



How Religion and LGBTQ Rights Intersect in Media Coverage

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Introduction and summary

The movement for LGBTQ rights in this country has gained widespread support among religious Americans of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Yet for too long, media narratives have painted a picture of secular LGBTQ rights activists positioned against anti-LGBTQ opponents who are motivated by their religious convictions. This study shows that the way media outlets frame these stories, based on whose perspectives they include or do not include, can play an influential role in setting political agendas.¹ As public opinion in faith communities and nationwide support for LGBTQ rights have shifted dramatically in recent years, does news media coverage of the intersection of faith and LGBTQ rights reflect this changed landscape? The Center for American Progress examined this issue by studying articles that appeared in select national and local newspapers across a 15-month period.

The context for this study was the broad acceptance of LGBTQ rights by religious groups in the United States. Large majorities of every major religious group favor nondiscrimination laws that protect LGBTQ people.² Majorities in every major religious group—with the exception of white evangelical Protestants—also support marriage equality.³ Religious Americans strongly support LGBTQ rights, and this reality should be reflected to ensure fair and accurate media coverage.

This study's top finding is that news media coverage of religion and LGBTQ rights more often cites religiously identified sources that oppose LGBTQ equality. This overall finding starkly contrasts with the support for LGBTQ rights expressed by religious Americans. While 66.3 percent of religiously identified sources expressed negative or anti-LGBTQ sentiment, public opinion polling of religiously affiliated Americans suggests that only 25.8 percent oppose nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ people.⁴

Other major findings include:

- While there is diversity in the representation of sources among Christian groups, non-Christian sources were only marginally consulted.

- Of the religious traditions represented, mainline Protestant and Jewish sources expressed the highest shares of positive or pro-LGBTQ sentiment.
- Evangelical Protestant sources and sources who were reported as generically Christian or religious had the highest shares of negative, anti-LGBTQ sentiment.
- Two major news events notably amplified the number of pro-LGBTQ religiously identified sources overall: the presidential candidacy of Pete Buttigieg and the possible schism of the United Methodist Church over the recognition of LGBTQ rights. If articles addressing these two events were omitted, the share of anti-LGBTQ faith sources would be considerably higher.
- Individuals identified as religious and as community members were predominantly positive or pro-LGBTQ equality but were consulted less often than those identified as religious spokespersons, who were nearly evenly split between positive and negative sentiment.
- Despite the tireless advocacy of a broad coalition of pro-LGBTQ faith activists, the majority of activists/advocates reported in the sample news stories opposed LGBTQ equality. These activists were identified generically as Christian or religious, implying that they represent a broader religious community than their own specific denomination or tradition.⁵
- Without news coverage of Buttigieg—the first openly gay major presidential candidate—included in the sample, anti-LGBTQ officials were identified with their personal religious beliefs approximately two times more than pro-LGBTQ officials.
- Religiously identified sources who were speaking on behalf of a business were predominantly anti-LGBTQ equality.

Methodology overview

This study leveraged qualitative content analysis to review news articles published by four national publications (*The Associated Press*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*) and 10 local publications (*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Denver Post*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *Tampa Bay Times*, *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Detroit News*, *The Houston Chronicle*, *The Kansas City Star*, and *The Tennessean*) between April 2019 and June 2020. The authors analyzed a total of 458 national and 195 local news articles addressing the intersection of religion and LGBTQ issues. The 1,880 sources who were identified in these articles were analyzed for their individual type, organization type, religious affiliation, and overall sentiment toward the LGBTQ community and related issues. Messages in favor of LGBTQ equality were coded as positive, those opposing LGBTQ equality were coded as negative, and those asserting perspectives that were neither positive nor negative were coded as neutral.⁶ This study primarily interrogates the 951 religiously identified sources in these articles—for example, individuals who cited “my Christian faith”—as well as their positive or negative sentiment toward LGBTQ equality. The categories that were used for individual type and organization type were derived from a relevant previous study conducted by the University of Missouri’s Center on Religion and the Professions.⁷

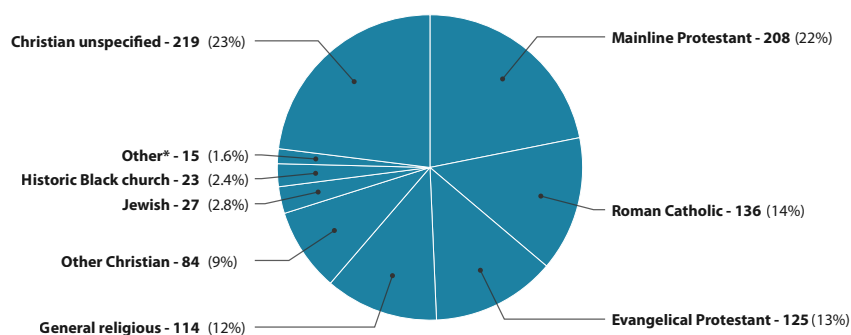
Study findings

Sources identified as generically Christian or religious frequently demonstrate anti-LGBTQ sentiment

FIGURE 1

Diversity of article sources is high among Christian groups but minimal among non-Christian groups

The number and percentage of all religiously identified article sources, by religious affiliation



*Buddhist, Hindu, Humanist, Indigenous African religions, interfaith, Muslim, and Native American religions were collapsed into "Other" due to small sample size.

