

LEFT BEHIND

The Skewed Representation of Religion in Major News Media

The logo for Media Matters for America, featuring the text "MEDIAMATTERS" in a large, bold, white sans-serif font, with "FOR AMERICA" in a smaller, spaced-out, white sans-serif font below it, all set against a dark blue rectangular background.

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MAY 2007

A Special Report by *Media Matters for America*

Media Matters for America is a not-for-profit, progressive research and information center dedicated to comprehensively monitoring, analyzing, and correcting conservative misinformation in the U.S. media. *Media Matters* is the first organization to systematically monitor the media for conservative misinformation every day, in real time. For more information, visit www.mediamatters.org.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It would surprise few people, conservative or progressive, to learn that coverage of the intersection of religion and politics tends to oversimplify both. If this oversimplification occurred to the benefit or detriment of neither side of the political divide, then the weaknesses in coverage of religion would be of only academic interest. But as this study documents, coverage of religion not only overrepresents some voices and underrepresents others, it does so in a way that is consistently advantageous to conservatives.

As in many areas, the decisions journalists make when deciding which voices to include in their stories have serious consequences. What is the picture of religious opinion? Who is a religious leader? Whose views represent important groups of believers? Every time a journalist writes a story, he or she answers these questions by deciding whom to quote and how to characterize their views.

Religion is often depicted in the news media as a politically divisive force, with two sides roughly paralleling the broader political divide: On one side are cultural conservatives who ground their political values in religious beliefs; and on the other side are secular liberals, who have opted out of debates that center on religion-based values. The truth, however is far different: close to 90 percent of Americans today self-identify as religious, while only 22 percent belong to traditionalist sects.¹ Yet in the cultural war depicted by news media as existing across religious lines, centrist and progressive voices are marginalized or absent altogether.

In order to begin to assess how the news media paint the picture of religion in America today, this study measured the extent to which religious leaders, both conservative and progressive, are quoted, mentioned, and interviewed in the news media.

Among the study's key findings:

- Combining newspapers and television, conservative religious leaders were quoted, mentioned, or interviewed in news stories **2.8 times as often** as were progressive religious leaders.
- On television news -- the three major television networks, the three major cable new channels, and PBS -- conservative religious leaders were quoted, mentioned, or interviewed **almost 3.8 times as often** as progressive leaders.
- In major newspapers, conservative religious leaders were quoted, mentioned, or interviewed **2.7 times as often** as progressive leaders.

Despite the fact most religious Americans are moderate or progressive, in the news media it is overwhelmingly conservative leaders who are presented as the voice of religion. This represents a particularly meaningful distortion since progressive religious leaders tend to focus on different issues and offer an entirely different perspective than their conservative counterparts.

INTRODUCTION

If one were trying to assess the state of religion in America today by examining the major news media, one would be forgiven for believing that religious Americans are primarily concerned with a small subset of issues, chief among them ending legal abortion and opposing gay marriage. One might also believe that a handful of vocal religious figures advocating extremely conservative political views, many with close ties to the Republican Party, represent the face of religion in America today.

Since the 2004 election and the allegedly heightened influence of “values voters” -- itself a term the media usually use not to mean voters who have values, but voters who are both religious and conservative -- there has been a notable increase in coverage of religion, particularly as it intersects with political debates. Consequently, *Media Matters for America* undertook this study to assess just whom the media turn to when they want to represent religious opinion. We found that conservative religious figures dominate the media’s coverage of religious issues, while religious progressives and representatives of mainline religious institutions, who regularly make statements on controversial issues, went relatively ignored.

The actual data on religious belief and observance in America illuminates a picture at odds with the media’s representation. According to a 2006 survey by the Center for American Values in Public Life, only 22 percent of Americans are traditionalist in their religious beliefs, whereas a full 50 percent of Americans can be classified as centrist in their religious orientation, 18 percent as modernist, and 10 percent as secular or nonreligious.² According to the Pew Research Center, in 2004, evangelicals represented 23 percent of Americans, the same percentage as reported in 2000.³ Furthermore, despite media depictions, evangelicals are a heterogeneous group with varying priorities: For example, in 2006 only 10 percent of evangelical Christians said abortion and gay marriage would be the most important factor in determining their vote.⁴ This heterogeneity of political views among religious Americans applies across varied religious denominations and traditions.⁵

Other studies further demonstrate the diversity of views among religious Americans. A Beliefnet.com study by John Green and Steven Waldman based on data from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life classified 24 percent of Americans as either “Religious Right” or “Heartland Culture Warriors,” while 17.9 percent were classified as the “Religious Left” or “Spiritual but not Religious.” That 17.9 percent did not include Latinos and African-Americans, most of whom are politically progressive.⁶

But something significant happened when exit polls taken on election day 2004 showed that more people chose “moral values” as the most important issue on which they based their vote than any other issue. On the basis of this single vaguely worded question, many media outlets delivered a verdict that it was “values voters” - - defined as individuals driven by opposition to abortion and gay rights based on religious belief - that won the 2004 presidential election for George W. Bush.⁷ In fact, national post-election surveys have shown that gay marriage and abortion were far from the most important predictors of vote choice: These issues had no effect on votes among Independents, respondents in battleground states, or respondents in states with anti-gay marriage initiatives on the ballot. Opposition to abortion and gay marriage did have an effect in the South, albeit minimal in comparison to that of

attitudes toward the economy, the Iraq war, and terrorism.⁸ An exit poll taken by Zogby International in 2006, furthermore, showed that the “moral issue” cited most by voters was the Iraq war, and that more than twice as many voters cited greed and materialism or poverty and economic justice as “the most urgent moral crisis in American culture” as those who cited abortion or same-sex marriage.⁹

Nonetheless, whether it sprung from a misinterpretation or not, the media’s increased focus on religion after November 2004 might have been a good thing -- had the balance of voices they presented accurately represented the American public. But that has not been the case.

Religious coverage as it exists today does a disservice to the public in two major ways. First, the distorted picture allows a vocal minority to exercise an outsized influence on the issues and politicians that shape the direction of the country.¹⁰ The second disservice is in the opportunity cost of neglecting to offer a more accurate picture of religiosity and its effects on political views: More than eight in 10 Americans, consistently across virtually every religious tradition, agree that too many leaders use religion to talk about abortion and gay rights, but don’t talk about more important things like loving your neighbor and caring for the poor.¹¹ This is particularly notable in a country with higher rates of religious observance than nearly any other industrialized nation.¹²

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

Since the media increased their focus on religion and politics after the 2004 election, we decided to examine the period beginning on the day after that election and continuing through the end of 2006. The data demonstrate that conservative religious leaders comprise the overwhelming majority of religious perspectives presented in news coverage. For this time period, we examined print media coverage in major newspapers and televised coverage on the three major networks, three major cable channels, and PBS. We looked at all news stories that included mentions, quotes, or interviews of 20 major religious leaders -- 10 conservative religious leaders and 10 progressive religious leaders.¹³

For the purposes of this study, we defined “religious leaders” as clergy or officials of religiously based organizations with clearly identifiable ideological positions who are called upon to comment on political issues and events and offer a religious perspective.

This meant that certain individuals were outside our main focus, particularly those who can be considered political actors in their own right. We decided to bracket five particular political personalities and discuss them in a separate section: James Dobson, the late Jerry Falwell, Jesse Jackson, Pat Robertson, and Al Sharpton. Unlike the other religious leaders we examined, these five are newsmakers; politicians seek their endorsements, and when they are sought out they do not simply offer a religious perspective but become important players in political dramas. Their celebrity status makes them distinct from the other leaders in our study.

