

“GORE”-ING THE IPCC: HOW U.S. CONSERVATIVE
MEDIA HAS FRAMED THE CLIMATE CHANGE
DEBATE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The post-WWII American conservative movement focused primarily on the threat of communism to the American capitalist economic structure. These counter-movements successfully framed communism as fundamentally opposite to the foundations on which America was built. After the fall of communism in Russia in the late 1980s and coupled with the increased environmental awareness during the 1970s and 1980s, the American conservative movement shifted its focus from the red threat and to the green threat of global environmentalism (Dunlap and McCright 2010).

In the early stages of the anti-environmental movement, the key actors focused on promoting environmental skepticism throughout society. That is, they attacked the science behind pro-regulation agendas that sought to curtail the detrimental actions of business toward the environment. As the topic of climate change became more salient in public discourse, it became the main topic of target for American anti-environmental movements. Under the Bush Administration, the anti-environmental movement found an enabling structure and a source of legitimacy with which they could frame their anti-environmental rhetoric.

Members of the anti-environmental movement have found media outlets as a forum where their dissention is given equal weight, even if that relationship does not

reflect the consensus among the scientific community. Not only are these opponents dictating the balance of media analysis on the subject (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004) but they are also successfully sabotaging the scientific consensus emerging on the topic (McCright and Dunlap 2000). I look to further examine how the conservative movement has used the media as a vehicle for framing global climate change as non-problematic in light of awards and accolades bestowed upon Al Gore and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Specifically, I will explore the role played by American conservative syndicated columnists in challenging the authenticity of global climate change. I will report the results of a content analysis of nationally syndicated editorials distributed via www.townhall.com, a self-identified conservative website. This analysis examines the counter-claims utilized by the conservative media in its effort to discredit the global climate claims of the scientific community. While there have been numerous studies on the role of media framing and environmental issues, there has been very little focus on the role of editorials on the framing process.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the conservative U.S. media's response to global climate change in 2007 and 2008, focusing on manifest claims that emerged after the awards and nominations achieved by Al Gore and the IPCC. The format of the paper is as follows: first, a review of the previous literature on the subjects of anti-reflexivity, past and present anti-environmental movement tactics, and the coverage of science by the U.S. media; second, a description of the research purpose; third, an explanation of the

data and methods; fourth, the results of the content analysis; and finally, a conclusion and discussion about the results of the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anti-Reflexivity

Two major reflexive modernization theories—Risk Society Theory (e.g., Beck 1992) and Ecological Modernization (e.g., Mol and Spaargaren 2000)—share certain elements which shed light on aspects of reflexivity in society (McCright and Dunlap 2010). These insights can be used to help explain the motivations behind the American conservative movement's attempt to challenge the post-WWII environmental agenda in the United States. The shared aspects of these two distinct theories better clarify the vital features of reflexive modernization.

Reflexive modernization is a process characterized in a risk society where progress is achieved via reorganization and reform (Beck 1992). This reorganization and reformation, in this case with science and technology, enables a society to re-evaluate the risks associated with crises and solve problems stemming from modernization. Two forces of reflexivity play prominent roles within the framework of the American conservative movement: impact science and social movements (Beck 1992; Mol and Spaargaren 2000). The conservative movement has challenged the gains won by progressive social movements such as the environmental movement while also challenging the legitimacy of impact science—climate science, in this example. By challenging these two aspects of a reflexive society, the American conservative movement has attempted to stifle reformation and reorganization while also attempting to maintain the status quo (McCright and Dunlap 2010).

The American conservative movement has utilized agenda setting in order to promote an ideological perspective aimed at re-asserting the Dominant Social Paradigm (Dunlap and Van Liere 1984). This perspective, which values individualism, technological progress, and economic growth, provided the American conservative movement with a platform needed to effectively mobilize against liberal issues (e.g., environmental protections protests) arising in the 1960s and 1970s. As the conservative movement attempted to re-emphasize the dominance of industry and capitalism in America, it became a highly potent force for anti-reflexivity and incredibly effective in the social de-construction of social problems.