Note: Percentages were rounded to the third decimal. Religious identification was determined through information in the article text; the source's self-identification; the authors' separate identification of the source's affiliation; and/or another source identifying different sources' religious affiliation. The data include neutral-identified sources.

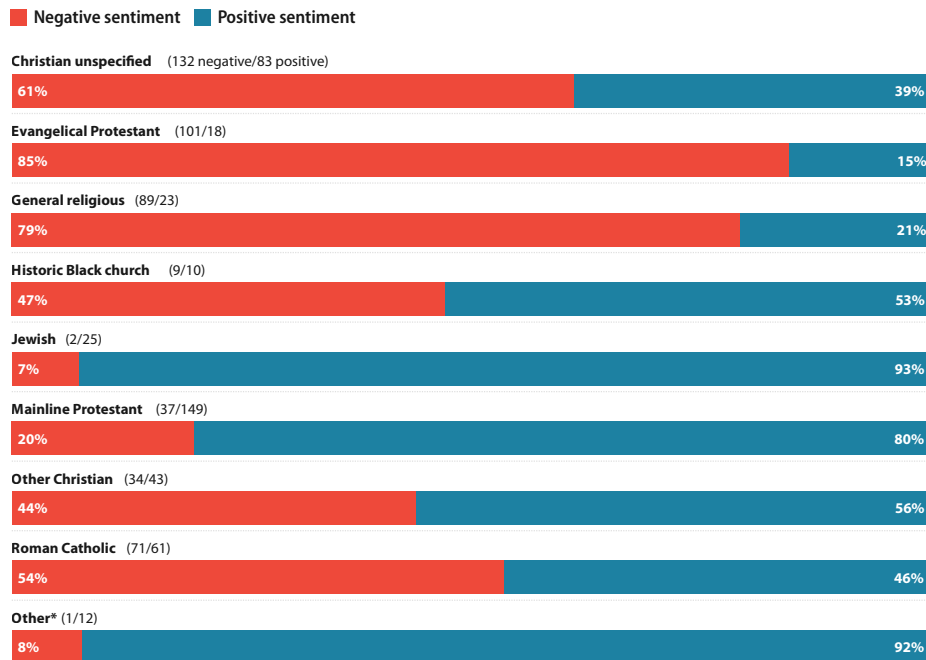
Source: Center for American Progress analysis of sources reported in 653 news articles between April 2019 and June 2020, July 2020 to November 2020, on file with the authors.

This study is a comprehensive review of relevant articles published in specific outlets across the United States, yet the religious affiliations of the articles' sources are not reflective of America's diverse religious landscape. (see Figure 1) A similar study conducted by GLAAD in 2012 demonstrated an outsize focus on evangelical Christian sources; this CAP study encouragingly demonstrates a more representative proportion of nonevangelical Christian sources. However, there remains minimal representation of growing groups of non-Christian faiths, including Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims who, combined, make up approximately 3 percent of the U.S. population.⁸

FIGURE 2

Unspecified Christian and general religious article sources had predominantly negative sentiment toward LGBTQ equality

The number and percentage of religiously identified article sources with positive and negative sentiment toward LGBTQ equality, by religious affiliation



*Buddhist, Hindu, Humanist, Indigenous African religions, interfaith, Muslim, and Native American religions were collapsed into "Other" due to a small sample size.

Note: Percentages were rounded to the third decimal. Religious identification was determined through information in the article text; the source's self-identification; the authors' separate identification of the source's affiliation; and/or another source identifying different sources' religious affiliation.

Source: Center for American Progress analysis of sources reported in 653 news articles between April 2019 and June 2020, July 2020 to November 2020, on file with the authors.

The study found that sources' sentiment varied significantly depending on their religious affiliations.⁹ (see Figure 2) Sources affiliated with evangelical Protestantism, general religious perspectives, and unspecified Christian perspectives comprised the highest shares of negative sources of the religious affiliations that appeared in the study. Eighty-five percent of evangelical Protestant-identified sources espoused anti-LGBTQ views in the study. While polling indeed suggests that this religious group is the least supportive of LGBTQ equality, this still amounts to an overly negative representation of evangelical perspectives on LGBTQ equality. The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) indicates that less than half of this religious group opposes LGBTQ equality: 38 percent of white evangelical Protestants oppose LGBT nondiscrimination protections, and 46 percent oppose same-sex marriage.¹⁰ Similarly, approximately 54 percent of Roman Catholic-identified sources espoused anti-LGBT views, whereas the PRRI indicates that 23 to 26 percent of Catholic groups oppose LGBT nondiscrimination protections.¹¹

The negativity of the “Christian unspecified” and “general” religious categories is noteworthy. In multiple cases, American Christianity as a whole was portrayed as being inherently opposed to LGBTQ rights—an inaccurate depiction of the majority of American Christian attitudes. For example, some articles used over-generalized terms such as “religious-minded voters” and “Christians” to describe opponents to same-sex marriage:

*Christians say secular activists are trying to make it impossible for those who don't accept same-sex marriage to do business; same-sex couples say they are looking for the same rights in the public square that straight people have.*¹²

*The Republican firebrand, who as chief justice defiantly opposed gay marriage and defended the public display of the Ten Commandments, has maintained a following among some religious-minded voters. “Our religious liberty is presently under assault as Christians,” he said.*¹³