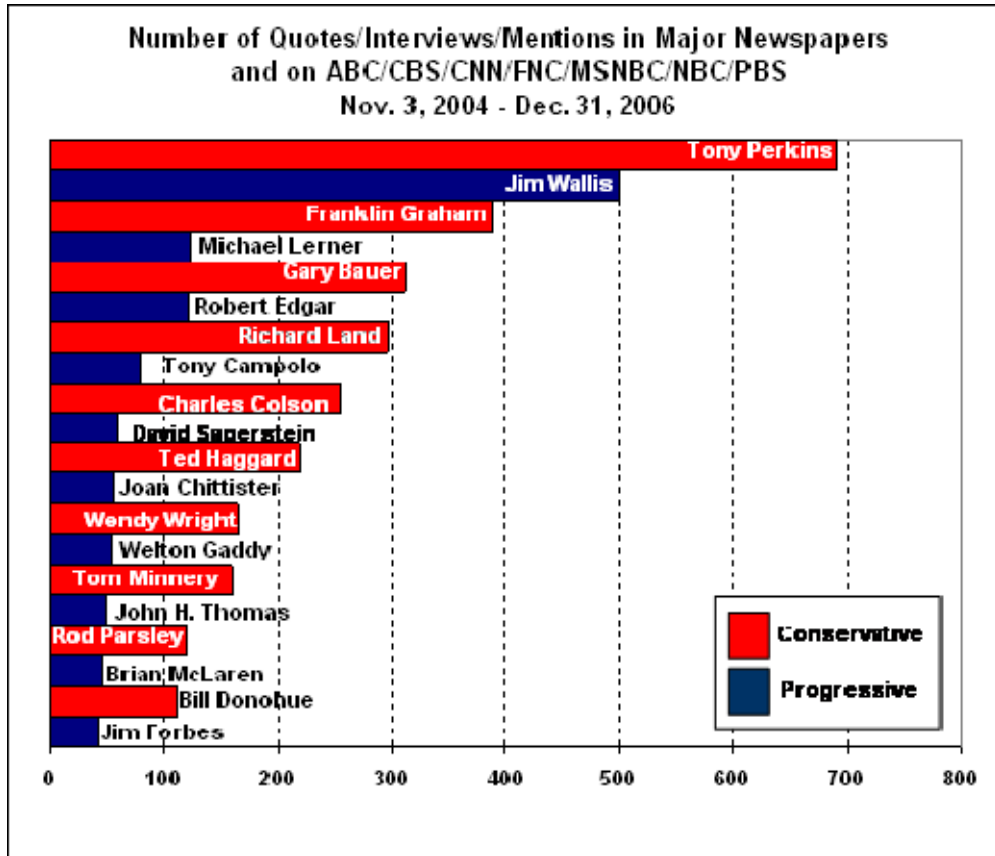
We also gathered data on a number of prominent and influential ministers who are more difficult to classify ideologically and who, to varying degrees, avoid making explicitly political ideological statements. Because these ministers -- Rick Warren, T.D. Jakes, and Joel Osteen -- are so well-known, readers might be interested to know how often they appear in major news media, so we have included a special section with data on them as well.

We offer three kinds of data for the religious figures: the number times each person was interviewed, the number of times they were quoted, and the number of times they were mentioned. The unit of analysis here is the news story; each number represents one story, even if the figure in question was quoted or mentioned multiple times in the same story.

These codes were applied in a hierarchical fashion: If a story contained an interview, it was coded as an interview, whatever else it contained; if it contained quotes and mentions, it was coded as a quote; finally, the “mention” category covers stories containing at least one mention of the religious figure but no quotes or interview.

Newspapers and Television Combined

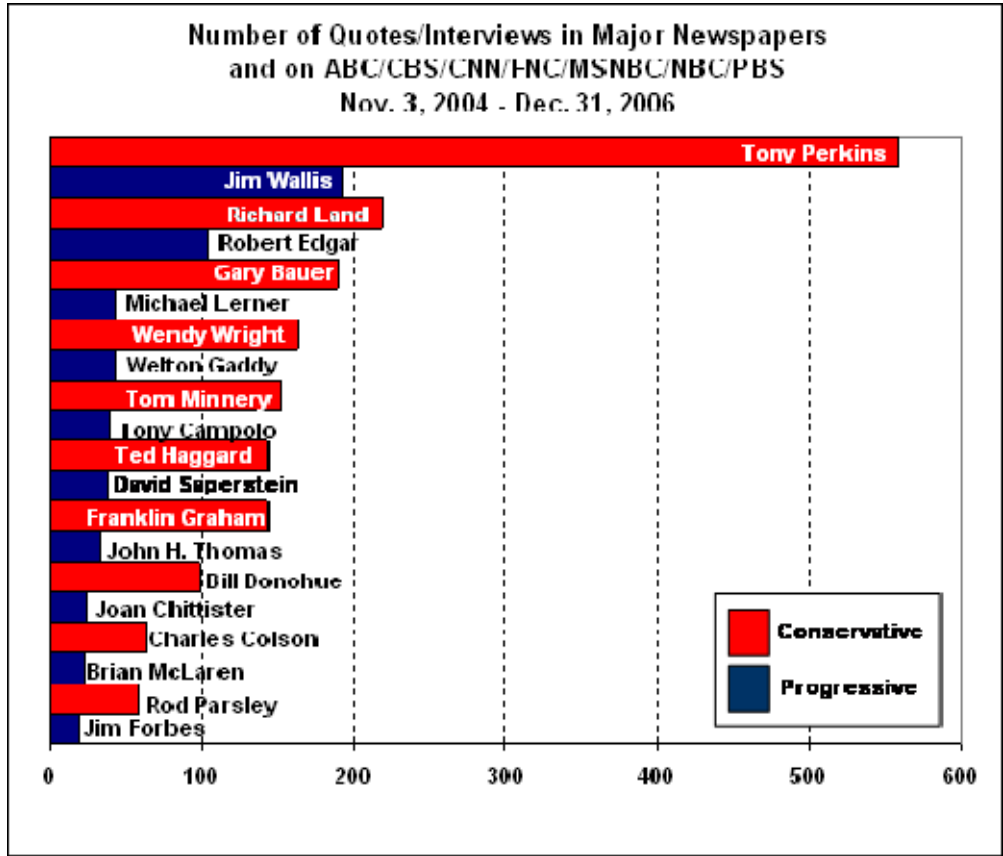
Our results confirmed that conservative religious leaders garner the lion's share of media coverage: Conservative religious figures were quoted, mentioned or interviewed 2.8 times as often as progressive religious leaders.