Social (De)Construction of Social Problems

In order to dictate saliency of issues in public discourse, actors within the anti-environmental movement utilized counter-claims in an attempt to increase uncertainty regarding the scientific argument on climate change (McCright and Dunlap 2000). As these key actors employed counter-claims to re-define climate change as non-problematic, they were also attempting to recover political power lost due to increased public awareness of environmental issues. The anti-environmental movement shifted the emphasis of their argument from a broader political discussion to one which consistently questioned the legitimacy and the certainty of the scientific claims-makers. This shift in emphasis has led to successfully introducing doubt into public discourse via many outlets such as various forms of media (also see Freudenburg et al. 2008).

The issue of uncertainty is prevalent in many skeptical reports concerning scientific conclusiveness, with the topic of global warming being no exception. Actors within the anti-environmental movement claim that they are unsure whom to believe and

to what extent they should give credibility to the claims-makers involved. As these skeptics begin to infiltrate the mainstream media, the public begins to experience greater levels of doubt. This can lead to serious reservations about whom to trust when attempting to decipher the facts from opinion. It should be noted that these counter-claims have existed for many decades and I will briefly discuss the emergence of these counter-claims and the counter-movements that foster them.

Post-WWII Environmental Awareness in the U.S.

After World War II, public sentiment changed drastically in the United States, culminating in protests for multiple causes, such as civil rights, anti-war, women's rights, and environmental rights. The American environmental movement successfully mobilized due to an awakening of environmental consciousness among citizens. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 increased awareness about the long-term effects of pesticide use, while the first photos of Earth from the moon in 1966 challenged humans to view the planet as one large ecosystem. These two significant events, coupled with increased time and money spent vacationing in state and national parks, led to the first Earth Day in 1970. With increasing public support, the U.S. environmental movement was building a foundation for stronger environmental laws while also indirectly energizing an opposition in the form of the U.S. conservative movement (Hays 1982; Dunlap and Mertig 1992).

Conservative Movement and the Rise of Anti-Environmentalism

Beginning in the early 1960s with The Clean Air Act and continuing through Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act in 1980, the United States Congress made substantial gains in setting nationwide environmental protection standards. These changes in domestic laws were evidence of core environmental values and objectives important to many Americans (Hays 1982). These fundamental values were shared across political parties and not solely attributed to liberals or democrats. As our nation's political infrastructure began embracing environmental regulations, a backlash among conservatives and Republicans slowly emerged.

While a shift in public opinion favoring environmental protection was observed during increased industry regulations during the 1960s and 1970s, a vocal sector of the population clung to the Dominant Social Paradigm, which generated lower levels of concern for environmental protection (Dunlap and Van Liere 1984). American conservatives defended this position more so than American liberals did. The Dominant Social Paradigm's general opposition to environmental protection when ecological limits were just being realized stems from a commitment to laissez faire, individualism, progress, and growth (Dunlap and Van Liere 1984). During the 1980s, the Republican administration attempted to repeal many environmental regulations under the guise of defending the American capitalist system.

The American capitalist system threatens the environment in two major ways: first, the primary goal of capitalist accumulation is to increase commodity production and commercial markets (O'Connor 1994); second, the motivation to maximize profits

induces capitalists to externalize production costs and, in doing so, increase environmental destruction and risk to public health (O'Connor 1994; Schnaiberg and Gould 1994). Regulations which restrict commodity production and attempt to decrease environmental destruction are seen as a hindrance to economic growth. In order to avoid these barriers, corporations allied themselves with the U.S. anti-environmental movement. Over the past three decades, the U.S. anti-environmental movement became strengthened via two trends: first, the increased ability of corporations to shape public opinion; second, the decreased ability of democratic organizations to defend environmental policies (Austin 2002). This inability to defend environmental policies began during the Reagan Administration in the 1980s.

The Reagan Administration viewed environmental protection as fundamentally opposed to economic prosperity and, beginning in 1981, deeply cut federal spending for environmental programs (Vig 2006). Reagan was able to effectively weaken the Environmental Protection Agency in an effort to repeal the environmental regulations enacted during the previous decade. While Reagan was successful at rolling back environmental regulations during his term as President, his efforts did not sustain past his presidency. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, support for environmental protection became stronger due to a backlash against the pro-economic Reagan Administration.