Portraying religion and LGBTQ rights as inherently contradictory is directly related to the efforts of some conservative Christians to reframe their anti-LGBTQ advocacy as a matter of religious freedom, thereby making it more difficult to challenge in the public square.¹⁴ By failing to identify specific Christian denominations or traditions, and in many cases simply leaving the self-identification of an anti-LGBTQ actor as “religious,” journalists are seemingly unintentionally conforming to this intentional political strategy by the religious right.¹⁵

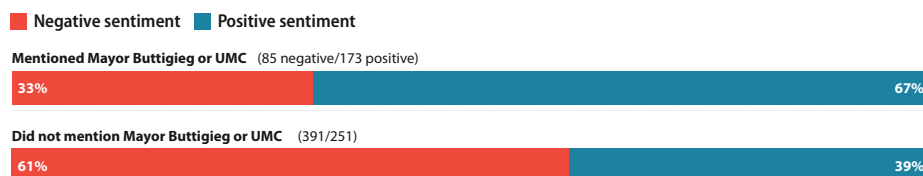
Of all religious affiliations included in this study, mainline Protestant and Jewish sources had the highest proportions of positive views.¹⁶ This reflects the pro-LGBTQ attitudes of these religious groups reported in public opinion polling.¹⁷

Former Mayor Buttigieg's presidential run and the proposed schism of the United Methodist Church elevated pro-LGBTQ faith sources

FIGURE 3

The majority of article sources mentioning South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg (D) or the United Methodist Church (UMC) demonstrated positive sentiment toward LGBTQ equality

The sentiment toward LGBTQ equality of religiously identified article sources that mentioned Mayor Buttigieg or UMC compared with those who did not



Note: Percentages were rounded to the third decimal. Religious identification was determined through information in the article text; the source's self-identification; the authors' separate identification of the source's affiliation; and/or another source identifying different sources' religious affiliation.

Source: Center for American Progress analysis of sources reported in 653 news articles between April 2019 and June 2020, July 2020 to November 2020, on file with the authors.

This study also found that a significant portion of positive sentiment was accounted for in articles mentioning Buttigieg, the former Democratic mayor of South Bend, Indiana, and the proposed schism within the United Methodist Church over same-sex marriage and the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy.¹⁸ (see Figure 3) These two highly covered events had a significant effect on the average sentiment of religiously identified sources cited in published articles. As the first openly gay major presidential candidate and a high-profile Democratic politician who spoke openly of his Episcopalian faith, Buttigieg's candidacy challenged the so-called God versus gays framing that has been prominent in national news media coverage.¹⁹ And as a high-profile denominational conflict, the proposed split of the United Methodist Church brought the voices of LGBTQ-affirming clergy and community members to the fore.²⁰

Notably, approximately 47 percent of religiously identified sources were positive. When the sources from articles mentioning Buttigieg or the United Methodist Church were omitted, this proportion dropped to approximately 39 percent. This suggests that these two major stories led to the increased visibility of pro-LGBTQ people of faith, likely spurring increased journalistic interest in these key political events in which positive faith sources were central to the storyline.

Buttigieg publicly asserted his LGBTQ identity as part of his vision of faith:

*My marriage to Chasten has made me a better man and yes, Mr. Vice President, it has moved me closer to God.*²¹

He challenged the notion that the Republican Party and its conservative values have a monopoly on faith in the political square:

Buttigieg, who is vocal about his Christian faith, told the crowd gathered that he wasn't afraid to make faith and values part of his campaign, "proving and asserting that God does not belong to a political party."

*"Values," Buttigieg said, "no longer belongs to one side of the aisle."*²²

While ideologically diverse United Methodist congregations navigated the uncertainty of an impending split, LGBTQ-affirming United Methodist clergy and congregants were elevated in local and national news coverage:

*Tampa Bay area church leaders who support inclusion say it's about time. That included the Rev. Andy Oliver of Allendale United Methodist Church in St. Petersburg, who faced possible discipline for officiating at a same-sex wedding that violated church rules. "It's a great day for inclusion for the United Methodist Church."*²³

*Rosenquist, who is the lead pastor at First United Methodist Church, said that denying LGBTQ marriage would give a message of "lack of inclusivity and lack of tolerance." She believes that goes against God's message of love. "Not only do we welcome you, but we offer you full rights and privilege," Chappell said.*²⁴

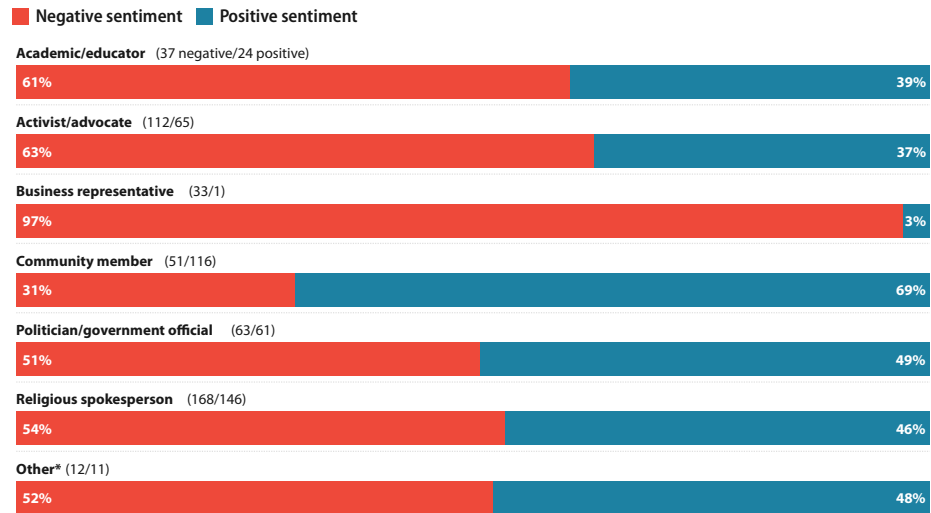
The majority of activists, advocates, and religious spokespersons espoused anti-LGBTQ views, while community members espoused pro-LGBTQ views

This study found a significant relationship between the source's role in the news story—categorized by individual type—and their sentiment.²⁵ (see Figure 4) Most sources consulted in the sample of articles were religious spokespersons, activists/advocates, and community members.

