

Ideologies Drive Journalists' Attitudes Toward Oil Industry

by *Brendan R. Watson*

A survey of Gulf Coast journalists revealed that their environmental and political ideologies are the strongest predictors of their attitudes toward the oil industry following the BP oil spill. Conservative journalists are most likely to believe that the industry behaved responsibly.

The public relies heavily on the news media for both factual information and reassurances following disasters such as the 2010 BP oil spill,¹ which was arguably America's worst environmental disaster.² Thus, as Carey argues, disasters are important periods to examine how "journalism sizes up situations, names their elements, structure and outstanding ingredients and names them in a way that contains an attitude toward them."³ This paper begins that process of examining how journalists "sized up" the BP oil spill, reporting on the results of a survey of Gulf Coast journalists' (N=218) attitudes toward offshore drilling following the spill.

The community structure literature suggests journalists are not independent watchdogs. Instead the media reflect and frequently operate as sentries for the dominant social structure in which they are embedded.⁴ Thus, this study examines the influence of both individual level beliefs, including journalists' political and environmental ideologies, and community-level variables, such as communities' economic reliance on the oil industry, on journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry following the BP oil spill.

Literature Review

Community Structure

The dominant focus on individual-level variables to predict journalists'

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attitudes implies they operate independent of external influences.⁵ The community structure literature, however, suggests that journalists' work reflects and often reinforces the interdependent social and political systems on which journalists rely for sources of information, profit and influence. Tichenor, Olien and Donahue, for example, found that in smaller, less diverse communities, that is, more homogenous communities, social power tends to be concentrated among a smaller group of individuals, who primarily manage conflict through interpersonal communication.⁶ The press often avoids reporting conflict in these smaller communities to protect that dominant social arrangement. On the other hand, in larger, more diverse communities, that is, more structurally pluralistic communities, social power tends to be more dispersed and conflicts are addressed more openly, including in the news media.

In regard to environmental issues, Dunwoody and colleagues found that newspapers embedded in more structurally pluralistic communities are more likely to frame environmental pollution in terms of health risks.⁷ Griffin and Dunwoody, however, found that a community's economic reliance on manufacturing was a stronger predictor than was the degree of pluralism within a community of whether a local newspaper would frame industrial pollution in a manner critical of industry.⁸ Those papers that relied more heavily on manufacturing were less likely to frame pollution as a health risk. Griffin and Dunwoody concluded that "the press' function may be tempered by some economic sensitivities."⁹

These previous studies have examined how community structure affects journalistic content but have not suggested how these variables work their way into the journalistic process. This study proposes that the degree of diversity within a community and the community's degree of economic dependence on the oil industry may affect the news gathering process by influencing journalists' perceptions of the oil spill in such a way that is favorable to the local community's dominant social structure and economic interests.

Journalists' Ideologies

Community structure, however, is not the only possible explanation of journalists' attitudes toward the industry. Journalists' ideologies may actually be a more plausible explanation of journalists' attitudes.¹⁰ This study examines two types of ideology: political and environmental.

Typically, journalists' political ideologies skew left of center,¹¹ an observation that is used to imply a liberal media bias.¹² Researchers' evidence of media bias, however, is mixed. Patterson and Donsbach conducted an experiment that found that professional journalists' editorial judgments about how to present a hypothetical regulatory conflict between environmental regulators and the chemical industry were correlated with their political ideologies in 68 percent of the cases.¹³ Conservative journalists were more likely to frame the issue in a manner favorable toward industry. D'Alessio's and Allen's summary of studies of journalistic bias, however, concluded that previous studies do not contain

evidence of a consistent pattern of political bias in news coverage.¹⁴

This current study does not tackle the issue of bias, per se. That is because bias in journalists' stories cannot be measured without analyzing journalists' output.¹⁵ However, this study tests the hypothesis that journalists are not supernatural observers who coolly use facts as a basis for judging issues they cover, as Schudson defines journalistic objectivity.¹⁶ Instead, their attitudes toward the oil industry will reflect the American public's starkly partisan judgments about the BP oil spill. In a nation-wide, post-oil spill survey, the Pew Research Center for the People & The Press found that 56 percent of Democrats opposed increasing off-shore oil drilling. At the same time, 74 percent of Republicans favored expansion of off-shore oil drilling.¹⁷