Second Wave of Anti-Environmentalism

After the first wave of anti-environmental rhetoric ultimately led to an increase in public support for environmental groups such as the Sierra Club (Dunlap 1991), American conservatives shifted their attacks to the science behind many pro-regulation arguments. After the fall of the USSR, and while the Dominant Social Paradigm was

being questioned on a global level in the early 1990s with the Rio Summit in 1992, the American conservative movement transferred their attacks from communism to domestic and global environmentalism. As conservatives saw global environmentalism as a threat to U.S. economic power and sovereignty (Jacques et al. 2008), they began aggressively targeting sources of legitimacy for environmental organizations. One common target for U.S conservatives was the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as they attempted to introduce skepticism into the environmental debate.

Environmental Skepticism

Environmental skepticism is a strategy specific to a conservative ideology supported by the conservative counter-movement opposed to environmentalism (Jacques 2006). Jacques et al. (2008) define four fundamental themes of environmental skepticism: first, a rejection of scientific literature on environmental problems; second, the prioritization of economic, social, and environmental problems; third, a theme of anti-regulation and anti-corporate liability; fourth, the claim that environmentalism and environmental protection threaten the progress and development embedded in Western modernity. These four themes coincide with the Dominant Social Paradigm that is crucial to the American conservative movement's mobilization.

The American conservative movement's embrace of environmental skepticism hinges on the tactic of labeling environmentalists as extremists and radicals in order to question the seriousness of environmental problems (Buell 2003). As American conservatives attack the actors within the environmental movement, they also begin to attack the legitimacy of the claims made by environmental activists, especially claims relating to global warming. Three specific counter-claims emerged which challenged

global warming's legitimacy: evidence is weak; net global warming is beneficial; proposed solutions would do more harm than good (McCright and Dunlap 2000). As the Bush Administration came into office, the skepticism landscape narrowed from general environmental skepticism to more specific climate skepticism.

The counter-claims existing pre-Kyoto Protocol remained influential due to the significant role of the conservative counter-movement in the Bush Administration (McCright and Dunlap 2003). The Bush Administration, as well as the conservative counter-movement, helped usher back an anti-environmental and pro-industry sentiment that was present during the Reagan Administration but lost political sway during the Clinton Administration. One new wrinkle that the Bush Administration was particularly skillful at was passing industry-friendly legislation with environmentally-friendly names such as "healthy forests" or "clean skies" initiatives. The administration also revived a heightened sense of doubt over scientific certainty by calling for "sound science" in regard to climate science, thereby implying scientific knowledge produced by bodies such as the IPCC was "unsound" (Dunlap and McCright 2010). Climate skepticism reached new highs during the Bush Administration, thanks in large part to role of five key actors and the significant roles they played in agenda-setting in America.

Key Actors

Dunlap and McCright (2010) identify the roles which five key actors played in the war against climate science and policy-making in America. These actors not only enabled and perpetuated a general denial machine, but also were all actively involved in climate change denial. The five key actors in the American anti-environmental

movement over the past 25 years have been fossil fuel industry, conservative think tanks, contrarian scientists, conservative politicians, and conservative media.

Fossil Fuel Industry

As mentioned earlier, the strongest components of the anti-environmental sector in the American capitalist system would be those industries that stand to lose the most from environmental regulations. These industries, led by coal and oil corporations, have paved the way for and been joined by many other businesses and companies in promoting climate change denial. As some businesses gradually begin to acknowledge the reality of anthropogenic climate change, the role of industry in the climate denial machine becomes more apparent. Some oil companies that publically accepted the scientists' claims of anthropogenic climate change were met with disappointment and anger from those in the American conservative movement (Layzer 2007). One crucial role industry has played in assisting with the climate denial machine is providing direct funding for several conservative think tanks, which are the second key actor in the anti-environmental movement in America.

Conservative Think Tanks

Over the past 20 years, conservative think tanks have been linked with distributed anti-environmental rhetoric into the public discourse, including the majority of environmental skepticism books published (Jacques et al. 2008). Lahsen (2007) connected the relationship between the conservative counter-movement and the trio of physicists who founded George C. Marshall Institute, claiming that the physicists' decision can be understood as a preservation of a particular normative order. Conservative think tanks have been the focus of many studies conducted by social

scientists, with many researchers concluding that the think tanks played significant roles in climate change issues such as generating opposition to the Kyoto Protocol (McCright and Dunlap 2000, 2003), diminishing a U.S. National Academy of Science report in the early 1980s (Oreskes et al. 2008), or assuming a primary role in fighting global environmental awareness (Austin 2002; Lahsen 2005). One of the main tactics of the conservative think tanks has been to promote and make use of the third key actor: contrarian scientists.