Community members’ perspectives on LGBTQ issues did not mirror those of religious spokespersons.²⁶ They also represented the highest proportion of pro-LGBTQ perspectives among the individual source types. However, religious spokespersons were consulted approximately two times more than community members in the sample and thus had greater influence on the overall findings.

FIGURE 4
The majority of activist/advocates and religious spokespersons demonstrated negative sentiment toward LGBTQ equality and the majority of community members demonstrated positive sentiment

The number and percentage of religiously identified article sources with negative and positive sentiment toward LGBTQ equality, by source type



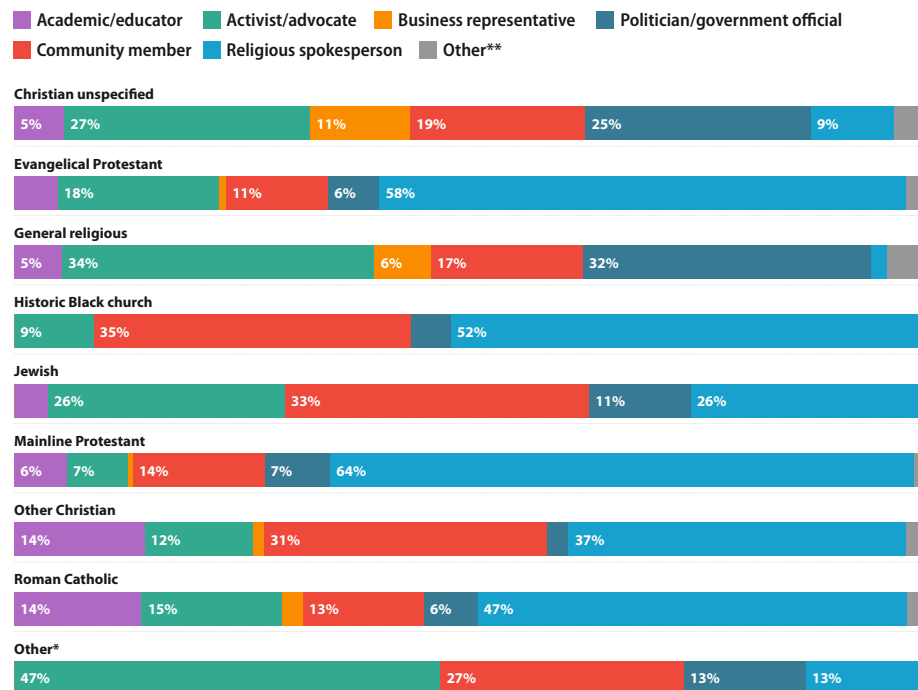
**Journalists, medical/psychological experts, and witness/bystanders were collapsed into "Other" due to a small sample size.*
Note: Percentages were rounded to the third decimal. Religious identification was determined through information in the article text; the source's self-identification; the authors' separate identification of the source's affiliation; and/or another source identifying different sources' religious affiliation.
Source: Center for American Progress analysis of sources reported in 653 news articles between April 2019 and June 2020, July 2020 to November 2020, on file with the authors.

In some stories, community members and religious spokespersons were cited together to highlight intrafaith tension, as was the case with the debate over Brigham Young University’s honor code, in which hundreds of students protested the enforcement of specific prohibitions on same-sex relationships and other activities.²⁷ As religious congregations across the country grapple with LGBTQ inclusion, community members are arguably as important to consult as official religious spokespersons in order to understand the viewpoints of broader religious communities. The importance of consulting community members is underscored by recent polling indicating that while the majority of American adults identify with a specific faith tradition, three-quarters of this demographic report making important decisions without consulting religious leaders.²⁸

FIGURE 5

The majority of activist/advocates and politicians/government officials were reported as Christian unspecified or general religious

The number and percentage of all religiously identified article sources, by religious affiliation and source type



*Journalists, medical/psychological experts, and witness/bystanders were collapsed into "Other" due to a small sample size.

Note: Percentages were rounded to the third decimal. Religious identification was determined through information in the article text; the source's self-identification; the authors' separate identification of the source's affiliation; and/or another source identifying different sources' religious affiliation. The data include neutral-identified sources.

Source: Center for American Progress analysis of sources reported in 653 news articles between April 2019 and June 2020, July 2020 to November 2020, on file with the authors.

