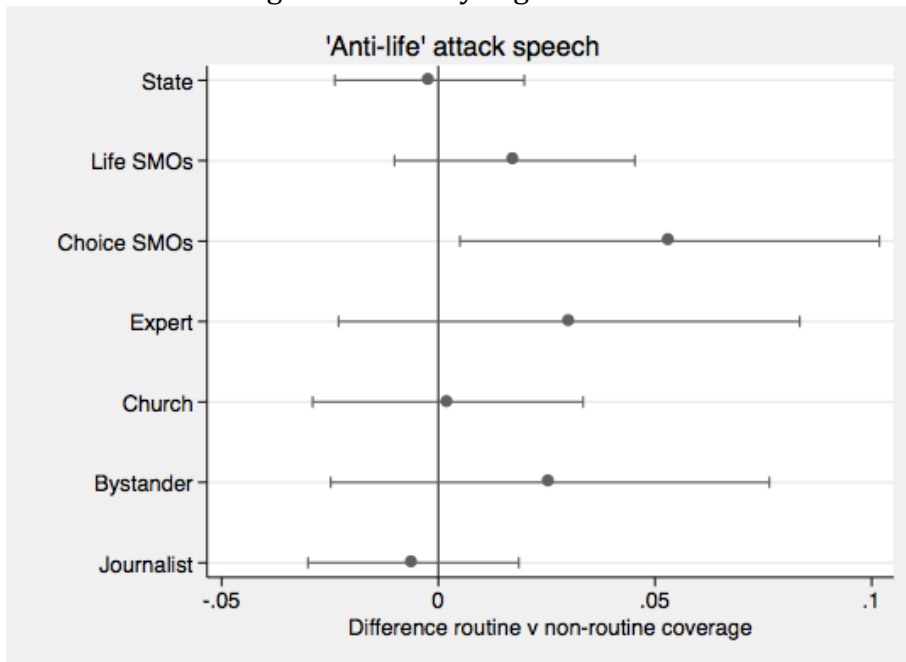
Note: N=6,646. Descriptive statistics reflect raw data (unweighted)

## Outraged attack speech: Routine vs. contentious news<sup>67</sup>

**Figure A4.1:** Difference in predicted share of 'anti-choice' attack speech in routine vs. contentious coverage condition by organizational source.



**Figure A4.2:** Difference in predicted share of 'anti-life' attack speech in routine vs. contentious coverage condition by organizational source.



<sup>67</sup> Note: 95% confidence intervals for all figures (marginal effects).

**Table A4.2** Coefficients from logistic regression model of alarmist speech with interaction between contentious news and balance.

Independent Variables	Full Model
Life SMOs	-0.651** (0.219)
Choice SMOs	0.517** (0.168)
Experts	0.310+ (0.179)
Church	-0.802** (0.281)
Bystander	-0.486* (0.204)
Journalist/Author	0.403** (0.126)
Contentious News	1.278*** (0.148)
Argument Balance	-0.605*** (0.154)
<b>Contentious News*Balance</b>	<b>0.605** (0.196)</b>
News Report	0.876*** (0.120)
Length	0.007 (0.006)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.003 (0.094)
Court Case	-1.099*** (0.146)
Election	-0.201 (0.147)
77-88'	1.304*** (0.239)
89-94'	2.176*** (0.240)
Constant	-4.751*** (0.325)

N= 6,646. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*

\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed test)

**Table A4.3** Coefficients from logistic regression models of outrage rhetoric with author as actor.

Independent Variables	Model 1: Organizational Sources		Model 2: Contentious coverage		Model 3: Balance		Model 4: Full	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
<i>Source (State Omit.)</i>								
Life SMOs	1.386***	(0.127)	1.072***	(0.130)	1.392***	(0.127)	1.074***	(0.130)
Choice SMOs	0.465***	(0.123)	0.176	(0.128)	0.460***	(0.123)	0.176	(0.128)
Experts	0.376**	(0.124)	0.332**	(0.125)	0.361**	(0.125)	0.329**	(0.125)
Church	1.154***	(0.131)	1.119***	(0.136)	1.167***	(0.132)	1.121***	(0.136)
Bystander	0.704***	(0.117)	0.445***	(0.122)	0.697***	(0.117)	0.445***	(0.122)
Journalist	0.383**	(0.149)	0.263+	(0.151)	0.351*	(0.148)	0.258+	(0.151)
Contentious News			1.056***	(0.081)			1.051***	(0.082)
Argument Balance					-0.207**	(0.079)	-0.031	(0.081)
<i>Controls</i>								
News Report	0.492***	(0.088)	0.346***	(0.091)	0.556***	(0.091)	0.356***	(0.094)
Length	-0.004	(0.005)	-0.012*	(0.005)	0.000	(0.005)	-0.012*	(0.005)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.182**	(0.070)	-0.103	(0.072)	-0.173*	(0.070)	-0.103	(0.072)
Court Case	-0.598***	(0.104)	-0.529***	(0.108)	-0.604***	(0.104)	-0.531***	(0.108)
Election	-0.017	(0.098)	0.013	(0.101)	-0.024	(0.098)	0.011	(0.101)
<i>Period (72-76 Omit.)</i>								
77-88'	0.014	(0.114)	0.092	(0.117)	0.021	(0.114)	0.092	(0.116)
89-94'	0.433***	(0.111)	0.502***	(0.114)	0.446***	(0.111)	0.503***	(0.114)
Constant	-1.639***	(0.189)	-1.889***	(0.196)	-1.626***	(0.190)	-1.884***	(0.197)