Journalists' Professional Roles

A third potential explanation of journalists' attitudes is their preferred professional roles. Research into journalists' professional roles attempts to get at a fundamental question: What is the purpose of journalism?¹⁸ Weaver et al.'s 2002 national survey of U.S. journalists identified four types of journalists based on the roles they embrace. The "interpreters" are those journalists who believe that it is important to provide analysis of complex problems to cover policy as it is being developed and to investigate government claims. "Adversarialists" are those journalists who are principally driven by skepticism toward public officials and business interests. "Disseminators" are focused on reaching large audiences and publishing information quickly. Lastly "populist mobilizers" are those journalists who believe that it is important for their readers to have a voice in the media and who believe their craft should encourage individuals to become active in the community.

This strand of research has principally been descriptive in nature.¹⁹ When journalistic roles have been tied to journalists' values, the research has primarily focused on professional ethics.²⁰ There has not been previous research on how journalists' preferred journalistic roles affect their attitudes toward specific issues they cover. Given the lack of previous research tying preferred professional roles to attitudes about specific issues journalists cover, this study approaches the subject from an exploratory perspective, investigating what relationship, if any, exists between journalists' preferred professional roles and their attitudes toward off-shore oil drilling following the BP oil spill.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

There is mixed evidence of whether journalists' work reflects an ideological bias.²¹ There is also little evidence, however, that journalists have special powers to separate their political attitudes from their assessments of the issues they cover. The American public's attitudes toward the BP disaster are starkly partisan,²² and it is hypothesized that journalists' attitudes will also reflect this ideological divide:

H1:

Journalists' political ideologies will be positively associated with their positive attitudes toward the oil industry: More conservative reporters will have more favorable attitudes toward the oil industry.

H2:

Journalists' environmental ideologies will be negatively associated with their positive attitudes toward the oil industry: More pro-environmental reporters will be more critical toward the oil industry.

This study also examines the possible relationship between journalists' preferred professional roles and their attitudes toward the oil industry. There has not been any research that has examined the relationship between journalists' preferred professional roles and specific issues they cover. Thus, this study's examination of the relationship between support for the different professional roles and attitudes toward the oil industry is exploratory.

R1:

Are journalists' preferences for the different professional roles associated with their attitudes toward the oil industry?

In addition to being influenced by individual-level beliefs, this study hypothesizes that journalists' attitudes are shaped by community-level variables. Dunwoody and her colleagues found that newspapers in more structurally pluralistic communities were more likely to frame pollution in ways critical of industry than were newspapers in more homogenous communities.²³ Griffin and Dunwoody, however, found that a community's reliance on manufacturing is a stronger predictor of whether a newspaper would frame industrial pollution in terms of environmental health risks.²⁴ Thus, this current study also hypothesizes that:

H3:

Communities' degree of diversity will be negatively associated with journalists' positive attitudes toward the oil industry.

H4:

Communities' economic reliance on the oil industry will be positively associated with journalists' positive attitudes toward the oil industry.

Finally, this study examines the relative explanatory value of these variables—journalists' political and environmental ideologies, preferred professional roles and communities' degree of structural pluralism and economic reliance on the oil industry—in explaining journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry following the BP oil spill. The influence of these groups of variables

are entered into a hierarchical regression model, in which variables are entered into the model in groups or blocks. The model measures the influence of the first group of variables (journalists' ideologies) on journalists' attitudes toward the oil spill. Then the model holds journalists' ideologies constant, while estimating the percentage of journalists' attitudes explained by the subsequent groups of variables including, journalists' preferred professional roles and the community-level variables. This method allows the researcher to separate the discreet contribution that each group of variables makes to predicting journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry, answering the following questions:

R3:

Do journalists' preferences for the different professional roles add any explanatory value to predicting journalists' attitudes toward oil drilling following the BP oil spill, beyond examining journalists' individual political and environmental ideologies?

R4:

Does a community's degree of structural pluralism or economic reliance on the oil industry add any explanatory value to predicting journalists' attitudes toward oil drilling following the BP oil spill, beyond examining journalists' ideology and preferences for the different professional roles?

After controlling for individual beliefs, journalists in communities that are more economically dependent on the oil industry have more positive attitudes toward off-shore oil drilling. Structural pluralism, however, was not a significant predictor.