Examination of the religious affiliations of individual types also demonstrates that a majority of activists/advocates and politicians/government officials were reported as generically Christian or religious. (see Figure 5) In contrast, a majority of religious spokespersons were identified with their Christian denomination or congregation, such as mainline Protestant or evangelical Protestant. Furthermore, despite the existence of a broad coalition of pro-LGBTQ faith activists, the majority of activists/advocates who were identified as generic "Christian" or religious were negative.²⁹ (see Figure 4)

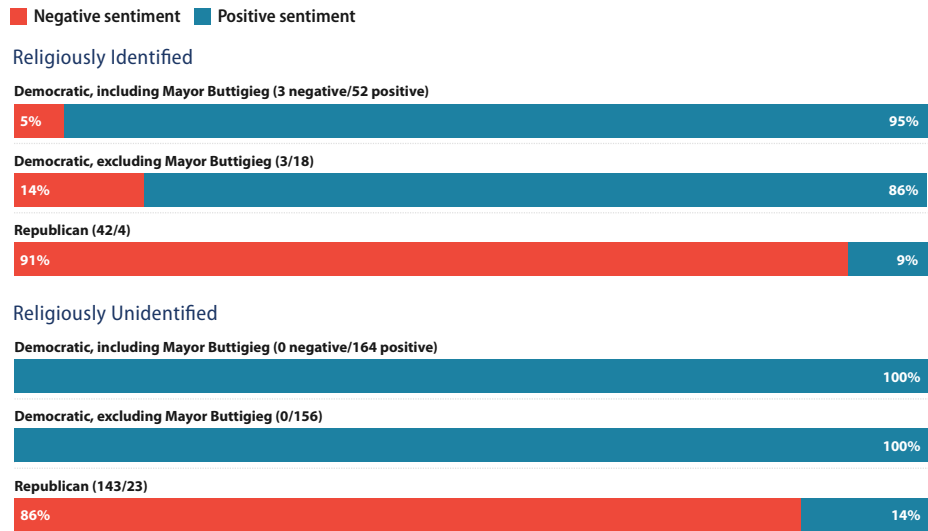
These trends further suggest that the particular belief systems of activists/advocates and politicians/government officials are often reported as representing all or the majority of Christians or generally religious Americans. For example, one article described the anti-LGBTQ advocacy of the Family Research Council as supporting “Christian causes”:

Tony Perkins, the president of Family Research Council, a group that supports socially conservative and Christian causes, said on Friday that the news was “tremendous” for children, birth moms and adoptive families. “Thanks to President Trump, charities will be free to care for needy children and operate according to their religious beliefs and the reality that children do best in a home with a married mom and dad,” Mr. Perkins said in a statement.³⁰

Invocations of personal faith slanted toward anti-LGBTQ
Republican officials

FIGURE 6
In articles that did not mention South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg (D), anti-LGBTQ political leaders were twice as likely to be identified with their faith than pro-LGBTQ political leaders

Negative and positive sentiment of article sources who are politician/government officials, by faith identification, party affiliation, and whether or not the article mentioned Mayor Buttigieg



Note: Percentages were rounded to the third decimal. Religious identification was determined through information in the article text; the source's self-identification; the authors' separate identification of the source's affiliation; and/or another source identifying different sources' religious affiliation.

Source: Center for American Progress analysis of sources reported in 653 news articles between April 2019 and June 2020, July 2020 to November 2020, on file with the authors.

Among articles that featured party-identified politicians/government officials, the authors found a significant statistical relationship between party sentiment and faith identification.³¹ (see Figure 6) At first glance, 24 percent of positive, Democratic officials were identified with their faith, whereas 23 percent of negative, Republican officials were identified with their faith. However, when Buttigieg is omitted as a source from the sample, only 10 percent of pro-LGBTQ Democratic sources are identified with their faith. (see Figure 7) Thus, without citations of Buttigieg, anti-LGBTQ Republican officials would be identified with their faiths more than two times more than pro-LGBTQ Democratic officials would be identified with their faiths. This further emphasizes the substantial role Buttigieg played in shifting the narrative that religion is contradictory to LGBTQ rights in the political arena.

Overall, Republican officials were religiously identified more often than Democratic officials, and the overall share of religiously identified pro-LGBTQ officials was less than that of anti-LGBTQ officials. This dichotomy positions religiously identified Republicans, approximately 91 percent of whom espoused anti-LGBTQ views, as the political authority on religion's intersection with LGBTQ rights in the legislative arena. Yet 78 percent of Democrats in Congress identify as Christian, and 96 percent of the 116th U.S. Congress self-identifies with a religion.³² As anti-LGBTQ advocates increasingly assert "religious liberty" to justify their positions, this right-wing monopoly on faith is likely working to the disadvantage of the LGBTQ rights movement at large.³³ For example, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp (R) was the only religiously identified source cited in an article regarding anti-LGBTQ legislation:

*[Gov. Kemp] and other supporters see it as a noncontroversial way to defend against what they view as a siege on Christian values.*³⁴

In the few instances where pro-LGBTQ politicians asserted their faith in response to the anti-LGBTQ position of their colleagues, readers can glean majority religious perspectives on LGBTQ rights that are clearly reflected in public opinion polling.³⁵ For example, one article provided Kentucky Sen. Phillip Wheeler's (R) justification for homophobic comments related to Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear (D) posing with drag queens:

*"What I thought indecent was the fact that they wore outfits that mocked the Christian religion and mocked traditional values," Wheeler said. "That's what I've got a problem with, is the mockery and the fact that the governor would pose and support that."*³⁶

The author also cited Gov. Beshear's response:

*[Gov. Beshear] said Thursday that he was proud to make history with his appearance. "It's time to move beyond the hatred and the division and treat everyone the way that they're supposed to be treated," he said. "For me, it's a matter of faith, morals and doing what's right."*³⁷

To provide another example, Lt. Gov. Dan Perry (R-TX) recently vocalized his support for a bill that would enable state-licensed professionals to deny people services based on their religious beliefs:

*"It's unfortunate that we're living in a day and time that people of faith, that are very well balanced, can't practice their faith openly in the public square anymore. So that's the reason why I took this on. ... But it's that important to me because it's not about the here and now. It's about where we're all going to spend our eternity."*³⁸

In the same article, Sen. Royce West (D-TX) invoked his own faith to challenge the bill:

[Sen. West] likened the bill to earlier civil rights debates when politicians cited their religious beliefs to enact racist policies, calling the bill "a subjective and not objective bill."