Contrarian Scientists

A small yet vocal number of scientists (with varying levels of expertise in climate science) have been major spokespersons for the anti-environmental movement in America. These contrarian scientists have been linked to industry groups and conservative think tanks directly via affiliations, lectures, and publications (Begley 2007; Gelbspan 1997, 2004; Lahsen 2005; Mooney 2005). Due to the prominence of conservative think tanks in American politics, these scientists have received a disproportionate amount of mainstream media visibility when compared to the large amount of climate scientists and how they have been treated. While contrarian scientists have been largely embraced by sympathetic politicians, not to mention Republican and pro-industry Congressional members, climate scientists have not received the same treatment when conservative politicians (the fourth key actor) have held political office.

Conservative Politicians

Stemming from the days of the Reagan Administration, conservative politicians have always been very receptive and welcoming to environmental skepticism. After the Republican Party won control of the House of Representatives in 1994, there was a

noticeable shift as House Republicans attempted a search for scientific misconduct in hopes of condemning climate science as a scientific fraud (McCright and Dunlap 2003). This shift to destroy the legitimacy of climate science continued throughout the Bush Administration and perhaps peaked in 2003 when Oklahoma Senator James Inhofe famously claimed global warming to be “the greatest hoax ever perpetuated on the American people” in a U.S. Senate speech. The fifth and final key actor that will be discussed, the conservative media, has helped the anti-environmental movement maintain momentum throughout the two aforementioned Republican administrations.

Conservative Media

The idea that conservative media outlets have been utilized as a platform for promoting the anti-environmental movement ideology is nothing new. One big difference from the 1980s to present-day media is the increased presence of the 24-hour cable news networks. This heightened presence has allowed certain pundits and media stations to become influential in swaying public opinion. Two individuals in particular, Rush Limbaugh and Rupert Murdoch, have played key parts in the rise of conservative media in the United States.

Right-wing radio commentator Rush Limbaugh has made climate change his favorite target by attacking the credibility of Al Gore and other “environmental wackos” (Wolcott 2007). Rush’s influence within the Republican Party should not be underestimated, as very few Republicans will publically denounce Rush for fear that they will then become alienated from the power core of the party. Rupert Murdoch’s influence, through Fox News and *The Wall Street Journal*, has given the conservative movement greater visibility over the past 20 years than radio outlets have. Fox News

allows other pundits, such as Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly, to reify the climate skepticism stance without adequately discussing the realities of global warming, all while claiming a "fair and balanced" perspective. The underlying problem with the rise of conservative media is the ease with which they are able to report erroneous facts and the impact that these erroneous statements can have on public discourse.

Case Study of George Will

George Will is a popular and award-winning syndicated conservative columnist whose columns appear in approximately 450 newspapers across the U.S. He is a best-selling author and has appeared on numerous political TV shows, currently and perhaps most notably as a panel member of ABC's *This Week with George Stephanopolous*. Will received the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 1977 and has garnered the respect of conservatives and liberals alike based on a reputation for writing factually in his columns. He also has been praised in the past for criticizing his own party, specifically attacking the Bush Iraq policy as well as the selection of Sarah Palin as John McCain's Vice Presidential candidate. Will's ability to objectively assess the Republican Party and conservative issues makes him more accessible to a wider audience (unlike Glenn Beck, for example, who is a much more polarizing media figure) and potentially more damaging when he fails to correctly report facts on issues such as global warming.

February 15th Column

On February 15, 2009, George Will wrote a column in *The Washington Post* with the headline, "Dark Green Doomsayers." In this column, he disparaged "eco-pessimists" and went on to cite previous instances in which these fanatics have predicted many "planetary calamities" that never came to fruition. Specifically, he made three arguments that were

later challenged: first, in the 1970s, many scientists believed in a catastrophic global cooling pattern; second, global warming stopped over a decade ago; and third, sea-ice levels now equal those of 1979 (Will 2009a). In making that third argument, Will cited the University of Illinois' Arctic Climate Research Center data. After the column was printed, *The Washington Post* began receiving letters from readers questioning the accuracy of Will's column (Kennedy 2009). Many outraged readers, most of them environmental activists and scientists, claimed that the data said exactly the opposite.