N= 5,073. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed test)

\*Note: this modeling uses a narrower operationalization of the journalists than the one shown in Chapter 4.

**Table A4.4** Coefficients from logistic regression of types of outrage with author as actor\*

Independent Variables	Anti-'choice' attack		Anti-'life' attack		Alarmist	
	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.	$\beta$	S.E.
<i>Source (State Omit)</i>						
Life SMOs	1.981***	(0.152)	-0.594	(0.419)	-0.600**	(0.221)
Choice SMOs	-2.244***	(0.490)	0.907***	(0.222)	0.523**	(0.168)
Experts	0.127	(0.186)	0.757**	(0.248)	0.326+	(0.178)
Church	1.924***	(0.153)	-0.498	(0.405)	-0.856**	(0.281)
Bystander	0.713***	(0.161)	1.018***	(0.217)	-0.446*	(0.207)
Journalist	-0.189	(0.231)	0.724**	(0.269)	0.451+	(0.238)
Contentious News	0.567***	(0.111)	0.558***	(0.157)	1.484***	(0.129)
Argument Balance	0.274*	(0.106)	-0.037	(0.161)	-0.280*	(0.123)
<i>Controls</i>						
News Report	0.003	(0.120)	-0.161	(0.184)	0.993***	(0.146)
Length	-0.022**	(0.007)	-0.022*	(0.010)	0.007	(0.008)
Newspaper (NYT)	-0.058	(0.098)	-0.232+	(0.138)	-0.054	(0.109)
Court Case	-0.399**	(0.144)	0.205	(0.200)	-1.032***	(0.175)
Election	0.234+	(0.131)	-0.158	(0.208)	-0.223	(0.177)
<i>Period (72-76 Omit)</i>						
77-88'	-0.296*	(0.147)	0.104	(0.244)	1.072***	(0.273)
89-94'	-0.206	(0.142)	0.207	(0.223)	1.876***	(0.274)
Constant	-2.297***	(0.257)	-3.049***	(0.410)	-4.650***	(0.369)

N= 5,073. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, + p<0.10 (two tailed test)

\*Note: this modeling uses a narrower operationalization of the journalists than the one shown in Chapter 4.

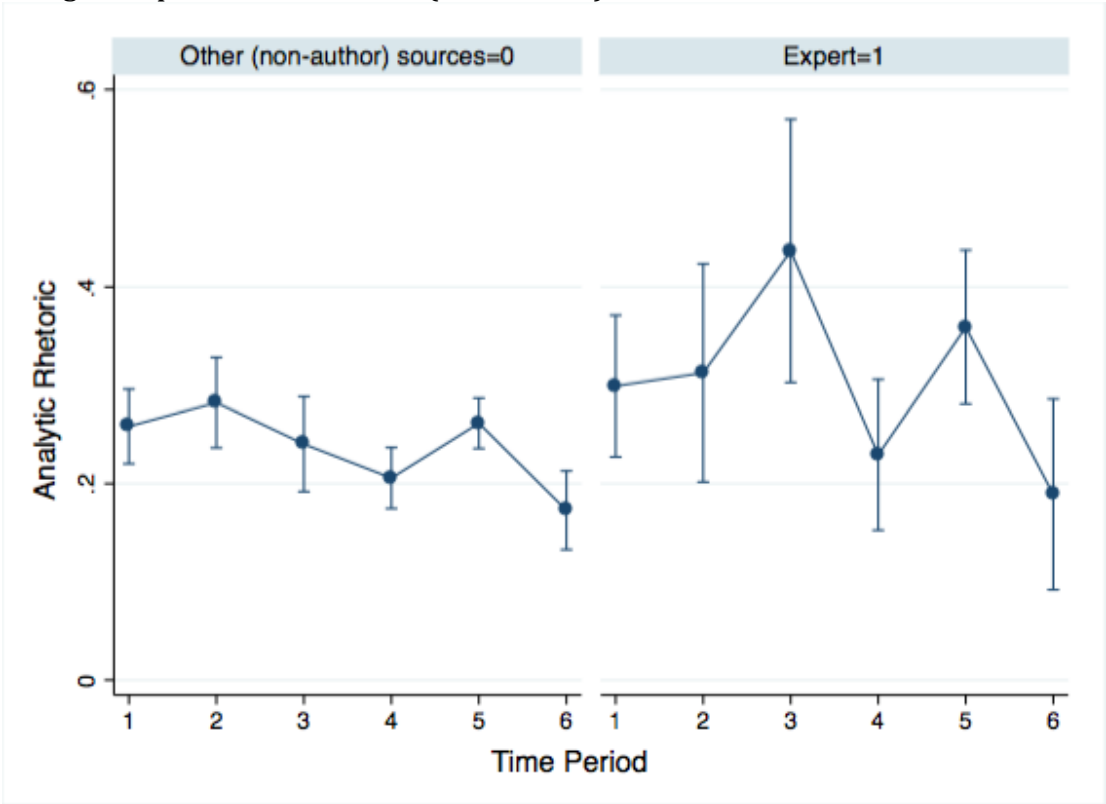
**Table A5.1:** Descriptive statistics for chapter 5 modeling