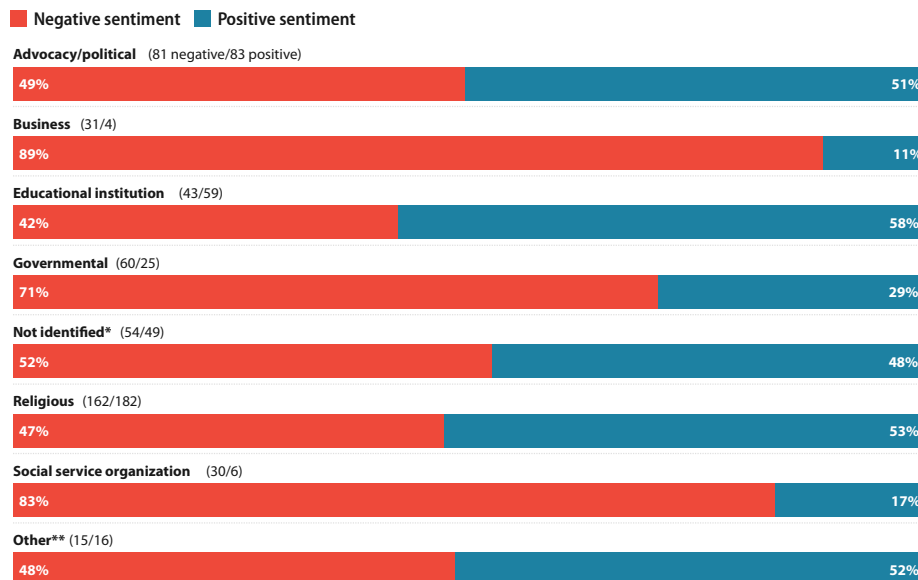
*"I go on and on about how our religious beliefs have been perverted by some people in this country," West said Wednesday. "I think this is a perversion right now. This is going to be a seminal moment in the history of this state."*³⁹

Religiously identified businesses demonstrated the largest proportion of anti-LGBTQ sentiment

FIGURE 7

The majority of article faith sources affiliated with businesses and social service organizations demonstrated negative sentiment toward LGBTQ equality

The number and percentage of religiously identified article sources with negative and positive sentiment toward LGBTQ equality, by organization type



*Sources that were not identified with an organization were categorized as "Not identified."

**Media, recreational, and research centers/think tanks were collapsed into "Other" due to a small sample size.

Note: Percentages were rounded to the third decimal. Religious identification was determined through information in the article text; the source's self-identification; the authors' separate identification of the source's affiliation; and/or another source identifying different sources' religious affiliation.

Source: Center for American Progress analysis of sources reported in 653 news articles between April 2019 and June 2020, July 2020 to November 2020, on file with the authors.

The study also found a significant relationship between sentiment and the type of organizations with which sources were cited.⁴⁰ (see Figure 7) In the sample, sources were predominantly associated with religious and advocacy/political organizations. Roughly 8 out of 10 businesses and social service organizations that identified with a religious tradition espoused the highest proportions of negative sentiment. This is likely reflective of ongoing legal battles regarding business owners and social service organizations—for example, the debate around adoption agencies⁴¹—and prompts further inquiry as to why anti-LGBTQ sources that are religiously identified are presented as the majority voice on these issues. For example, dozens of non-religiously identified businesses weighed in on the debate around anti-LGBTQ policies in Florida's tax credit scholarship program,

condemning discrimination and withdrawing their donations.⁴² Notably, only 11 percent of religiously identified businesses were associated with pro-LGBTQ perspectives. This trend differs from the overall study findings: 2 in 5 businesses, religiously identified or not, demonstrated pro-LGBTQ perspectives,⁴³ and 3 in 4 of businesses that were not publicly identified with a religious affiliation demonstrated support for LGBTQ equality.

Additionally, advocacy/political organizations were divided nearly evenly in positive and negative sentiment. However, the language used to identify anti-LGBTQ advocacy/political organizations varied among news stories. For example, the Alliance Defending Freedom—an organization that represents some of the anti-LGBTQ businesses and social service organizations described in the news articles—was identified simply as a “conservative advocacy organization” in one article and a “conservative Christian organization” in another article by the same publication.⁴⁴ Such inconsistencies in journalists’ identification of anti-LGBTQ sources can significantly affect readers’ interpretation of the news event. While the reason for these inconsistencies is unclear, journalists should avoid identifying anti-LGBTQ sources as religious while omitting religious leanings for pro-LGBTQ sources, even when both may be religiously motivated.