Methods

Data on journalists' attitudes were gathered via a web-based survey. The names of Gulf Coast newspaper journalists who covered the oil spill were identified by searching America's News database from April 20, 2010, the day of the Deep Water Horizon explosion, until Sept. 20, 2010, the day after BP sealed the leaking oil well. The following keywords were used to search Gulf Coast newspapers: BP, oil spill and Deep Water Horizon. The stories' headlines and first paragraphs were read to determine if the story was about some aspect of the Gulf oil spill. Reporters' email addresses and their newspapers' mailing addresses were found at the bottom of the relevant stories and on newspapers' websites. Six hundred

and eighty-eight unique bylines and valid email addresses were identified: 379 in Florida, 142 in Texas, 80 in Alabama, 59 in Louisiana and 34 in Mississippi.

A pre-notification letter was mailed to journalists on Nov. 5, 2010. Newspapers returned 11 letters as undeliverable. These journalists were removed from the list of journalists, presumably because they no longer worked at these papers. The survey was emailed to the remaining 682 journalists on Nov. 10, 2010, followed by six reminder emails.

Two hundred eighteen journalists completed the survey, for a response rate of 32.4 percent. Given the low response rates on web surveys, especially when surveying a professional population,²⁵ and the sensitive nature of asking journalists' personal opinions on issues they cover, the response rate is probably as good as one could hope for.

Measures

Political Ideology

Political ideology was measured using a single item adapted from Patterson and Donsbach: "How would you characterize your political ideology, from left to right?"²⁶ (M=3.43/7, SD=1.11). A single question was chosen out of fear that more sophisticated means of measuring journalists' personal political beliefs might cause them to stop responding to the survey.

Environmental Worldview

Environmental ideology was measured using four questions from Dunlap et al.'s New Environmental Paradigm:

- Humans are severely abusing the environment.
- The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations. The so-called environmental crisis has been greatly exaggerated
- Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it.²⁷

Principal components analysis was used to confirm that these four questions together measured a single concept and that individuals' responses to the questions were consistent ($\alpha=.738$, M=3.70/5, SD=.625).

Professional Roles

Journalists' preferences for the different professional roles were measured using seven questions adapted from Weaver et al.'s survey of American journalists.²⁸ These questions measured four potential journalistic roles: the adversarialist, the populist mobilizer, the interpreter and the disseminator.

The adversarialists consisted of two items: "Journalists should always be critical of corporations" and "Journalists should always be critical of government" ($r=.974$). Both were averaged to create a single score (M=2.405/5, SD=1.12).

The populist mobilizer consisted of three items, "Journalists should give

people an opportunity to express their views," "Journalists should motivate people to get involved in the community" and "Journalists should point to possible solutions to community problems" ($\alpha = .680$), which were also averaged into one score ($M=3.95/5$, $SD=.633$).

The interpreter consisted of one item—"Journalists should provide analysis of complex problems," ($M=4.66/5$, $SD=.690$), as did the disseminator, "Journalists should concentrate on serving the largest possible audience" ($M=3.65/5$, $SD=.909$).

Attitudes Toward Oil Drilling

This portion of the survey adapted 13 questions from public opinion surveys about oil drilling,²⁹ energy policy and government regulation³⁰ and industry responsibility.³¹ [See Table 1] Principal components analysis was again used to confirm that these questions were indeed measuring three separate concepts. Afterward, each sub-grouping of questions was averaged to create three different scores representing journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry. They consisted of a five-question pro-drilling measure ($\alpha=.851$, $M=3.160$, $SD=.720$), a four-question anti-regulation measure ($\alpha=.730$, $M=2.22$, $SD=.679$) and a four-question industry responsibility measure ($\alpha=.823$, $M=2.707$, $SD=.694$).

Community Structure

Two types of community-level variables were used. They were variables that sought to measure a community's degree of structural pluralism and a second set of variables that sought to measure a community's economic reliance on the oil industry. The structural pluralism measures consisted of a city's population ($M=915,630$, $SD=1,015,957$), percentage of the population that graduated from college ($M=.165$, $SD=.034$), the percentage of the population who is black ($M=.205$, $SD=.169$),³² variables similar to those used in Dunwoody's studies,³³ as well as newspapers' Monday through Friday circulation ($M=176,809$, $SD=132,355$).³⁴ Circulation is included as a measure of diversity because previous studies have shown that more diverse communities are served by larger papers.³⁵ Circulation was not available for 19 of the papers included in the study, in which case that missing value was replaced with the average circulation.