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Max	Min
Outrage Rhetoric	0.2425519	0.4286585	0	1
<i>Outrage Speech Constructions</i>				
Anti-choice' attack	0.1059284	0.3077691	0	1
Anti-life' attack	0.0466446	0.2108923	0	1
Any attack	0.1518206	0.358874	0	1
Alarmist	0.0997593	0.2997013	0	1
Analytic Rhetoric	0.2597951	0.4385551	0	1
<i>Analytic Speech Constructions</i>				
Diagnostic	0.0877034	0.2828844	0	1
Hedging	0.1244726	0.3301448	0	1
Society	0.1241712	0.3298016	0	1
Polarization	0.0714286	0.2575588	0	1
Consensus	0.0346594	0.1829295	0	1
<i>Organizational Source</i>				
State	0.2557930	0.4363388	0	1
Life SMOs	0.067108	0.2502278	0	1
Choice SMOs	0.0917845	0.2887433	0	1
Expert	0.1087872	0.3113955	0	1
Church	0.0604875	0.2384058	0	1
Bystander	0.0913331	0.2881039	0	1
Journalist/Author	0.3247066	0.4683004	0	1
<i>Article Subject &amp; Structure</i>				
Contentious News	0.2831779	0.450576	0	1
Argument Balance	0.5452904	0.497982	0	1
State-initiated	0.5678604	0.4954108	0	1
<i>Controls</i>				
News Report	0.668071	0.4709411	0	1
Length	12.03385	8.244782	1	62
Newspaper (NYT)	1.462985	0.4986655	0	1
Court Case	0.2888956	0.4532834	0	1
Election	0.2488715	0.4323917	0	1
<i>Time Periods</i>				
72-76'	0.1823653	0.3861744	0	1
77-80'	0.1280469	0.3341672	0	1
81-83'	0.0901294	0.2863886	0	1
84-88'	0.1802588	0.3844318	0	1
89-92'	0.3040927	0.4600567	0	1
93-94'	0.1280469	0.3341672	0	1

Note: N=6,646. Descriptive statistics reflect raw data (unweighted).



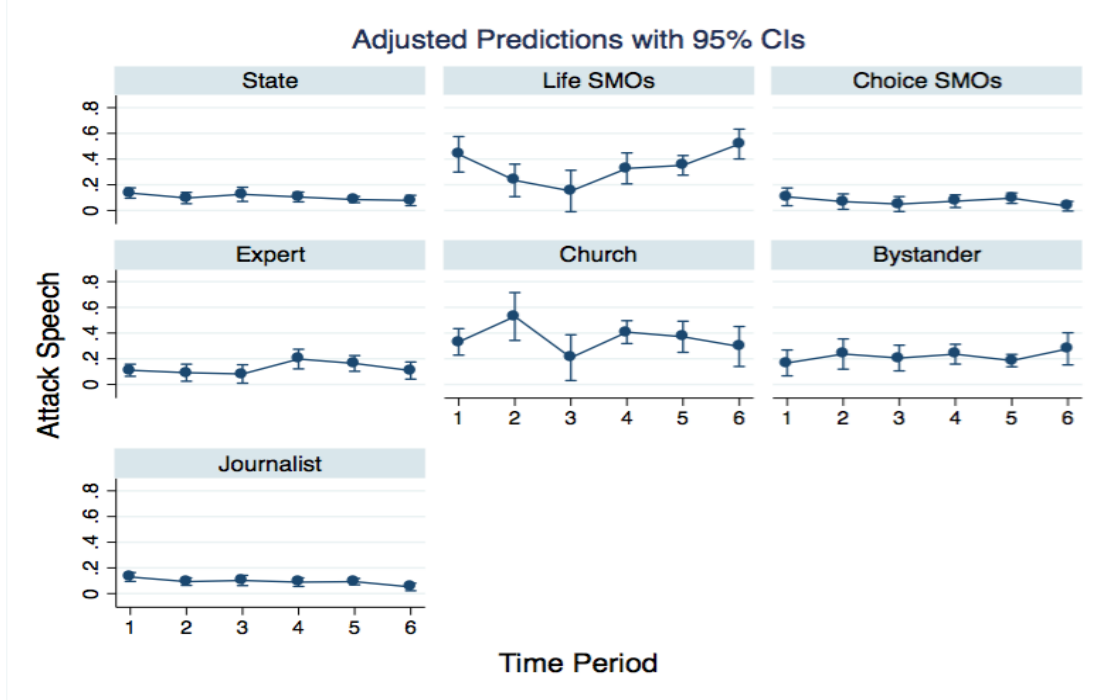
**Figure A5.1:** Predicted share of analytic rhetoric overtime in the condition of the speaker being an expert vs. some other (non-author) source.