Recommendations

Since its contemporary emergence in the 1980s, the religious right has intentionally and deftly saturated media narratives around LGBTQ rights, to the virtual exclusion of pro-LGBTQ religious voices.⁴⁵ Given Pew Research Center's finding that a majority of LGBT Americans are people of faith and that people of faith have remained on the front lines of the movement for LGBTQ equality since its inception, the media's historical framing of religious and LGBTQ interests as contradictory is both inaccurate and erasive.⁴⁶ Furthermore, scholars have found that such media frames can substantially influence political agenda-setting and the public's understanding of these issues.⁴⁷

This study found a meaningful improvement in the proportion and diversity of pro-LGBTQ sources of faith cited in news articles regarding issues at the religion-LGBTQ rights intersection, compared with the 2012 GLAAD study.⁴⁸ This shift is likely due in part to Buttigieg's bold candidacy and the tide-shifting split of the United Methodist Church, as well as years of robust advocacy by national organizations and local faith communities that continue to educate religion reporters and elevate pro-LGBTQ voices of faith. However, anti-LGBTQ faith voices remained the slight majority of religiously identified sources that were cited in more than 650 local and national newspaper articles between April 2019 and June 2020, which does not reflect the majority-progressive positions of Americans of faith on LGBT issues.⁴⁹

To advance more accurate, inclusive, and effective representations of Americans of faith on LGBTQ issues, CAP offers the following recommendations for journalists, policymakers, business leaders, and everyday people of faith.

- **Anti-LGBTQ Christians are not the majority: Diversify representation**

Journalists must make an intentional effort to consult more diverse perspectives when writing stories regarding the issues at the religion-LGBTQ rights intersection. While the provocative comments of famous white evangelical religious leaders and well-resourced anti-LGBTQ advocacy organizations may be the most accessible, polling data of religious Americans on LGBTQ issues make clear that these loud

voices are not representative of everyday Americans. Journalists could better represent religious Americans' perspectives on LGBTQ equality by increasing their coverage of growing non-Christian religious groups (see Figure 1) and by intentionally consulting religious community members rather than primarily deferring to official religious spokespersons. (see Figure 4) Thus, journalists must consult more diverse sources to reflect actual trends of public opinion in these communities and more accurately depict influential news events.

- **Anti-LGBTQ Christians are not the authority: Specify religious affiliation**

The high proportions of negative, unspecified faith sources (Christian unspecified, general) compared with specified faith sources suggest that journalists inadvertently present the minority perspectives of religious Americans who are opposed to LGBTQ rights as generally Christian or generally religious. (see Figure 2) While this may be in part due to how certain activists/advocates and community members self-identify in media appearances, it is the role of journalists to do due diligence to identify their sources and their organizational affiliations beyond “religious,” “Christian,” or even “conservative Christian.” The diversity in opinion among Christian subgroups alone makes clear that further specification will lead to more accurate stories. When journalists only cite the self-identification of a major leader such as Jeff Sessions as Christian, they inadvertently play into the intentional political strategy of religious-right actors to position themselves as the broad authority on issues of faith.

- **The Buttigieg effect: Faith is not bound by party lines**

In legislative debates regarding LGBTQ rights and religious liberty, it is especially crucial that pro-LGBTQ politicians of faith cite their own beliefs to counter politicians who deploy religious language to justify anti-LGBTQ policies. This study found that if citations of Buttigieg were excluded from the sample, more than two times more anti-LGBTQ Republican officials cited their faith than pro-LGBTQ Democratic officials. Buttigieg's news visibility as a gay man and practicing Episcopalian had a notable impact on both the study's overall findings (see Figure 3) and the partisan nature of how religious identity was paired with pro- and anti-LGBTQ positions. (see Figure 6) These trends underscore how if even a few high-profile politicians assert their faith more publicly and regularly in LGBTQ-affirming discourse that implicates religion, it can substantially affect how the public perceives these issues.

- **Power of the dollar: Elevating business leaders of faith**

Business leaders of faith must be vocal in supporting LGBTQ rights and in referencing their religious values or tradition when doing so. The overwhelming majority of religiously identified sources associated with businesses espoused anti-LGBTQ views (see Figure 7), thus positioning those sources' attempts to discriminate against LGBTQ people through litigation as the authority on business-related issues in the public square. Given the demonstrated power of LGBTQ-affirming corporations in influencing legislative outcomes—for example, the Equality Act and Tennessee religious freedom legislation—and ongoing litigation efforts by anti-LGBTQ businesses, this is especially important for advancing LGBTQ inclusion in the private and public sector.⁵⁰

The Trump administration has empowered religious-right actors who support the individuals, organizations, and corporations that seek to discriminate against the LGBTQ community.⁵¹ As supported by this study, despite improved visibility of pro-LGBTQ people of faith, the minority voices of the religious right continue to occupy the mantle of religion in news media coverage of LGBTQ issues. This misrepresentation has likely strengthened the profile of anti-LGBTQ advocacy priorities in the public square. As many Americans optimistically transition into a new administration on the shoulders of the monumental Title VII ruling that affirms the civil rights of LGBTQ Americans, the country faces impending challenges of anti-LGBTQ litigation under dozens of conservative, lifetime federal judges.⁵² This research provides valuable insights into the current news media landscape and advocacy openings for the movement for LGBTQ equality at large.