There was a rebuttal offered from the newspaper's ombudsman, who quickly defended Will's claim and the fact-checking process at *The Washington Post*. The fact-checking process was also defended by *The Washington Post's* editorial-page editor, who also defended Will. This did not do much to reduce the anger among readers and other journalists. In fact, one week after the column ran, *New York Times* reporter Andrew Revkin began highlighting Will's refusal to back down from his erroneous stance. George Will had been silent on the issue prior to Revkin's article.

February 27th Column

With controversy over his previous column still lingering, George Will wrote another column and reiterated his stance on the issue (Will 2009b). He defended his interpretation of the sea-level data and also lashed out at Andrew Revkin and global warming activists by claiming that asserting something such as global warming to be true—without proper evidence—is flawed. This second column prompted another wave of backlash from readers and journalists, as well as a second response from the ombudsman (Kennedy 2009).

In his second response to the column, the ombudsman admitted that everyone involved in the fact-checking process of the article had fallen short, especially with the comment about sea-level data. According to a climate scientist who worked at the Arctic Climate Research Center, no call was made from *The Washington Post* or George Will before the initial column was printed. He did not hear from an editor at the newspaper until nine days after the demands for a correction began pouring in (Alexander 2009). The backlash toward George Will reflects the impact that erroneous statements can have, especially when columnists are allowed to publish columns that might not go through a thorough fact-checking process.

April 1st Column

George Will ran a third column in which he yet again disputed the occurrence of global warming over the past ten years (Will 2009c). In this instance, he cited short-term (and in some examples, single-year) data as evidence of long-term trends. This drew even more ire from bloggers, readers, and climate scientists who felt that Will was misrepresenting the data. *The Washington Post* reporters Juliet Eilperin and Mary Beth Sheridan pointed out inaccuracies in Will's claims about global sea ice levels and specifically criticized Will by name in their column (Brainard 2009). While it might not be extraordinary for reporters at the same newspaper to disagree on a topic, it is quite uncommon for a news article to criticize a high-level columnist by name.

This backlash is not the only instance in which readers have been angered by misleading scientific information regarded as fact in an editorial piece. This example does, however, showcase how journalists, activists, and climate scientists are becoming infuriated over the laziness with which fact-checking has been handled. The op-ed

columnists have the freedom to write columns about whatever topic they choose and need to be held to similar standards because they are, more often than not, more visible and recognizable to the reader than newspaper reporters. In this example, George Will is a highly-respected columnist whose words have much more impact than the individuals who were challenging his claims. It is imperative that these syndicated columnists be held accountable for the statements they are making about issues such as global warming.

Media Analysis

The aforementioned discussion of George Will demonstrates how media bias can impact the way facts are presented and the how perspectives are framed. While framing bias has achieved little serious scientific attention (Niven 2002), there have been empirical studies showing bias in the media's framing of political (Entman 2007), racial (Entman and Rojecki 2000; Kang 2005), and entertainment realms of society. Whatever the range of issues, framing bias can cause misguided interpretations of the news. Biased coverage, simply put, refers to inaccurate coverage (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004). These reporting inaccuracies can then guide viewers to distort the macro-level interpretation of events which occur in their daily lives (Bennett 2002). Framing bias, whether intentional or not, can cause one to misinterpret or distort the factual evidence and give credibility to a lesser-established perspective.

Framing processes can be found not only within media outlets, but also within social movement organizations (McCaffrey and Keys 2000; Benford and Snow 2000). Certain social and political movements, such as environmental movements, are often met with a backlash of sorts. One source of this environmental criticism has been from conservatives and specifically the "counterscience" movement (Buell 2003). This new

movement proved to be highly effective in its strategy of debunking the environmental movement (e.g. McCright and Dunlap 2000, Demeritt 2006). McCright and Dunlap point out core strategies at the heart of the conservative movement that aim to challenge the credibility of global environmental problems, specifically global warming (2000). Significant problems such as media bias occur once these counter-claims, especially those that lack credible scientific evidence, become public discourse.

