

RICK SANTORUM'S CATHOLICISM AND WEDGE ISSUES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF RELIGION COVERAGE IN MAJOR U.S. NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Little scholarly research has been conducted about how journalists report on religion during a political campaign. Even so, there is evidence to suggest religion plays a major role in voting patterns in an election. Journalists, however, often avoid covering the religious beliefs of political candidates. When they do, they choose to focus on wedge issues, such as abortion, homosexuality, or evolution, to frame their articles. During the 2012 election, Rick Santorum, a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, talked about his Catholicism frequently and took a hard stance on social issues involved with the campaign.

This study used a content analysis to assess journalists' use of wedge issues to frame news articles and editorials about Santorum's Catholicism from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) from January through March 2012, when Santorum was running in the presidential primaries. There was not enough disparity in results to run nonparametric tests to assess relationships among the collected variables.

This research corroborates previous studies showing that journalists usually cover religion on a superficial level and deal with the outcomes of a candidate's religious beliefs rather than examining the tenets of those beliefs. It also indicates several of the wedge issues most widely used by journalists when reporting on religion might be antiquated and could be updated to include views on the death penalty, torture and contraception.