Reliance on the oil industry was measured by the percentage of workers over 16 who are employed in the oil industry in the county where a given newspaper is located ($M=.014$, $SD=.018$),³⁶ similar to the measure Griffin and Dunwoody used to measure the influence of manufacturing industries.³⁷ Reliance on the oil industry was also measured by proximity to the oil spill, calculated using the geographic coordinates of the Deep Water Horizon rig's location and the geographic center of a newspaper's zip code (M distance= 381.71 miles, $SD=167.71$).

Findings

The average reporter was a white (84.4 percent), middle-aged ($M=43.67$)

Table 1
Measures of Attitudes Toward the Oil Industry

<i>Pro-Oil Drilling</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>
U.S. regulators should allow continued off-shore drilling for oil at current levels.	3.07	.863
The U.S. should encourage exploration of new off-shore oil fields.	3.12	.922
U.S. energy policy should continue to encourage production of more domestic oil supplies.	3.25	.908
The collapse of the Deep Water Horizon oil platform and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico was a rare accident.	3.38	.932
Tragic as the Deep Water Horizon accident was, we cannot let it get in the way of developing domestic oil supplies.	2.98	.907
<i>Anti-Regulation</i>		
The government does not do enough to regulate the oil drilling industry. (reverse coded)	2.44	.864
Strict environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy.	2.36	.82
Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the environment. (reverse coded)	2.01	.788
U.S. energy policy should shift attention away from fossil fuels to sources of renewable energy. (reverse coded)	2.07	.849
<i>Oil Industry Corporate Responsibility</i>		
Oil drilling companies are generally concerned with limiting their environmental impact.	2.87	.885
Oil drilling companies are committed to protecting the public.	2.64	.847
The oil drilling industry generally complies with government regulation.	2.87	.804
Government regulation of the oil industry is adequate.	2.45	.894

reporter (73.1 percent). He or she was left-of-center politically ($M=3.42/7$), with an income between \$40,000 and \$50,000 and had been a journalist for an average of 19.2 years. This profile is similar to Weaver et al.'s national survey of journalists.³⁸

In regards to the training of those journalists who covered the BP oil spill: 72 percent had bachelor's degrees in journalism, although only 10.1 percent had received specialized training in reporting on energy issues. Only 15.1 percent had received training on reporting on environmental issues. The largest group of reporters who covered the oil spill were general assignment reporters (31.6 percent), followed by business reporters (21.5 percent), environmental reporters

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

<i>Industry Attitudes</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.</i>
<i>Deviation</i>				
Pro-Drilling	1	5	3.1607	.720
Anti-Regulation	1	5	2.216	.679
Corporate Responsibility	1	5	2.707	.694
<i>Ideologies</i>				
Political Ideology	1	6	3.43	1.110
Environmental Ideology	1.75	5	3.704	.625
<i>Professional Roles</i>				
Adversary	1	5	2.405	1.123
Mobilizer	1	5	3.952	.633
Interpreter	1	5	4.659	.690
Disseminator	1	5	3.651	.909
<i>Structural pluralism</i>				
Population	14,579	3,909,790	915,630	1,015,957
M-F Circulation	3,351	507,437	176,809	132,355
% College Graduates	.052	.277	.165	.034
% Black	.007	.727	.205	.169
<i>Economic Reliance</i>				
% Employed in Oil Industry	.002	.1624	.0141	.018
Proximity to Spill	118.265	905.281	381.708	167.708
Valid Listwise	177			

(10.7 percent) and energy reporters (2.5 percent).

Preliminary Analysis

On average, journalists' attitudes toward off-shore drilling were neither pro-drilling nor anti-drilling ($M=3.161/5$, $SD=.720$), but their scores on the anti-regulation nor scale ($M=2.216/5$, $SD=.618$) suggest they think some level of regulation of the oil industry is necessary, which may in part be a reflection of their pro-environmental attitudes ($M=3.704/5$, $SD=.625$). [See Table 2] Journalists also rated the oil industry's level of responsibility pretty low ($M=2.707/5$, $SD=.694$). Generally, though, journalists' attitudes, including their political beliefs ($M=3.43$, $SD=1.110$), were middle-of-the-road, which may in part be due to journalists not wanting to express strong positions on political matters or issues they cover.

H1 stated that journalists' political beliefs would be positively associated with their attitudes toward the oil industry.