U.S. Media Coverage of Science

Recent research has shown that the U.S. newspapers have given a near-equal voice to skeptics, even though the scientific community has achieved a general consensus (e.g. Boykoff and Boykoff 2004) or have even suffered from a pro-industry bias (Nissani 1999). The idea of having balanced news coverage is not limited to print media. More than 70% of U.S. television news segments from 1995-2004 provided both sides of the anthropogenic climate change debate, which leads to greater difficulty in conveying the climate science consensus to the public (Boykoff 2007a). The existing bias in the global climate change debate can easily be transferred to those who publicly defend the scientific community, such as politicians and environmentalists.

Al Gore and the IPCC

It would not be surprising to find conservative media outlets as a main source of skepticism toward Al Gore. He has supported the conclusions of the IPCC and therefore opened himself up to the same criticisms from those actors defending the Dominant Social Paradigm. As Vice President during the Clinton Administration, Al Gore was a key actor in promoting global environmental protection and opposed pro-industry regulations. As he is sharing the Nobel Peace Prize with the IPCC, it can be assumed that

certain media outlets will view Al Gore's Nobel Peace Prize with the same skepticism and doubt that they view the findings of the IPCC.

His efforts to add credibility to the climate change debate and bring the topics of environmental protection to the forefront challenge the conservative agendas. It has been previously argued that conservatives support a Dominant Social Paradigm perspective (McCright and Dunlap 2000), in which societies are viewed as being separate from nature and therefore are able and allowed to control it (Dunlap and Van Liere 1984). Al Gore has championed enhanced industrial restrictions for the protection of the environment, as well as the worldwide enactment of the Kyoto Protocol. These two issues alone make him an easy mark for many conservative publications. Even though Al Gore is a common target, little empirical research has been conducted to describe the framing tactics utilized by the U.S. conservative media.

Literature and data showing climate change evidence continue to be met with skepticism at many different levels, including congressional and industrial (Mooney 2005). The outnumbered skeptics within political and media professions, many of whom deny the findings of the IPCC report, have effectively found their perspective heard. While some outliers within these skeptic groups attempt to refute the claims of those scientists producing the data, a general consensus within the scientific community has been reached over the past fifteen years on the validity of global climate change (Oreskes 2004). One would think that the majority opinion from the scientific community should be held with more regard than opinions from the non-scientific sector on global climate change, but this is not the case. Even though the skeptics remain in the minority, they

have been successful at countering the scientific claims and giving their perspective of global climate change equal weight in the debate.

The skepticism that has pervaded the public discourse on global climate is problematic to say the least. While certain amounts of skepticism are permissible and even welcomed in many social commentaries, there seems to be an unhealthy dose of skepticism in the global climate change forum. Not only are the skeptics dictating the balance of media analysis on the subject (Boykoff and Boykoff 2004) but they are also successfully sabotaging the scientific consensus that is emergent within the environmental movement (McCright and Dunlap 2000). The inconsistencies between media analysis and scientific findings led to negative impacts on policy-making agendas (Antilla 2004), specifically the United States' reluctance to ratify the Kyoto Protocol (McCright and Dunlap 2003).

Previous studies have exposed disparities between evidence that is scientifically produced with high levels of consensus and evidence that is reported through media outlets (e.g. Mazur 1998; Schoenfeld, Meier, and Griffin 1979, Ungar 1992, Williams and Frey 1997). These differences can lead to misinterpretations of the evidence and, consequently, negative ramifications with regard to public discourse and uncertainty about the topic (Dunlap 1998). Ultimately, this misconstruction of the evidence can significantly impact the process of creating and maintaining environmental laws and standards. Researchers have suggested that modern societies must also adjust to communication risks while they attempt to adjust with environmental risks (Weingart, Engels, and Pansegrau 2000). The global climate forum is one example where these disparities have become increasingly apparent, even in countries other than the United

States (Bell 1994). Even though ecological responses to global climate change have been observed within the scientific community (Walther et al. 2002), the media outlets are slow to reinforce this consensus through their television news reporting (Boykoff 2007b). Instead, they have focused on ensuring equal attention is given to both perspectives.