Results by sub-category: quotes, mentions, and interviews

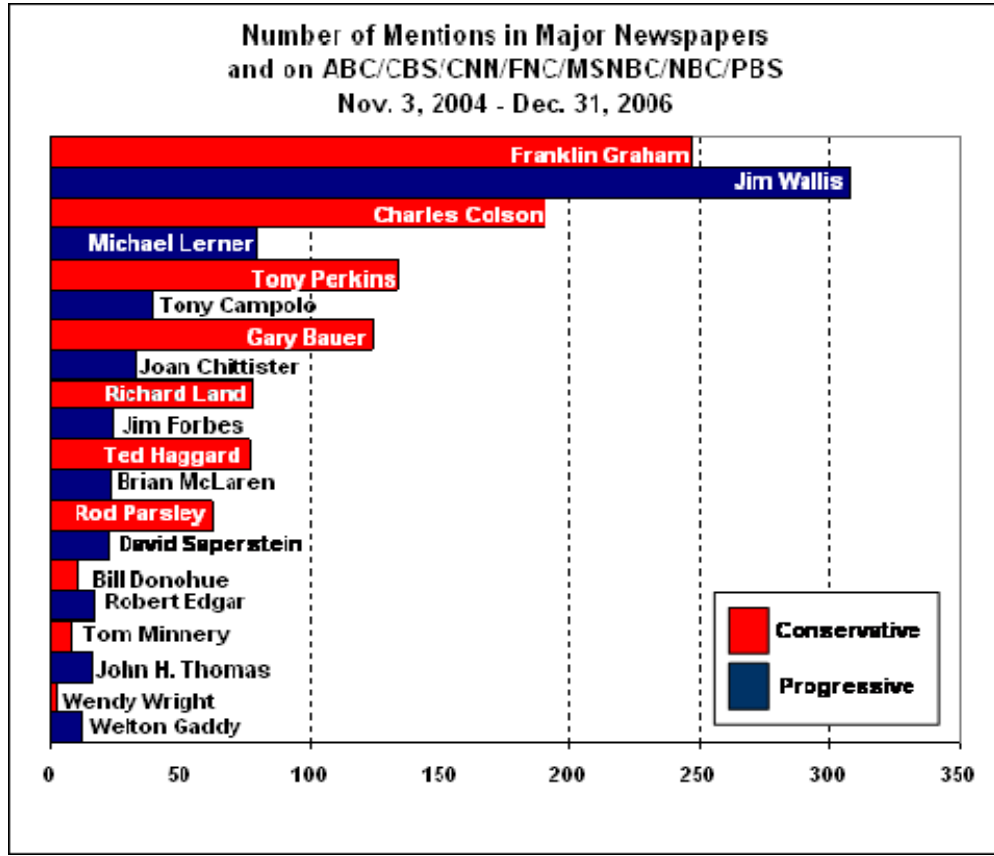
The overwhelming conservative advantage remained consistent when we separated the data into the number of times a given religious leader was mentioned in a news story, the number of times a given religious leader was quoted in a news story, and the number of times a given religious leader was interviewed in a news story. In all cases, conservatives were seen and discussed far more often than progressives.

When it came to being quoted and interviewed, we found 3.3 appearances by conservatives for every appearance by a progressive:



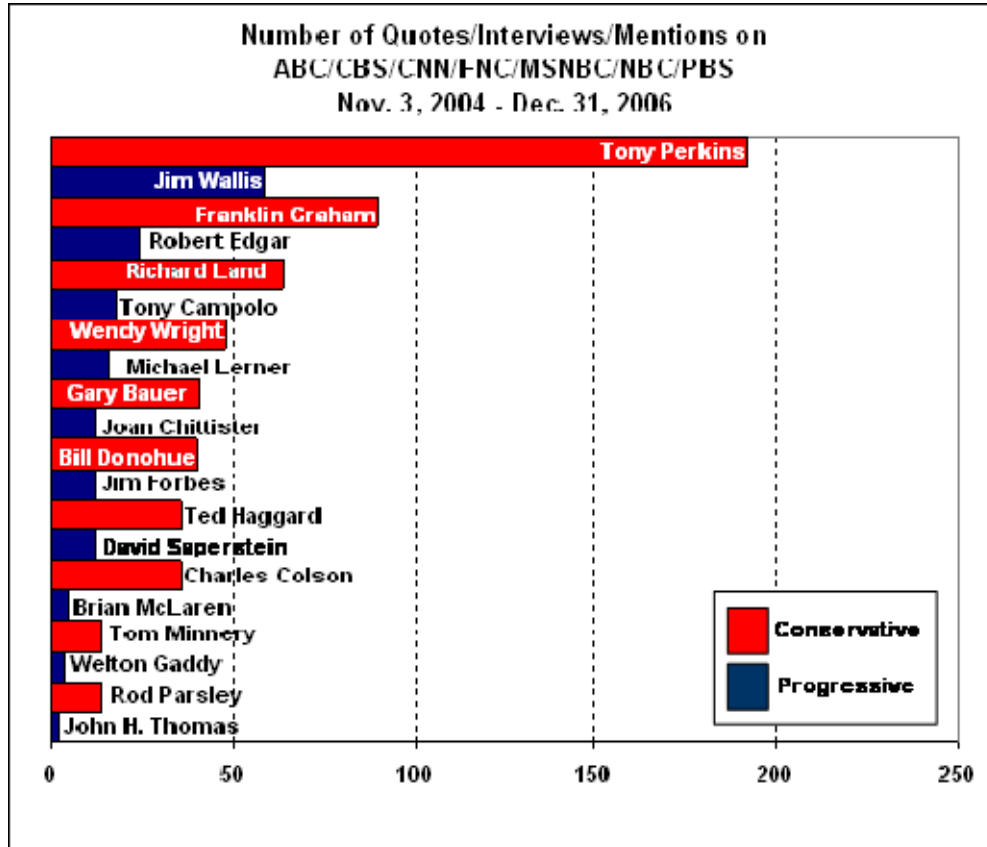
Given their substantially higher media profiles, it should have come as no surprise that the conservatives were also mentioned far more often than the progressives -- 2.5 times as often, in fact.

This particular cut of the data does, however, provided one of the only occasions on which a progressive religious leader outpaced the conservative leaders. Jim Wallis of Sojourners/Call to Renewal was actually mentioned more often during this period than the top conservative, Franklin Graham. As we shall see below, this is mostly accounted for by Wallis' relatively higher profile in newspaper stories. But the results for Wallis should not overshadow the fact that, overall, conservatives had a much higher profile than progressives.