This hypothesis was supported by the data: More conservative journalists

Table 3
Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
<i>Attitudes</i>															
1. Pro-Drilling															
2. Anti-Regulation	.409*														
3. Corporate Responsibility	.512*	.430*													
<i>Ideology</i>															
4. Political	.492*	.415*	.379*												
5. Environmental	-.379*	-.643*	-.379*	-.490*											
<i>Roles</i>															
6. Adversary	-.157*	-.001	-.042	-.090	.015										
7. Mobilizer	-.068	-.240*	-.006	.022	.101	.071									
8. Interpreter	-.063	-.066	-.003	-.100	.116	.081	.112								
9. Disseminator	.012	.006	.015	.005	-.016	.046	.150*	.041							
<i>Structural Pluralism*</i>															
10. Circulation	-.175*	-.042	-.074	-.150*	.097	.002	-.067	.182*	.053						
11. Population	-.093	.080	.036	-.073	.041	.005	-.195*	.175*	.062	.651*					
12. % College Grad.	.005	-.065	.044	-.068	.074	-.054	.131	.015	.093	.070	-.082				
13. % Black	.193*	.009	-.025	-.022	-.036	-.143*	-.014	.038	.081	.139*	.095	.006			
<i>Industry Dependence*</i>															
14. Proximity to the Spill	.151*	-.083	-.109	.006	.013	-.036	-.023	-.016	.034	-.210*	-.309*	-.012	.580*		
15. % Employed in Oil Industry	.244*	-.012	.140*	.127	-.096	-.041	.184*	-.104	-.056	-.326*	-.378*	.026	-.023	.060	

(* $p < .001$, * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$)
* Log-transformed variables

were more likely to have positive attitudes toward the oil industry. As shown in Table 3, journalists' political ideology was positively correlated with journalists' support for oil drilling ($r=.492$, $p<.001$), anti-regulatory preferences, ($r=.415$, $p<.001$) and trust in industry responsibility ($r=.379$, $p<.001$).

H2 posited that journalists' environmental ideologies would be negatively associated with positive attitudes toward the oil industry.

This hypothesis was also supported by the data: As journalists' pro-environmental attitudes increased, their positive attitudes toward the oil industry decreased. Journalists' pro-environmental attitudes are negatively correlated with pro-drilling attitudes ($r=-.379$, $p<.001$), faith in the oil industry's corporate responsibility ($r=-.379$) and anti-regulation attitudes ($r=-.643$).

R1 asked if there was a relationship between journalists' preferred professional roles and their attitudes toward the oil industry.

There was a slight negative correlation between journalists' support for the adversarial role and pro-drilling attitudes ($r=-.157$, $p<.05$): Those who believed journalists should be adversaries of business and government had more negative attitudes toward the oil industry. There was also a negative correlation between journalists' support for the mobilizer role and anti-regulation attitudes ($r=-.240$, $p<.001$): Those journalists who are more focused on mobilizing their communities are more accepting of regulation of the oil industry.

H3 stated that measures of structural pluralism would be negatively associated with journalists' positive attitudes toward the oil industry. This hypothesis was partially supported.

There was a significant negative correlation between circulation and pro-drilling attitudes ($r=-.175$, $p<.05$), which supports the hypothesis. However, there was a significant positive correlation between the percentage of the population who is black and pro-drilling attitudes ($r=.193$, $p<.01$). There were no other significant correlations between the structural pluralism measures and anti-regulation or corporate responsibility attitudes.

H4 stated that measures of a community's reliance on the oil industry would be negatively correlated with journalists' positive attitudes toward the oil industry.

The data partially supported this hypothesis. Communities' proximity to the oil spill ($r=.151$, $p<.05$) and the percentage of the workforce employed in the oil industry ($r=.244$, $p<.001$) were both positively correlated with pro-drilling attitudes. The more a community relies on the oil industry for its economic base, the more journalists support off-shore oil drilling. The percentage of the workforce employed in the oil industry was also positively but modestly correlated with journalists' beliefs in the industry's corporate responsibility ($r=.140$, $p<.05$). Economic reliance on the oil industry, however, was not correlated with journalists' anti-regulation attitudes.

R3 and R4 were both answered with the same series hierarchical regression models.