This balance of perspectives can lead some to believe there is a similar uncertainty among scientists. The perception of uncertainty then leads to boundaries between public knowledge and scientific knowledge (Zehr 2000). The newly formed boundaries create somewhat of a cycle of ignorance, as the public gradually becomes discouraged from acquiring scientific knowledge (Ungar 2000). Ultimately, the disengaged public will begin to sense the risk as questionable or irrelevant. This strategy, once it is realized to be a successful one by counter-claimants, can be applied to other sectors of social and environmental life, such as Al Gore and the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.

Contributions to the Literature

The nomination and subsequent awarding of a Nobel Peace Prize is an achievement that rarely is met with criticism. Al Gore's win, however, was one of those rare instances. Some conservative think tanks and journalists contend that Al Gore's selection was politically motivated and an attempt to put pressure on governments to enact environmental policy (Borenstein and Leff 2007). They attempted to discredit the prize itself, as well as further assassinate Al Gore's character and the supporting evidence of global climate change. Similar to previous attacks on social movements, environmental agendas, and the scientific community, these attacks were launched with the aim of introducing skepticism into the debate.

This study contributes to the existing literature on media bias in climate change analysis. Not only does it build upon existing framing theory, but it also builds upon previous research concerning media bias with regards to environmental issues. This investigation extends that particular research past the scientific community and into the social community. The Nobel Peace Prize is a highly regarded honor throughout the world, not merely within scientific communities. This paper will fill an emerging and important hole in not only the scientific literature on the media's framing of environmental issues, but also provide more evidence as to the success counter movements have had in the United States.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to examine how syndicated conservative columnists have discussed the global climate change debate in light of the nominations and awards received by Al Gore and the IPCC in 2007 and 2008. In order to examine this issue, I explore three research questions from the data:

- Which general topics do the authors discuss most frequently?
- If the authors attempt to refute climate scientists' claims, what are the reasons given in claiming anthropocentric global climate change is a non-issue?
- How are the framing strategies of the U.S. conservative media changing from January 1, 2007, to December 30, 2008?

Data

The primary data source of my research was www.townhall.com, a self-identified conservative website offering editorial columns from over 100 syndicated U.S. columnists. The website was established in 1995 as the first conservative web community and is a “place to activate conservative political participation” (Townhall, 2008). Since this self-identified conservative website only distributes articles written by syndicated columnists, I am confident that all the featured columnists share a conservative philosophy. That is, the columnists do not write columns specifically for www.townhall.com, but rather use the website as an additional means of exposure.

Search Techniques

I utilized two search techniques at three separate dates (November 2007, July 2008, and January 2009) in order to maximize results and minimize researcher error. Specifically, by searching the website at three different dates, I increased the likelihood of locating a previously-overlooked article. At every step in the search process, I focused only on articles published by featured columnists from www.townhall.com between January 1, 2007 and December 30, 2008.

The first search technique was used to correct for potential errors in the website's search engine. In order to locate articles, I alphabetized the names of all the featured columnists on the website. I then selected each columnist, one at a time, and searched through their entire archived database of articles published in 2007 and 2008. The articles, sorted by year, were identified only by the article title. I read each title in order to locate articles that pertained to global warming. As I examined the titles of the articles, I quickly excluded many articles based on irrelevancy. If I was unsure about any of the articles, I read the first two paragraphs of the article to better understand the article topic before making a decision.

My second search technique adjusted for possible errors in my initial search technique. I employed the search engine on www.townhall.com to search for any overlooked articles. I searched six general keywords in order to find relevant articles: 1) global warming; 2) Al Gore; 3) IPCC; 4) climate change; 5) Warner-Lieberman; and 6) Kyoto Protocol. All six of these keywords are common public rhetoric and produced over 200 article results each. There was no filter allowing me to narrow the search for articles published in 2007 and 2008, so there was an abundance of irrelevant articles

using this search process. I analyzed the first 200 articles of each search result similar to the first technique: I scanned the article title, as well as the first two paragraphs of the article, to determine topic relevancy. While these search methods are not completely exhaustive of all the articles on www.townhall.com, I am confident it has provided me with the vast majority of relevant articles for this project. These two search techniques resulted in a total of 99 relevant articles published between January 1, 2007, and December 31, 2008¹.