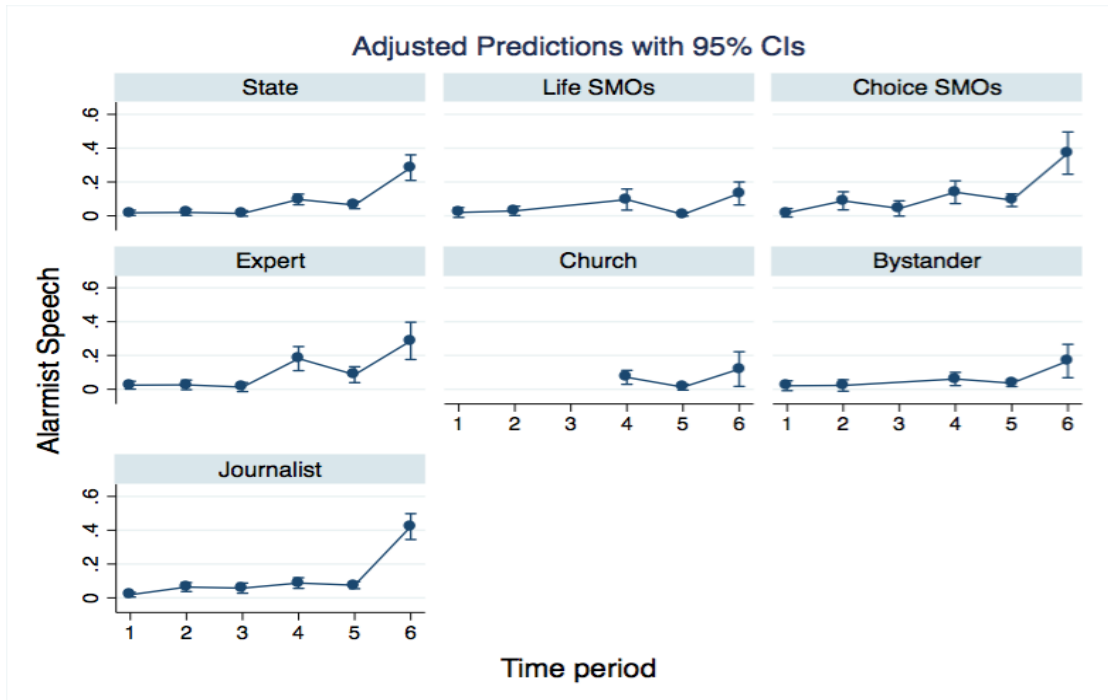
Note: 95% confidence intervals

## Predicted share of outraged attack and alarmist speech by organizational source over time

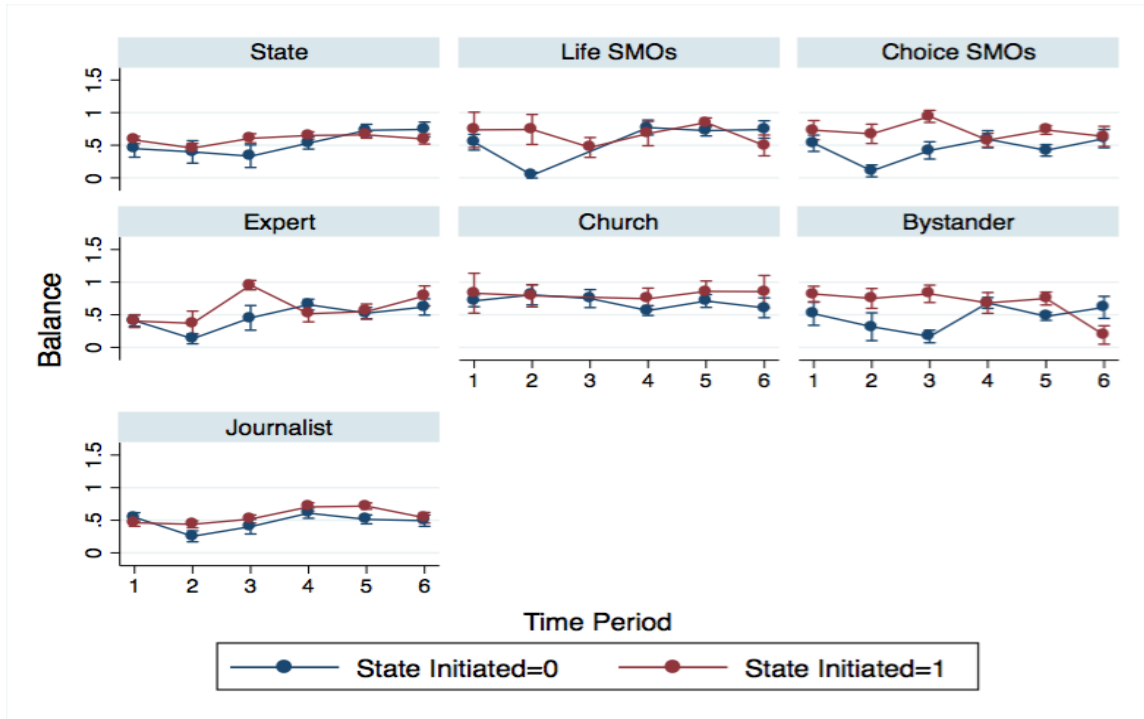
**Figure A5.2:** Predicted share of outraged attack claims by organizational source over time.



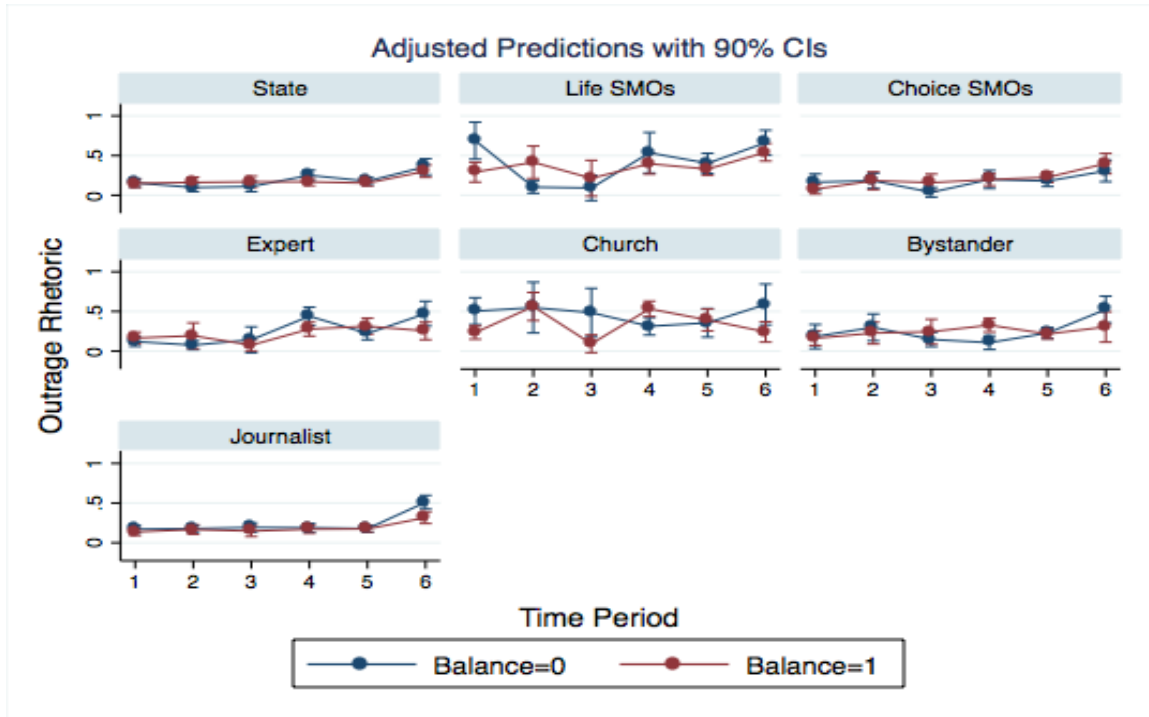
**Figure A5.3:** Predicted share of outraged alarmist claims by organizational source over time.



**Figure A5.4:** Predicted share of claims making in balanced articles by organizational source over time under the condition of not state-initiated vs. state-initiated.