This study uses separate hierarchical regression models to predict three different outcomes: journalists' pro-drilling, anti-regulation and corporate responsibility attitudes. Hierarchical regression models estimate the unique contribution groups or blocks of variables make to predicting a given outcome. In this study, the first block of variables includes journalists' political and environmental ideologies. The hierarchical regression method estimates the influence of these variables, then holds their values constant while estimating the influence of the second group of variables, which are journalists' preferred professional roles. Then the model holds both of these groups' values constant, while measuring the unique contribution that the community-level variables have in predicting journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry following the

Table 4
Regression, Journalists' Attitudes as DV

	Pro-Drilling		Anti-Regulation		Corporate Responsibility	
	β	R2/R2 Δ	β	R2/R2 Δ	β	R2/R2 Δ
<i>Ideology</i>						
Political	.403**		.131*		.254**	
Environmental	-.181**		-.579**		-.255**	
		.267**		.427**		.193**
<i>Roles</i>						
Political	.384**		-.155**		.254**	
Environmental	-.156*		-.551**		-.261**	
Adversary	-.117		.032		-.020	
Mobilizer	-.055		.198**		.009	
Interpreter	.012		.032		.053	
Disseminator	.020		.024		.007	
		.284 / .017		.465 / .038*		.196 / .003
<i>Community Structure</i>						
Political	.384**		.160**		.247**	
Environmental	-.156*		-.548**		-.254**	
Adversary	-.082		.036		-.011	
Mobilizer	-.094		.184**		-.005	
Interpreter	.032		.023		.055	
Disseminator	.017		.016		.004	
Circulation ^a	-.111		-.074		-.113	
Population ^a	.075		.061		.139	
% College Grad ^a	.058		.020		.094	
% Black ^a	.152		.064		.027	
Proximity to Spill ^a	-.070		.117		.096	
% Employed in Oil ^a	.197**					
		-.053		.099		
		.366, / .082**		.479 / .014		.231 / .035

^aLog-transformed variable.

*p<.05, ** p<.01

BP spill. The advantage of this statistical method is that it allows the researcher to separate the percentage of journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry explained by each group of variables.

As shown in Table 4, when predicting journalists' pro-drilling attitudes, political ideology and environmental attitudes were both significant predictors in the first block of variables. The R^2 values in Table 4 can be interpreted as the total percentage of journalists' attitudes explained by the model. The initial R^2 value represents the proportion of journalists' attitudes explained by the first group of values. The subsequent ΔR^2 values represent the additional explanatory value of the subsequent groups of variables beyond that already explained by the previous variables. The final R^2 value represents the total percentage of journalists' attitudes explained by all three groups of variables.

In this first model, journalists' political and environmental ideologies explained a total of 26.7 percent of the variance in pro-drilling attitudes ($R^2=.267$, $p<.01$). The second block, journalists' professional roles, did not add any significant explanatory value (R^2 change=.017, $p>.05$). The third block, community structure, did explain an additional 8.2 percent of journalists' pro-drilling attitudes (R^2 change=.082, $p<.01$). However, only the percentage of workers employed in the oil industry was a significant predictor ($B=.347$, $p<.01$). Together all three blocks of variables explained 36.6 percent of journalists' pro-drilling attitudes.

Next, predicting journalists' anti-regulation attitudes, only the first two blocks of variables significantly predicted journalists' attitudes. As seen in Table 4, journalists' political and environmental beliefs together explained 42.7 percent of journalists' anti-regulation attitudes. In this model, journalists' environmental attitudes had greater predictive power ($\beta=-.579$, $p<.01$), than did journalists' political beliefs ($\beta=.131$, $p<.05$). Where pro-drilling attitudes appear to be driven more by political beliefs, attitudes toward regulation appear more driven by environmental beliefs. Professional roles, specifically journalists' support for the mobilizer role, explained an additional 3.8 percent of the variance in journalists attitudes (R^2 change=.038, $p<.05$). The overall model explained 47.9 percent of the variance in journalists' anti-regulation attitudes.

In the final model [See Table 4], predicting journalists' attitudes toward corporate responsibility, only the first block of variables significantly predicts journalists' attitudes, explaining 19.3 percent of the variance ($R^2=.193$, $p<.01$). Journalists' preferred professional roles and community structure do not add any significant explanatory power.

R3 asked if journalists' preferences for the different professional roles add any explanatory value to predicting journalists' attitudes toward oil drilling following the BP oil spill beyond examining journalists' individual political and environmental ideologies.