Conclusion

Media coverage of LGBTQ issues and religion should fairly represent the views of religious communities in the United States. This comprehensive CAP study of recent media coverage in select national and local media outlets shows that there are more religiously identified anti-LGBTQ sources cited than religiously identified pro-LGBTQ sources. Journalists have a responsibility to improve the diversity of voices in their coverage and to make sure religious communities' voices are accurately represented.

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Appendix

This appendix contains further details about the authors' sample identification and qualitative content analysis procedures.

Research questions

This study sought to understand the following questions:

1. What proportion of religiously identified sources that are cited in news articles discussing issues relevant to the LGBTQ community are pro-LGBTQ versus anti-LGBTQ?
2. Of the religiously identified sources that are cited discussing such issues, which and to what extent are particular faith denominations represented?
3. What types of individuals and organizations are associated with the religiously identified sources cited in these articles?

Sample identification

To explore these research questions, the researchers identified a sample of articles published by four national publications (*The Associated Press*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*) and 10 local publications (*The Denver Post*, *Tampa Bay Times*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *The Detroit News*, *The Kansas City Star*, *The Charlotte Observer*, *The Tennessean*, *The Houston Chronicle*, and *The Dallas Morning News*) published between April 2019 and June 2020. This time frame was identified based on recency and research feasibility. The 14 publications were identified based on their circulation numbers, publishing company, and geographic location, taking into account states of particular interest based on their existing LGBTQ nondiscrimination legislative and judicial conditions.⁵³

More than 3,500 articles that addressed LGBTQ rights and religious issues in proximity were identified with media monitoring software through a Boolean search (LGBT* OR LBGT* OR “L.G.B.T” OR “L.G.B.T.” OR “L.G.B.T.Q.” OR “L.G.B.T.Q” OR Gay* OR Lesbian* OR Transgender* OR Bisexual* OR “Nonbinary” OR Queer* OR Homosexual*) NEAR/30 (Faith* OR Religion* OR God* OR Church* OR Clergy* OR Spiritual* OR “Rev.” OR Reverend* OR Bishop* OR Mosque* OR Temple* OR Synagogue* OR Chapel* OR Pastor* OR Rabbi* OR Imam* OR Monk* OR Priest* OR Christian* OR Protestant* OR Catholic* OR Evangel* OR Islam* OR Muslim* OR Jew* OR “Judaism” OR Mormon* OR Hindu* OR Buddh* OR Bible* or Quran* OR Torah* OR Talmud*) NOT (Category: Arts) NOT (Category: Fashion) NOT (Category: Music) NOT (title: op-ed) NOT (title: opinion) and manually reviewed for relevance and duplicity (e.g., an Associated Press wire piece that ran in several publications). Opinion and commentary pieces and sports, arts, entertainment, obituaries, and international articles were omitted from the article pool through the Boolean search and manually. However, U.S. sources cited in international subject articles (e.g., Secretary of State Mike Pompeo) were included.

Coding and analysis

The researcher in this study used a combination of human-coding and computer-aided textual analysis to analyze the identified articles and the sources cited within each article. The 653 articles that were included in this study were coded for headline, publication, author(s), and date of publication. Qualitative content analysis software was used to flag terms of interest from the aforementioned Boolean search within the article text, for more precise review by researchers. All 1,880 sources that were cited addressing issues at the religion and LGBTQ intersection within the articles were categorized by their individual type (academic/educator, activist/advocate, business representative, community member, journalist, medical/psychological expert, politician/government official, religious spokesperson, or witness/bystander); organization type (not identified, advocacy/political, business, educational institution, governmental, media organization, recreational, religious, research center/think tank, social service organization); religious affiliation (not identified, general, atheist/agnostic/humanist, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, interfaith, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, evangelical Protestant, historic Black church, mainline Protestant, Native American religions, or Indigenous African religions). The categories for individual type and organization type were derived from a previous study conducted in 2012 by the University of Missouri’s Center on Religion and the Professions.⁵⁴

Individual type, organization type, and religious affiliation were determined through the information available in the article text. Notably, sources' individual type may differ from their organization type. For example, Buttigieg's individual type was most often coded as "politician/government official" since he was often identified as the mayor of South Bend Indiana, and his organization type was most often coded as "advocacy/political" since he was often reported in the context of his 2020 presidential campaign. Additionally, while this report explores primarily religiously identified sources, all sources—including those coded as "not identified" for religious affiliation—discussing issues at the religion and LGBTQ intersection were coded. For example, in the cases where Buttigieg was not identified with his faith, his religious affiliation was coded as "not identified," even though the researchers are aware of his religious background.

Religious affiliation determinations for Christian sources—mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic, historic Black church, other Christian, or other—were made according to guidelines by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life.⁵⁵ Sentiment was determined both by the explicit language and underlying meaning of the source's quotes, or the authors' characterizations of the source's messages as related to LGBTQ issues. Pro-LGBTQ messages were coded as positive (e.g., United Methodist Church pastor affirming LGBTQ inclusion in their congregation); anti-LGBTQ messages were coded as negative (e.g., Roman Catholic school official asserting "religious liberty" as justification for firing a gay teacher); and messages that were neither positive nor negative were coded as neutral (e.g., academic religion expert delivering an objective assessment of the impact of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints' baptism policy).

After the article coding was completed, the researcher created cross tabulations of the categorical data points and used chi-squared tests for figures 3–5 and 7–8 when all expected values for cells were greater than 5 to determine statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) associations between categorical variables of interest (e.g., religious affiliation and positive/negative sentiment).

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