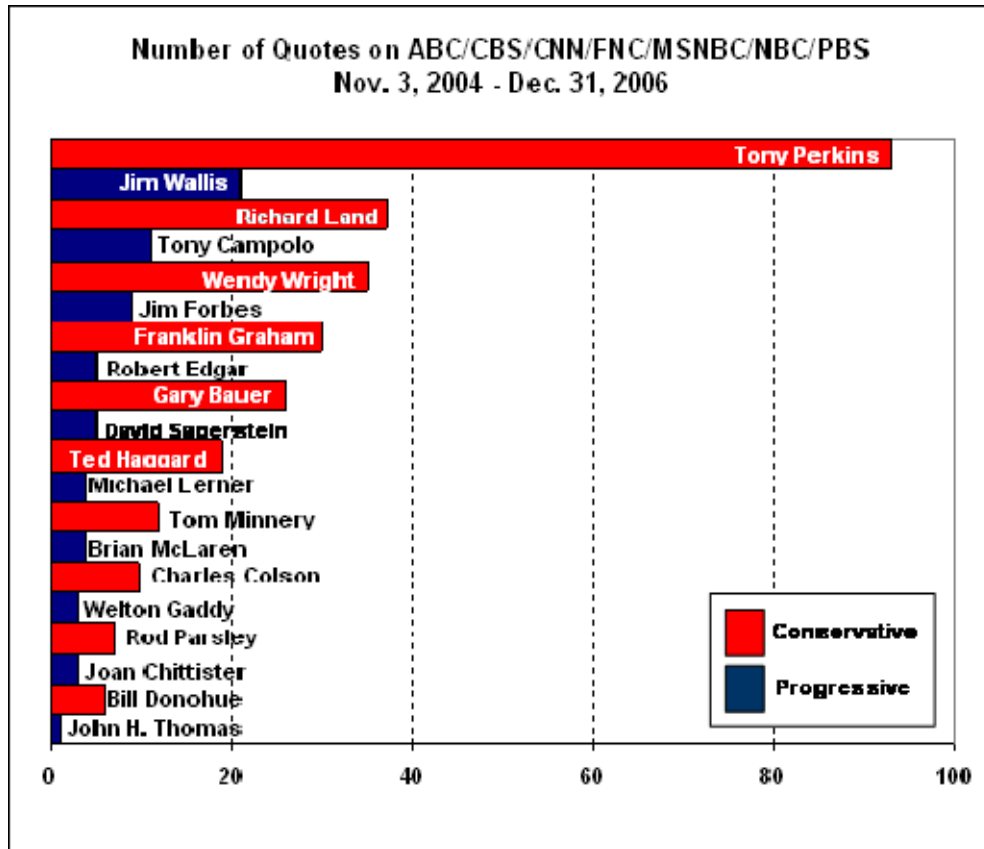
Television News

We examined televised news coverage on the three major networks, three major cable channels, and PBS, and counted all quotes, interviews, and mentions of the top 10 conservative and top 10 progressive religious leaders. Our results again confirmed that conservative religious leaders overwhelmingly dominated news media coverage: Conservatives were quoted, mentioned, or interviewed 3.8 times as often as were progressive religious leaders.

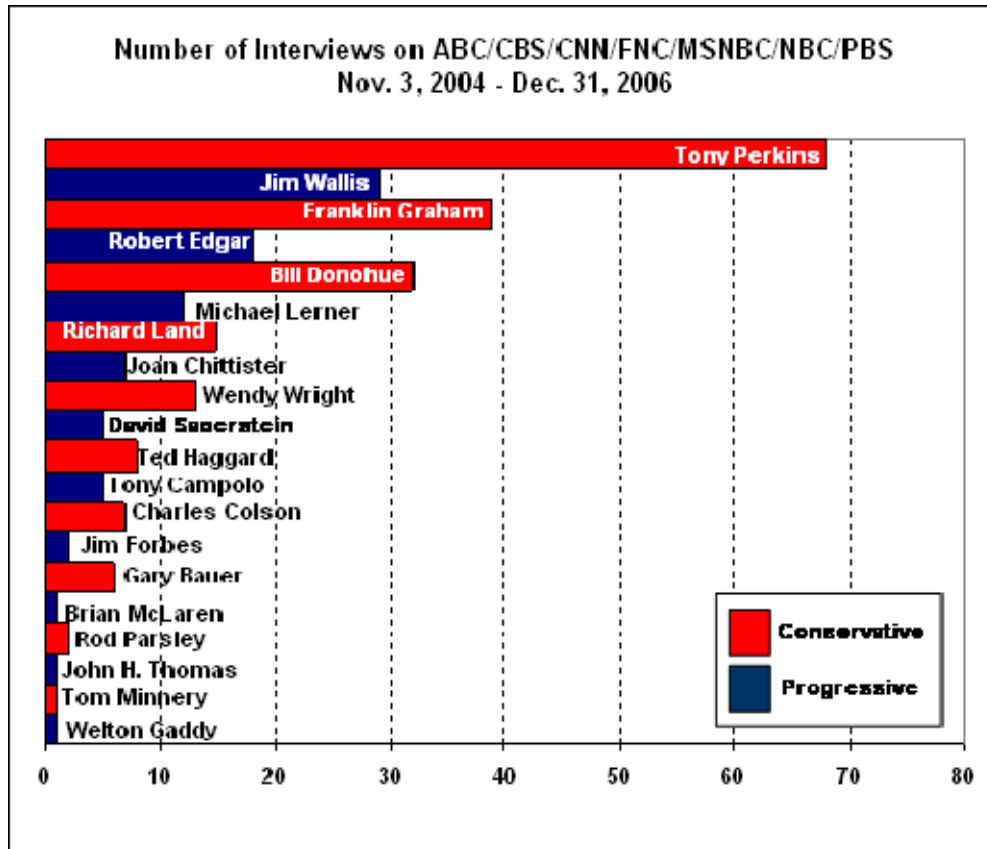


Results by sub-category: quotes, mentions and interviews

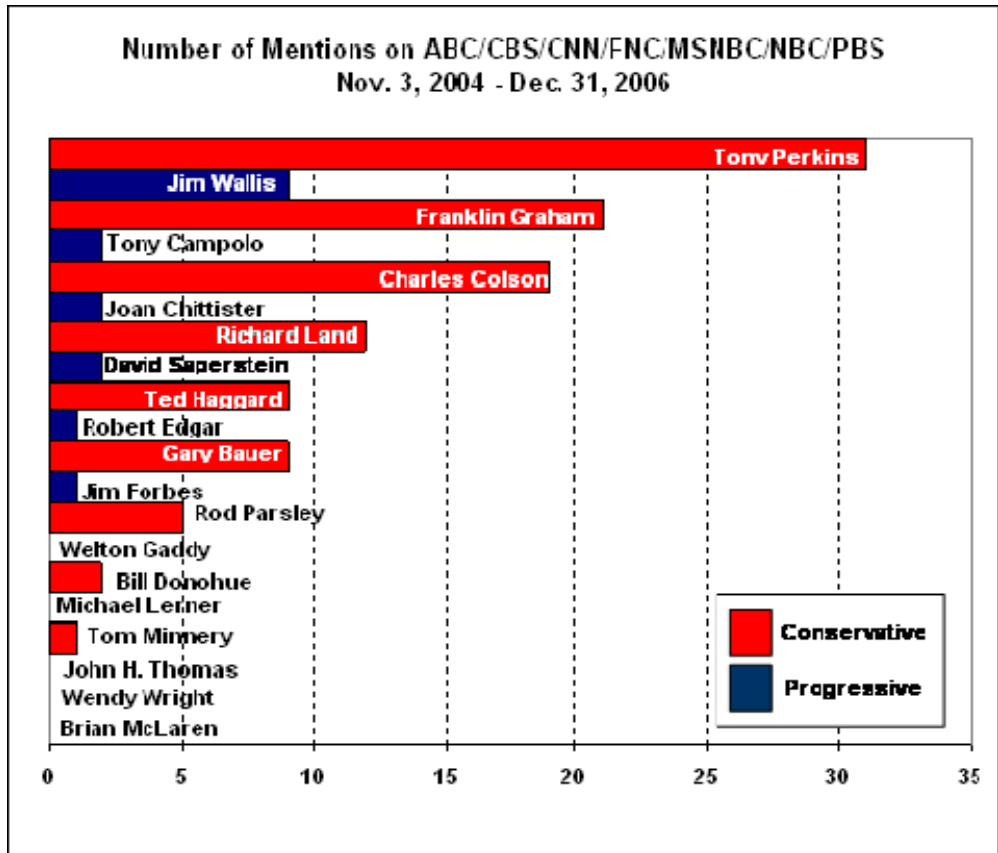
The overwhelming conservative advantage remained consistent when we separated the data into the number of times a given religious leader was quoted or interviewed for a news story, and the number of times a given religious leader was mentioned in a news story. In television news during this period, the top conservative religious leaders were quoted 4.6 times as often as the top progressive religious leaders. The data make clear that when they want a religious voice, television news programs turn to conservatives.



The disparity in interviews was, though not as dramatic as that in quotes, still striking: The conservatives were interviewed 2.4 times as often as the progressive religious leaders.