Journalists' preferred professional roles do not add any explanatory power to models predicting pro-drilling or corporate responsibility attitudes. Support

for the mobilizer role does significantly predict journalists' anti-regulation attitudes, but it adds modest explanatory value (3.8 percent).

R4 asked if the degree of diversity or economic reliance on the oil industry add any explanatory value to predicting journalists' attitudes toward oil drilling following the BP oil spill beyond examining journalists' ideology and preferences for the different professional roles?

Community structure variables do not add any explanatory value to predicting journalists' anti-regulation attitudes, which are primarily driven by environmental attitudes: Journalists who are less concerned about the state of the environment are less likely to support government regulation of the off-shore oil drilling industry. The community-level variables also fail to add any explanatory value to predicting journalists' corporate responsibility attitudes.

However, when predicting journalists' pro-drilling attitudes, community structure, specifically the percent of working adults employed in the oil industry, explains an additional 8.2 percent of journalists' attitudes, beyond what was explained by journalists' political and environmental ideologies.

Discussion

Journalists' environmental and political ideologies are the strongest predictors of their attitudes toward the oil industry following the BP oil spill, suggesting journalists' attitudes mirror the public's partisan attitudes. Conservative journalists with the least pro-environmental attitudes are most likely to support continued off-shore drilling, oppose regulating the industry and believe that the industry behaves responsibly.

Journalists' preferred professional roles also play a small role in explaining journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry. Those who see themselves as populist mobilizers were more accepting of regulation of the oil industry. The role that journalists' preferred professional roles plays in predicting attitudes toward specific topics they cover deserves further research.

This study began by proposing that community structure may influence news coverage by shaping individual journalists' toward the issues they cover. The results of this study are also consistent with this proposition. After controlling for individual beliefs, journalists in communities that are more economically dependent on the oil industry have more positive attitudes toward off-shore oil drilling. Structural pluralism, however, was not a significant predictor.

A cautionary note, however, should also be appended to this conclusion about structural pluralism. The percentage of minority residents is commonly used as a measure of structural pluralism,³⁹ although in at least one community the majority (73 percent) of the community's population was black. A community in which blacks are a strong majority of the population, which is more common in the South than in those areas of the upper Midwest where most previous

structural pluralism studies have been conducted,⁴⁰ are no more pluralistic than are those communities dominated by whites. More work could be done to refine measures of structural pluralism so that they more accurately capture the distribution of social power in all regional contexts.

This study also helps illuminate the challenges of trying to analyze the potential relationship between journalists' attitudes and the work they produce. Journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry are multi-faceted, as evidenced by the components—pro-drilling, anti-regulation, and corporate responsibility attitudes—that comprise their overall assessment of the oil industry following the BP oil spill. Each of these components was also shaped by different influences. For example, journalists' oil drilling attitudes are driven more by their political than environmental beliefs; whereas, anti-regulation attitudes are more driven by reporters' environmental ideologies.

Previous studies of journalistic bias have not used equally nuanced, multi-faceted measures of journalists' beliefs. Rather, these studies have largely been based on a rather one-dimensional model that assumes that journalists' work reflects either a politically liberal or politically conservative bias.⁴¹ The lack of recognition of the complexity of journalists' attitudes and the different underlying factors that shape these attitudes may explain the inconsistent findings in studies of journalistic bias. In addition, these studies are based on descriptions of journalists as a group. That is, that journalists tend to be politically liberal, thus their work likely reflects a liberal bias. Media bias, however, is not a theory about journalists' as a group, but rather a journalist's individual political beliefs shape the stories that he or she writes. If measured at the aggregate level, it is possible that those journalists with a liberal bias are being canceled out by an equal number of journalists with a conservative bias. Such a phenomenon would result in the conclusion that as a group, journalists are not biased, when in fact the majority of individual journalists are biased. It is also possible that journalists filter out their personal beliefs, but conclusions should be based on individual-level observations.

This study cannot ultimately comment on whether journalists are or are not biased because this study did not examine the effect of journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry following the BP oil spill on their coverage of the disaster. Analyzing this coverage would be the next logical step in this ongoing research agenda. However, before proceeding to this next step, it is first necessary to understand the structure of journalists' attitudes toward the oil industry and the underlying factors that influence their attitudes. While this study does not tackle the issue of journalistic bias, it provides a strong base for further analysis of how individual journalists' nuanced attitudes may affect the content they produce.

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