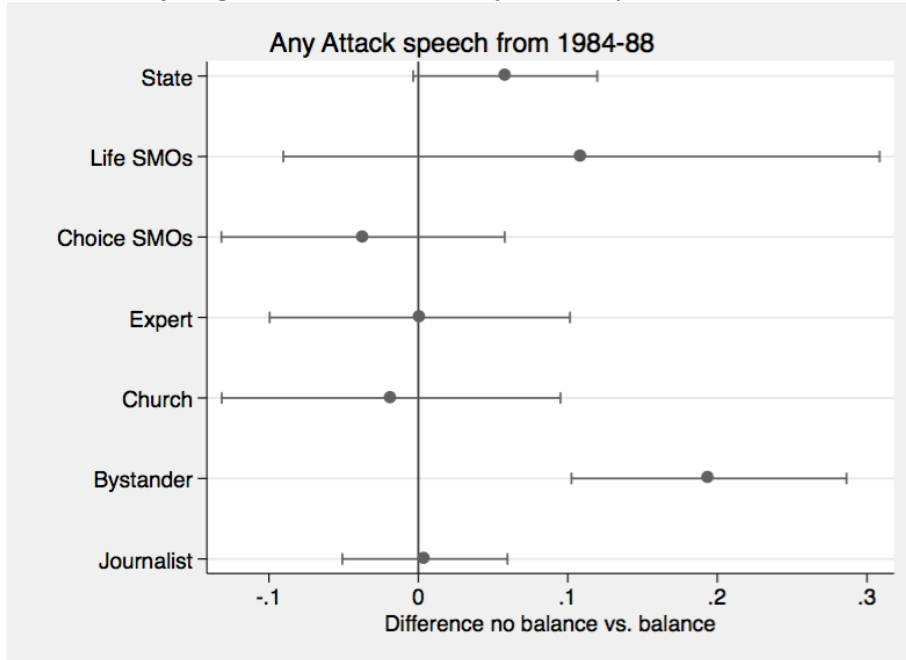
**Figure A5.5:** Predicted share of outrage rhetoric by organizational source over time under the condition no balance vs. balance.



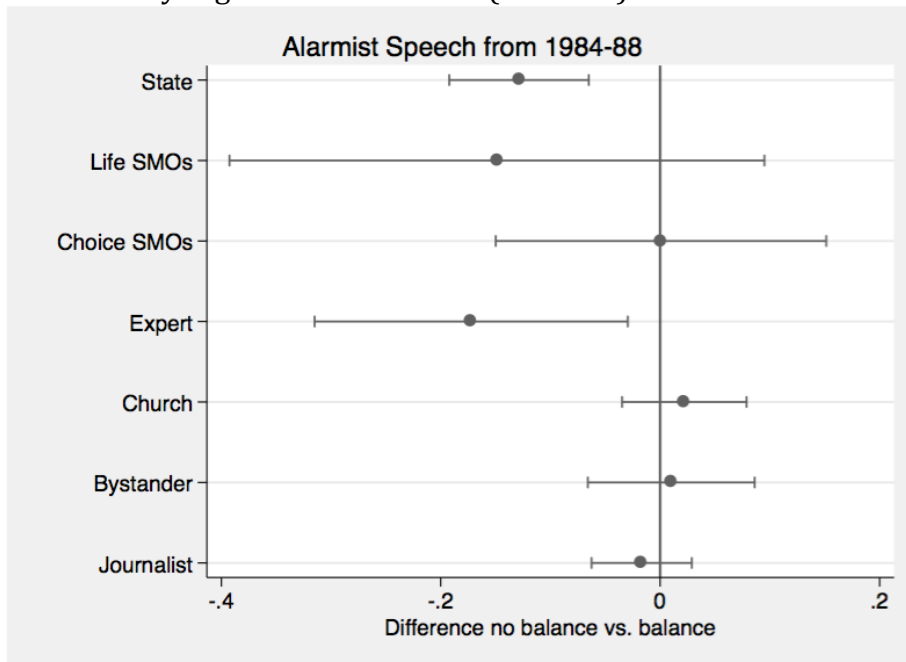
Note: 90% confidence intervals with other variables held at their means.

## Attack and alarmist speech: No balance vs. balance, 1984-88<sup>68</sup>

**Figure A5.6:** Difference in predicted share of attack speech in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source (1984-88).