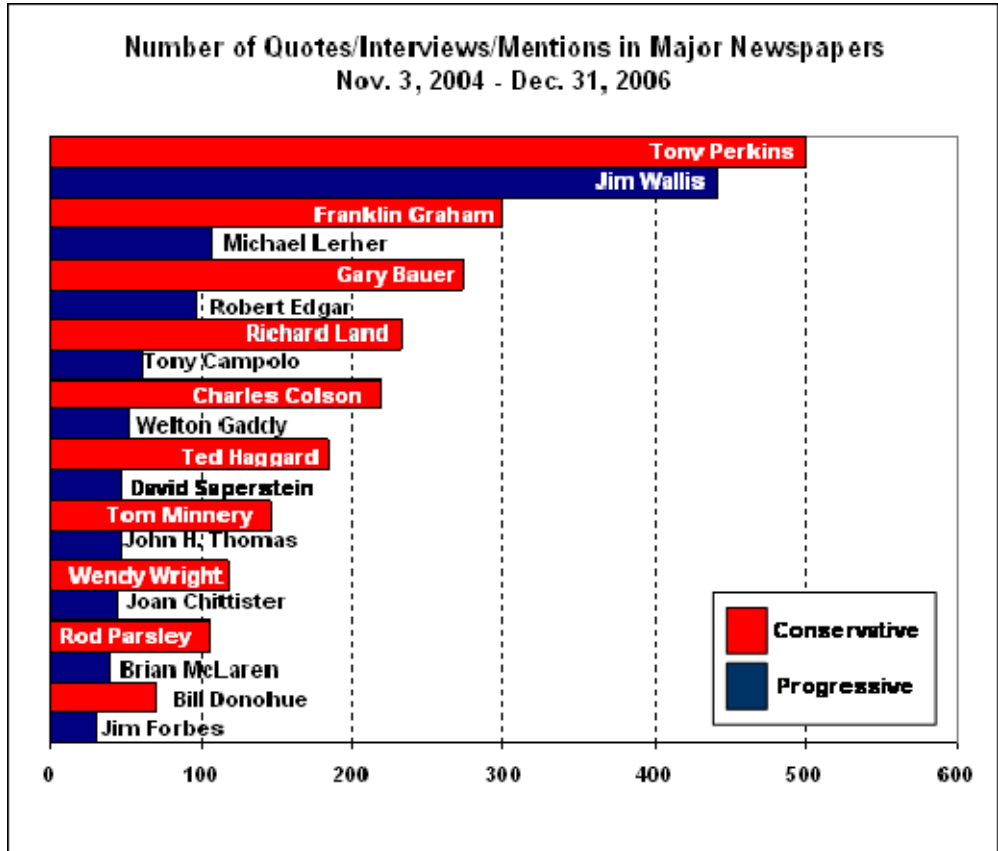


While the disparities in quotes and interviews were large, the difference in mentions was truly remarkable: There were 7.3 mentions of conservative religious leaders for every mention of a progressive religious leader.



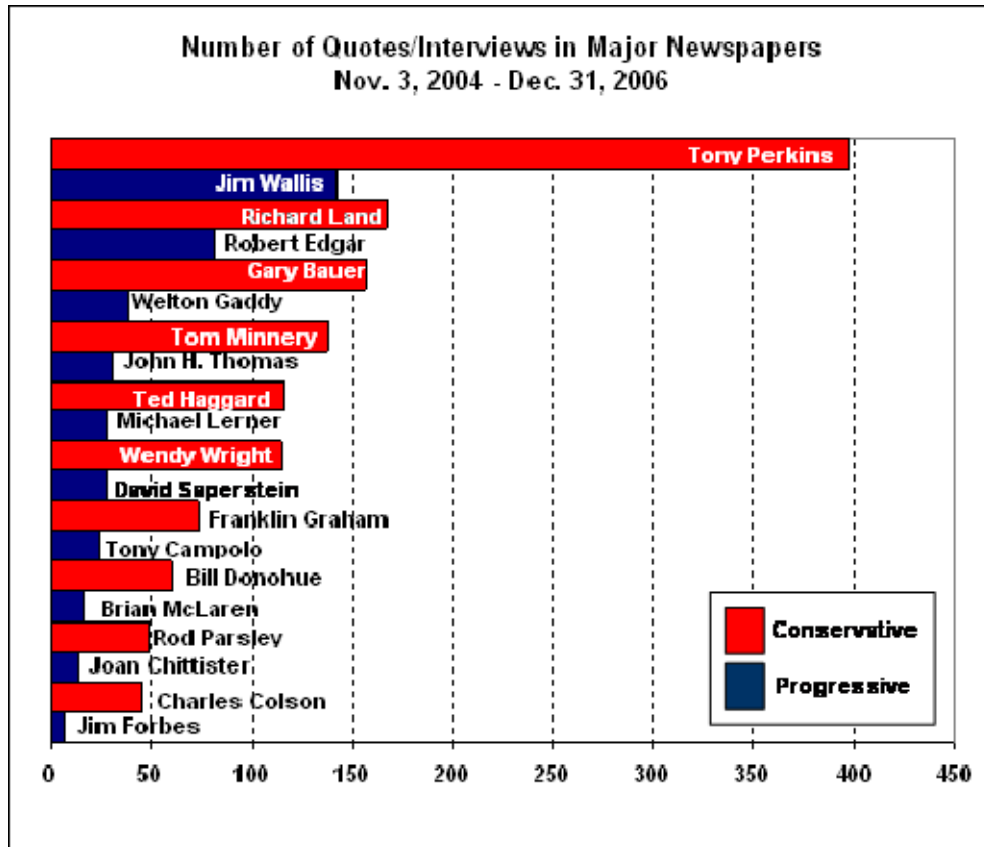
Major Newspapers

We examined print media coverage in all domestic publications included in the Nexis database's "Major Newspapers" category. The results here mirror those from television news: Conservative religious leaders were quoted, mentioned, or interviewed 2.7 times as often as progressive religious leaders.

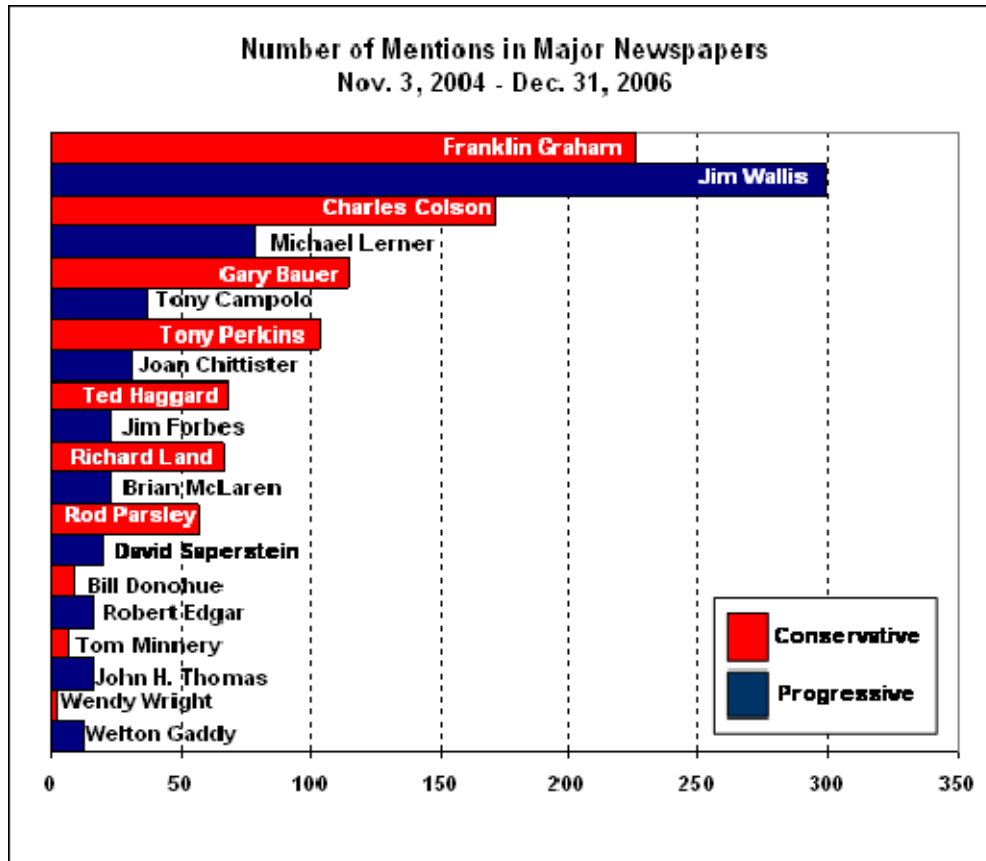


Results by sub-category: quotes, mentions, and interviews

The overwhelming conservative advantage remains consistent when separating the data into the number of times a given religious leader was quoted or interviewed in a news story, and the number of times a given religious leader was mentioned in a news story.¹⁴ Conservative leaders were quoted or interviewed 3.3 times as often as progressive religious leaders.



There is also a large disparity in mentions of conservative religious leaders, reflective of their higher media profile. The conservative leaders were mentioned 2.2 times in major newspapers for every one time a progressive religious leader was mentioned.



Special cases

The focus of our study was the 20 leaders -- 10 conservative and 10 progressive -- routinely called upon to offer their perspectives on social and political issues of the day. However, news media coverage of religion also included two other distinct categories of religious leaders. The first category is composed of religious leaders who obtain dramatically high levels of media coverage based on their celebrity status. The second category includes religious leaders who focus primarily on broad missions or spiritual messages, as opposed to politically motivated actions. We provide separate analyses for religious leaders belonging to each of these categories.

The celebrities

While they were not the primary focus of our study, we chose to separately analyze a special group of celebrity religious leaders. Although they are sometimes called on to provide commentary about political and social issues, each one of the religious leaders in this category also regularly drives news stories. They become active participants in events, rather than simply commenting on them; when they do comment, their statements are newsworthy simply because they are making them, rather than representing a "religious" perspective. Their endorsement is also sought by political candidates. In other words, these five are more political *actors* than political *commentators*.

On the conservative side, this category includes James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson. Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton stand out as progressive religious leaders who have attained celebrity status.

Had we included these religious leaders with our main results, each would have vastly outranked the other leaders in their respective ideological categories. Robertson, Falwell, and Dobson would be ranked first, second, and third among conservatives, while Jackson and Sharpton would be first and second among progressives.

Among these five, Jackson and Sharpton appear most often in the American media; together, they accounted for 7,564 quotes, interviews, and mentions during the period we studied, compared to 5,683 for Robertson, Falwell, and Dobson.

The following descriptions include examples of news coverage of each religious leader driven by his celebrity status, followed by a figure representing the cumulative number of times each was quoted, interviewed, and mentioned in both major papers and transcripts of cable news, network news, and PBS.

- Pat Robertson

Robertson was the subject of intense media coverage on at least two occasions during the time period we studied. In August 2005, Robertson called for the assassination of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. In January 2006, Robertson attributed former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's stroke to Sharon's decision to divide "God's land."

Robertson had a total of 2,397 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

- Jerry Falwell

Falwell, who died on May 15, garnered two significant spikes in media coverage in 2006. First, in May, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) delivered the commencement address at Liberty University, six years after the senator referred to Falwell and others as "agents of intolerance." In September, another spike in coverage occurred when Falwell compared Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) to Lucifer.

Falwell had a total of 1,671 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

- James Dobson

Dobson is often discussed in the media because of his large following among evangelical Christians. His celebrity status earned him ample coverage during the period we studied, in particular around three events in 2005. In June, Dobson made waves by voicing his concern that the children's cartoon character Spongebob Squarepants had been used in a "pro-homosexual video." In August, publicity followed Dobson's speaking out against embryonic stem cell research. In October, Dobson came out in support of President Bush's nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court and was quoted and mentioned in many articles about her nomination.

Dobson had a total of 1,615 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

- Jesse Jackson

Jackson figured prominently in news media coverage throughout the period we studied. Three incidents illustrate the attention that his celebrity status commands. In March 2005, Jackson linked his name to the widely covered plight of comatose Terri Schiavo by aligning himself with Schiavo's parents, who appealed to have their daughter's feeding tube re-inserted. In May 2005, after publicly criticizing remarks made by Vicente Fox, Jackson held a high profile meeting with the Mexican president. Finally, in June 2005, Jackson received attention when he acted as Michael Jackson's "spiritual adviser" during the singer's child molestation trial.

Jackson had a total of 4,336 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

- Al Sharpton

Sharpton is often called upon to discuss issues of civil rights and racial discrimination, and though he sometimes brings a religious perspective to his comments, he is seldom sought out explicitly to offer a religious opinion. In the final months of 2006, three incidents propelled Sharpton's coverage: beginning in November, Sharpton garnered coverage in his role as adviser to the family of Sean Bell, a unarmed man killed by New York police; stories about the death of James Brown in December often included quotes and mentions of Sharpton, who presided over the funeral; and also in December, following actor Michael Richards' racist rant during a stand-up comedy act, Sharpton again moved into the media spotlight as Richards sought a dialogue with the reverend.

Sharpton had a total of 3,228 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

Less ideological religious leaders

Several other high-profile ministers are conspicuously absent from our final list of influential religious leaders. We decided to set aside results for three leaders -- Rick Warren, T.D. Jakes, and Joel Osteen -- because we determined in all three cases that their core messages are too ambiguous to be labeled as simply "conservative," and that they seem to take pains to avoid being associated with a political ideology. While they are all well-known and are often mentioned in news stories, they are less likely to make explicitly political statements than the other figures in our study.

Had they been included in the main study, and had we classified them as conservative, Warren would have placed fourth, Jakes sixth, and Osteen seventh among the most quoted, interviewed, or mentioned conservative leaders that we coded for.

- Rick Warren

Warren had a total of 972 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

- T.D. Jakes

Jakes had a total of 647 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

- Joel Osteen

Osteen had a total of 383 quotes, interviews, and mentions in major papers and in transcripts of cable and network news that we coded for.

CONCLUSION

The news media's increased attention to religion since the 2004 election has all too often incorporated the assumption that conservatives are motivated by religious beliefs while progressives are not. This depiction distorts a reality in which centrist and progressive religious Americans are the majority and in which a varied and diverse body of progressive religious leaders would weigh in on the major issues of the day regularly if given the opportunity.

In order to demonstrate that news media systematically and grossly overrepresent conservative religious voices, we examined a period of media coverage in which religion emerged as a major factor in news portrayals of cultural divides in America: the two years directly following the November 2004 presidential elections. Our hypothesis was proven correct: In newspapers and in televised news, coverage of conservative leaders dwarfed that of progressive religious leaders across the board.