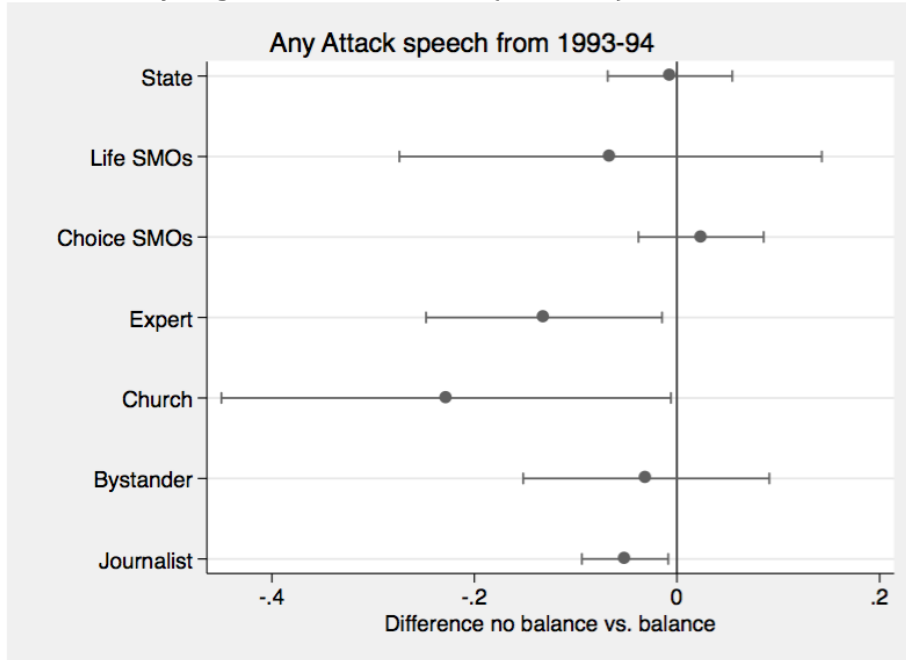
**Figure A5.7:** Difference in predicted share of alarmist speech in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source (1984-88).



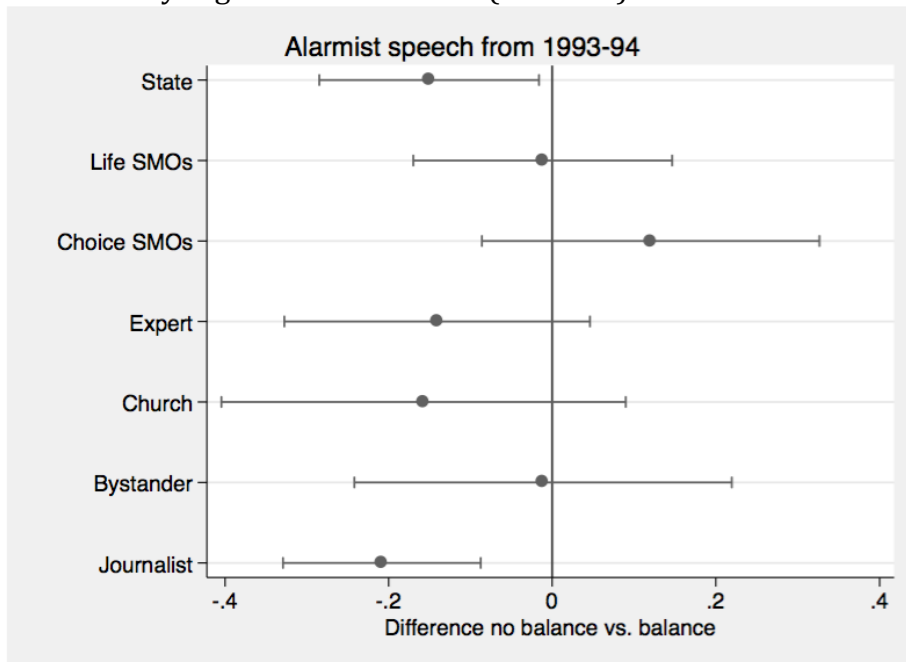
<sup>68</sup> Note: 90% confidence intervals for all figures with other variables held at their means (marginal effects).

## Attack and alarmist speech: No balance vs. balance, 1993-94<sup>69</sup>

**Figure A5.8:** Difference in predicted share of attack speech in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source (1993-94).



**Figure A5.9:** Difference in predicted share of alarmist speech in no balance vs. balance condition by organizational source (1993-94).



<sup>69</sup> Note: 90% confidence intervals for all figures with other variables held at their means.