At a time in which political polarization is perceived to be intensifying, news media have a responsibility to accurately portray the body politic in all its diversity. But instead of giving their readers and viewers an accurate picture of American religious belief and its effects on politics, news organizations have presented a picture in which religious Americans are usually defined as conservative religious Americans. If religion is an important topic for news media to explore -- and it plainly is -- then they have a responsibility to do so fairly and accurately. Our results suggest that in recent history they have failed to do so.

PROFILES

The following are brief descriptions of the religious leaders coded for in the study.

CONSERVATIVES

James Dobson

James Dobson is a conservative evangelical and also a child psychologist. Dobson is the founder of Focus on the Family, an evangelical ministry, as well as Focus on the Family Action, its lobbying arm. He is also a founding member of the Family Research Council, a Christian lobbying group. He has been referred to as "America's most influential evangelical leader"¹⁵ and is well known for his close political ties with the Bush administration and for his political influence.

William Donohue

William Donohue has been president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights since 1993. A persistent critic of Democrats and progressives, Donohue has spoken out against stem cell research, reproductive rights, and gay rights.

Gary Bauer

Gary Bauer is the founder and president of American Values, an organization championing a "pro-family, pro-life message." Bauer served in President Ronald Reagan's administration for eight years and concluded an unsuccessful bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. Before launching that campaign, Bauer led the Family Research Council for more than a decade. Bauer recently garnered media attention for advocating federal legislation opposing gay marriage and for his activism on behalf of conservative judicial nominees.¹⁶

Charles Colson

Charles Colson, former special counsel to President Richard Nixon, was convicted and served time in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal, and converted to evangelical Christianity while in prison. In 1983, Colson founded Justice Fellowship, the nation's largest faith-based criminal justice reform group. He hosts a daily radio feature aired on more than 1,000 radio outlets nationwide.¹⁷ Colson opines regularly on issues such as his opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, illegal immigration, and the corrosive influence of "decadent" modern culture.

Jerry Falwell

The late Jerry Falwell was an evangelical pastor and televangelist. He founded Thomas Road Baptist Church, currently numbering 24,000 members, in 1956. In 1971, he founded Liberty University, and in 1979 he founded the Moral Majority.

Franklin Graham

Franklin Graham is an evangelist and missionary and is the son of evangelist Billy Graham. Franklin Graham is the president, chairman, and CEO of Samaritan's Purse, an international Christian relief and missionary organization, and the CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Graham gave the opening prayer at the 2001

inauguration of President Bush. He came under criticism for comments he made following the September 11, 2001, terror attacks in which he criticized Islam as “a very evil and wicked religion.”¹⁸ Franklin Graham is an outspoken opponent of abortion and homosexuality.

Ted Haggard

Ted Haggard is the founder and former pastor of the New Life Church of Colorado. The church, started in Haggard’s basement, now has a membership of 14,000 people; *Time* magazine named him one of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in 2005, and he served as the leader of the National Association of Evangelicals from 2003 to 2006. Haggard received widespread attention for a 2006 scandal in which he admitted to purchasing illegal drugs and engaging in “sexual immorality” with a male prostitute.

T.D. Jakes

T.D. Jakes is founder of The Potter’s House, a non-denominational Dallas megachurch with a primarily African-American membership of more than 25,000. He is a popular televangelist on the Word Network and the Trinity Broadcasting Network, and was named by *Time* as “America’s Best Preacher” as well as one of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals.

Richard Land

Richard Land has been president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission since 1988. He was named by *Time* in 2005 as one of the 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America. Land is widely known for supporting President Bush’s reported claim of divine providence in the United States’ post-9-11 military action and is a vocal opponent of abortion, stem cell research, and same-sex marriage.

Tom Minnery

Tom Minnery is vice president of public policy for Focus on the Family, which produces two magazines, a daily information and analysis radio program broadcast on approximately 1,600 radio outlets, an online “webzine” for college students; and a weekly fax. Prior to coming to Focus on the Family, Minnery was senior editor at *Christianity Today* magazine, and before that he was a Capitol Hill correspondent and a manager in the Washington Bureau of Gannett Newspapers.

Joel Osteen

Joel Osteen leads Lakewood Church in Houston, which regularly draws crowds of 40,000 per week as well as countless television viewers. His book *Your Best Life Now* (FaithWords, 2004) has become a *New York Times* bestseller, and he has been profiled by programs ranging from *The 700 Club* to *60 Minutes*.

Rod Parsley

Rod Parsley is the senior pastor at World Harvest Church in Columbus, Ohio. World Harvest currently has two campuses, with a school, a Bible college, nine outreach programs, and a television studio. His church proceedings are televised nationally, and the attendees of his services number between 10,000 and 12,000 each week. He has been active in politics and campaigned vigorously for former Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell’s 2006 bid to become governor of Ohio.

Tony Perkins

Tony Perkins is the president of the Family Research Council. Perkins had a brief career in politics as a representative in the Louisiana House of Representatives and lost his 2002 bid for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Mary Landrieu.

Pat Robertson

Pat Robertson is the founder and chairman of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), which broadcasts to 200 countries in 70 languages, and hosts *The 700 Club*, CBN's most popular daily television program. The Bush administration has granted nearly \$15 million to Robertson's Operation Blessing charity during the last six years.¹⁹

Rick Warren

Rick Warren founded the Saddleback Church in California, whose congregation has grown from one family in 1980 to more than 22,000 weekly attendees today. His bestselling book, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondercan, 2002), has by some estimates sold more than 25 million copies. *The Economist* called Warren "arguably the most influential pastor in America."²⁰ He is the founder of pastors.com, a global Internet community of evangelical pastors.

Wendy Wright

Wendy Wright is president of Concerned Women for America (CWA), which has as its mission to "bring Biblical principles into all levels of public policy."

PROGRESSIVES

Tony Campolo

Tony Campolo is professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, an ordained minister, and the author of 33 books. Campolo is the founder and president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education (EAPE). Though opposed to abortion and same-sex marriage, Campolo has allied himself with progressive causes focused on issues of social justice, serving as President Clinton's spiritual adviser during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Joan Chittister

Sister Joan Chittister is member of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania, a regular columnist for *National Catholic Reporter*, and the author of more than 30 books. She serves as co-chairwoman of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, a partner organization of the United Nations. She has served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, president of the Conference of American Benedictine Prioresses (1974-90), and was prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie for 12 years. She is the founder and executive director of Benetvision, a resource and research center for contemporary spirituality in Erie.

Robert Edgar

Robert Edgar, a minister ordained in the United Methodist Church, is the general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ (NCC). He served as a Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1974 to 1987.

Jim Forbes Jr.

Jim Forbes Jr. was the first African-American to serve as senior minister of The Riverside Church, one of the largest multicultural congregations in the nation. He is an ordained minister in the American Baptist Churches and the Original United Holy Church of America. *Newsweek* magazine has recognized Forbes as one of the 12 "most effective preachers" in the English-speaking world. Forbes has been co-chairman of A Partnership of Faith, an interfaith organization of clergy among New York's Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim communities, and is a consultant to the Congress of National Black Churches and past president of The Martin Luther King Fellows.

C. Welton Gaddy

C. Welton Gaddy leads the national nonpartisan grassroots and educational organizations The Interfaith Alliance and The Interfaith Alliance Foundation. Gaddy serves as the pastor for preaching and worship at Northminster (Baptist) Church in Monroe, Louisiana. Gaddy is also the host of *State of Belief*, a weekly radio show by The Interfaith Alliance that is carried on Air America Radio.

Jesse Jackson

Jesse Jackson is a politician, a civil rights activist, and a Baptist minister. He competed for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984 and 1988. Jackson is the founder and president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition.