## APPENDIX B: Methodological Appendix

### Supreme Court decisions

- *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965). Fewer restrictions. (Upholds right to privacy for married couples to obtain contraception without state intrusion)
- *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972). Fewer restrictions. (Unmarried couples may obtain contraceptives)
- \**Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* (1973). Fewer restrictions (Constitutional right-nationalizes abortion as a fundamental right. States cannot interfere without compelling reason for regulation).
- *Planned Parenthood v. Danforth* (1976). Fewer restrictions (Overturns Missouri law requiring married women obtain husband's consent for an abortion).
- *Maher v. Roe* and *Beal v. Doe* (1977). Greater restrictions (affirms state rights to limit allocation of public funds for abortions).
- *Bellotti v. Baird* (1979). Fewer restrictions (minors can obtain judicial consent without first seeking parental consent).
- \**Harris v. McRae* (1980). Greater restrictions (upholds Hyde Amendment limiting state funding of abortion).
- *Planned Parenthood of Kansas City v. Ashcroft*, *City of Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health*, and *Simopoulos v. Virginia* (1983). Mixed. (Court invalidates certain Missouri requirements, but upholds waiting period and parental consent with judicial bypass provision & Court strikes down numerous provisions of Akron, Ohio ordinance restricting abortion).
- \**Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989). Greater restrictions. (affirms states rights to limit abortion but maintains fundamental right to abortion).
- *Ohio v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health et al.* & *Hodgson v. Minnesota* (1990). Mixed. (minors must be given option to seek "judicial bypass" of parental consent rules; Operation Rescue can be banned from blocking entrances at abortion clinics).
- *Rust v. Sullivan* (1991). More restrictions ("gag" rule prohibiting personnel working in Title X funded clinics from discussing abortion with clients).
- \**Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* (1992). Greater restrictions. (reinforces the 89' *Webster* decision upholding state rights to limit abortion and reinforces "undue burden standard").

\* Denotes major Supreme Court cases included in Court case variable and reflected in previous scholarship of the abortion case (Staggenborg 1991; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Rohlinger 2002, 2015).

## **Government administrations & presidential elections**

1972-1974\*: Richard Nixon (Republican) – noninterference with court decision

1975-1976\*: Gerald Ford (Republican) – willing to challenge abortion

1977-1980\*: Jimmy Carter (Democrat) - noninterference

1981-1984\*-1988\*: Ronald Reagan (Republican) – strong anti-abortion stand

1989-1992\*: George H.W. Bush (Republican) – anti-abortion

1993-1996: Bill Clinton (Democrat) – pro-choice

\* Denotes years in which presidential elections were held.



## Outrage rhetoric coding

**Attack Speech.** Discrediting character, beliefs, or arguments: Includes ad hominem attacks or character attacks, misrepresentative exaggeration, emotional language, and ideologically extremizing language.

Anti-choice' attack examples (pro-life direction):

1. Abortion is so wrong anything to stop it is justified [when pro-life speaker].
2. Minority rights demand freedom to dissent/right to break laws with analogies to Black Civil Rights, anti-Nazi, anti-Communist, anti-totalitarian movements [if stance is pro-life].
3. All private actions (threats, attacks, protests) are justified because babies are being killed.
4. Abortion conflict is a war that requires mobilizing for life [when life SMOs]
5. Women choose abortion for minor, irresponsible reasons. All trivializing of social reasons - frivolous, lifestyle, convenience - fit here.
6. Abortion is murder or mass murder [note: this is distinct from the arguments that only say a fetus is a baby/child]
7. Analogy of abortion to slavery.
8. Implicit or explicit link between abortion and the Nazi holocaust.
9. It is impossible, hypocritical to be pro-legal abortion if you think it is wrong. Private and public morality cannot be separated.
10. Deaths from illegal abortions are exaggerated or false.

'Anti-life' attack examples (pro-choice direction):

1. Abortion conflict is a war that requires mobilizing for choice [when choice SMO]
2. The opposition thinks abortion is so wrong they'll do anything to stop it and think it is justified [when pro-choice speaker].
3. Sanctity of human life assertion is dishonest, inconsistent with lack of general pacifism in the pro-life position. Pro-life supporters are inconsistent in being militant, supporting the death penalty, and war.
4. Hypocritical/dishonest to focus on unborn over born children and the mother/woman
5. Limits on abortion are part of a general anti-feminist agenda/conspiracy
6. Condemning abortion is political opportunism/dishonest.
7. Abortion is a symbol of modernity. Laws or restrictions take society back to the Middle Ages, backwards, or back to a schizoid era.
8. It is ignorant and backward to be anti-abortion. Uniformed and easily manipulated people are backbone of anti-abortion movement.
9. It trivializes the holocaust and is deliberate evil when one compares abortion to it.
10. Personal stories or accounts of high costs and trauma of illegal or highly regulated abortion.

**Alarmist Speech.** Examples of claims that raise the alarm in harshly condemning the threatening tactics of an actor:

1. Abortion conflict is a fundamental cleavage and a threat to social peace [when non-movement speaker]
2. Tactics are immoral and must be stopped. Generally arguments include a strong condemnation of tactics.
3. Private actions are causing harm are violent and escalating conflict.
4. Accounts of violence and horror stories of private actions/protests.
5. Abortion conflict is dangerous for abortion providers and impairs service provision in general.
6. Abortion conflict is traumatic for those seeking abortions
7. Tactics of either side threaten democratic principles because they are being used as a political threat.
8. The government must intervene to protect access; to protect minorities for majorities and vice versa.
9. Government must protect citizens from assault, violence.
10. Anti-abortion protests infringe on other rights.