Michael Lerner

Michael Lerner is rabbi at Beyt Tikkun synagogue in San Francisco and editor of *Tikkun* magazine. Lerner's ideas received national attention when then-first lady Hillary Clinton adopted his notion of "the politics of meaning."

Brian McLaren

Brian D. McLaren is an author, speaker, pastor, and Christian activist, listed by *Time* as one of America's 25 Most Influential Evangelicals. Among other topics, McLaren's public speaking covers inter-religious dialogue, ecology, and social justice. He serves as a board chairman for Sojourners/Call to Renewal and is a founding member of Red Letter Christians, a group that seeks to broaden and deepen the dialogue about faith and public life.

David Saperstein

Rabbi David Saperstein is the director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. He currently co-chairs the Coalition to Preserve Religious Liberty, comprised of more than 50 national religious denominations and educational organizations, and serves on the boards of numerous national organizations including the NAACP and People for the American Way.

Al Sharpton

Al Sharpton is a civil rights activist and the founder of the National Action Network. He has run for United States Senate, mayor of New York, and president of the United States.

John H. Thomas

John H. Thomas is general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, a mainline Protestant Christian denomination with an estimated 1.2 million members. A self-described "liberal Protestant," he advocates cultural pluralism and has spearheaded outreach efforts to targeted groups including gays and lesbians and supporters of social justice.

Jim Wallis

Jim Wallis is an evangelical author, theologian, preacher, and activist. He is president and executive director of Sojourners/Call to Renewal, where he is editor-in-chief of *Sojourners* magazine. He also convenes a national network of churches, faith-based organizations, and individuals working to overcome poverty in America. Wallis wrote a best-selling book, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), discussing progressive religious values.

METHODOLOGY

We began the study by drawing together a lengthy list of conservative and progressive religious leaders, based on consultation and on exploratory research of news media databases. It was from this longer list of potentially included figures that the top 10 were drawn.

We followed identical steps in coding for the representation of each of these individuals in the news media. We conducted two types of searches using the Nexis database: one in the Major Newspapers category and one in the Transcripts category. We searched the dates from November 3, 2004, to December 31, 2006. We included in our search all U.S. newspapers included in the Major Newspapers database. In the Transcripts database we included transcripts from: the network channels CBS, NBC, ABC; the cable channels CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News; and the public network PBS.

We coded each instance of the religious leaders' coverage in news media once, into one of three mutually exclusive categories. One category we labeled "interviews": Any time a news story contained an interview format, with a question posed and an answer given in response, we marked one tally for that leader in the "interview" category (regardless of how many unique interview responses were provided in the news story).²¹ The second category we labeled as "quotes": Any time a religious leader's words were cited directly and attributed to him or her, we marked one tally for that leader in the "quoted" category (regardless of how many unique quotes were provided in the news story). If a story contained a quotation as well as an interview, it was coded only as an interview. The third category we labeled "mentions," referring to any time the religious leader's name was mentioned. We marked one tally for that leader in the "mention" category regardless of how many unique mentions were provided in the news story. If a story contained both quotes and mentions, the story was coded exclusively in the 'quoted' category. The number of print interviews, as distinct from articles containing quotes, was extremely small, so a decision was made to combine quotes and interviews for newspapers.

Having completed the initial coding, we then narrowed the list to the top 10 most mentioned, quoted, and interviewed religious leaders on both the conservative and the progressive side, using the cumulative totals for newspapers and television news combining all sub-categories of quotes, mentions, and interviews. We eliminated the lowest scoring progressive and conservative leaders.

NOTES

¹ Jones, Robert and David Cox. "American Values Survey: Initial Report." *Center for American Values in Public Life*. 20 Sept. 2006. http://media.pfaw.org/CAV/CAV_Memo.pdf

² http://media.pfaw.org/CAV/CAV_Memo.pdf

³ <http://people-press.org/commentary/display.php3?AnalysisID=103>

⁴ http://media.pfaw.org/CAV/CAV_Memo.pdf

⁵ According to the findings of the 2006 American Values Survey, at least three-quarters of individuals belonging to every major religious tradition say issues like poverty and health care are more important than hot-button social issues. http://media.pfaw.org/CAV/CAV_Memo.pdf

⁶ More information on this study can be found at http://www.beliefnet.com/story/153/story_15355_3.html.

⁷ See for example: Richard Ostling, "The 2004 Election Reinforced America's Religious and Moral Divide," Associated Press, November 4, 2004.

⁸ Sunshine Hillygus and Todd Shields, "Moral Issues and Voter Decision Making in the 2004 Presidential Election." *Political Science and Politics*. April 2005.

⁹ Results of this poll, taken by Zogby International for Faith in Public Life, can be found at http://www.faihinpubliclife.org/content/files/zogby_exit_poll_memo_EntryFile_1.pdf.

¹⁰ According to AVS, even among "born again" religious adherents, 44 percent said that Pat Robertson and James Dobson don't speak for them well or at all.

¹¹ http://media.pfaw.org/CAV/CAV_Memo.pdf

¹² <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=167>

¹³ Two special cases are worthy of note. First, on November 1, 2006, a story broke that Ted Haggard, one of the conservative religious leaders we coded for, had frequented a male prostitute and purchased methamphetamine. The scandal was widely reported in the news media and ultimately led to his stepping down from both the New Life Church and his leadership of the National Association of Evangelicals. Because a personal scandal garnering a great deal of media coverage could distort data that otherwise reflect the political and social influences of religious leaders, we have omitted from our data all coverage of Ted Haggard beginning on November 1, 2006 until the end of the time period we studied, December 31, 2006. Had we included these two months in our data, Haggard would have been represented in news coverage 3.2 times as often as the total reflected in this report.

Second, the actual data on conservative religious leader Charles Colson revealed the former special counsel for President Nixon to be represented in media coverage 1.5 times more often than the data in the report reflects. The numbers for Colson that we used are significantly lower than the actual numbers because we decided to exclude all quotes, interviews, or mentions that substantively dealt with Colson's role in the Nixon administration. During the time period that we coded for, the identity of "Deep Throat," the source for Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's revelations on the Watergate scandal, was revealed. Such stories comprised a significant percentage of our original data, since Colson was quoted and mentioned in many of the stories about Deep Throat. We decided to make this exclusion because the stories in question have no bearing on religion in America.

¹⁴ When analyzing data for newspaper stories, we combined the results of stories that contained quotes and stories that contained interviews, since there were so few stand-alone interviews.

¹⁵ Michael Crowley, "James Dobson: The religious right's new kingmaker." *Slate.com*, November 12, 2004.

¹⁶ See the biography on the website of American Values,

http://www.ouramericanvalues.org/bauer_main.php.

¹⁷ From the biography on the Prison Fellowship website, <http://www.pfm.org/Bio.asp?ID=43>.

¹⁸ "Evangelist's Views on Islam draw critics in Winnipeg." *CBC News*, October 22, 2006.

(<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2006/10/22/graham.html>).

¹⁹ Bill Sizemore, "Gaining Faith in Federal Money?" *The Virginian Pilot*. January 16, 2006

²⁰ "Saving Africa, the Conservative Way." *The Economist*. June 30, 2005.

²¹ In coding for the first 5 leaders on either side of the ideological divide, we initially coded separately the number of unique times each religious leader was quoted, mentioned, or interviewed within a news story. Because the ratios of quotes, mentions, and interview answers per story were consistent for both progressive and religious leader, we proceeded with the current coding system