Methods

General Topics

The first research question dealt with coverage for each of the articles. Before I began to look for general themes within the articles, I listed out eight distinct topics for which I would search based on key terms popular in public rhetoric. These topics were 1) any reference to global climate change (i.e., “global warming”, “climate change”, “anthropogenic climate change”); 2) negative depictions of the climate science data (i.e., “junk science”); 3) references to the IPCC; 4) mentions of the Nobel Peace Prize, specifically the nominations and selections of Al Gore and the IPCC; 5) depictions of Al Gore; 6) discussion of the Oscars, with specific references to Al Gore’s 2007 Best Documentary nomination and win for *An Inconvenient Truth*; 7) dialogue referring to the Kyoto Protocol (i.e., negative consequences of Kyoto Protocol); 8) discussion of the proposed 2008 Warner-Lieberman energy bill. I then added one additional category to account for any climate change policy—global or domestic—that is not specifically mentioned by name or is not the Kyoto Protocol or the Warner-Lieberman bill.

¹ The complete list of articles, including author, title, and publication date is listed as Appendix 1.

After analyzing a small portion of the articles, I expanded my list of topics to fourteen in order to achieve greater clarification in my results. I divided the references to global climate change category into six smaller, more specific, categories: 1) references to global warming, 2) anthropogenic global warming, 3) the greenhouse effect, 4) greenhouse gases, 5) climate change, and 6) anthropogenic climate change. This allowed me to better understand and track changes to the terminology used by columnists when describing climate change in their articles. After coding the columns based on these categories, I collapsed anthropogenic climate change and climate change into one category and removed the greenhouse effect and greenhouse gases categories from the analysis. To analyze the coverage of these relevant topics, I simply counted the number of occurrences of each topic in the articles and kept track of the monthly totals across the two-year stretch.

Counter Claims to Global Climate Change

For this topic, I created a coding scheme based on a list of the top 50 skeptic arguments encountered online.² This list gave me a coding template and allowed me to examine the counter claims posed by the authors. I first analyzed all 99 articles with this list and coded each article with the corresponding alternative claim from the list of 50. After doing so, I then collapsed similar claims down to nine categories, which made it much easier to present the data and understand trends in the media³. I condensed the list of 50 into the following claims (with an example for each one):

² The list was accessed April 24, 2008. It is available at www.skepticalscience.com/argument.php and included as Appendix 2.

³ The list of condensed claims, along with the original claims which make up the collapsed category, is included as Appendix 3

1) Sun/Solar Cycles:

“In fact, if you believe the global warming hysterics, the sun’s mighty powers to affect our climate have been eclipsed by man’s accelerating greenhouse gas output...[t]he mighty sun is in charge of what happens on puny Earth – not humans or their fires” (Steigerwald 2007).

2) Earth’s Natural Processes:

“There is also no question that the earth can warm or cool. It has done both at one time or another for thousands of years, even before there were SUVs. If there had never been any global warming before, we wouldn’t be able to enjoy Yosemite Valley today for it was once buried under thousands of feet of ice” (Sowell 2007).

3) There is No Consensus:

“Sober scientists privately say such claims [by Gore] are exaggerated...Mr. Gore defended his work as fundamentally accurate. But it’s increasingly clear that far from the ‘consensus’ on global warming we are told exists, scientists are having a broad and rich debate on many aspects of it” (Fund 2007).

4) The Climate is Actually Cooling:

“Weather ‘varies.’ But scientists aren’t celebrating our decade of cooling. Since the planet hasn’t been getting any hotter, they now talk about how the problem is ‘global climate change.’ But that shouldn’t be a concern. The climate is always changing, and there’s simply no way for humans to alter that” (Tucker 2008).

5) There is Unreliable Evidence or Unreliable Models Being Used:

“Predictions of catastrophe depend on models. Models depend on assumptions about complex planetary systems – from ocean currents to cloud formation – that

no one fully understands. Which is why the models are inherently flawed and forever changing. The doomsday scenarios posit a cascade of events, each with a certain probability. The multiple improbability of their simultaneous occurrence renders all such predictions entirely speculative” (Krauthammer 2008).

6) Based on Past Inaccuracies, Climate Scientists Cannot Be Trusted:

“In addition, the mainstream media fails to report that the earth’s temperature dramatically rose from 1900 through the 1940s, causing scientists to recommend immediate and drastic action. And then, before we could marshal the resources to take major steps of action, the temperature fell through the 1970s. Some of you may remember magazine covers and headlines warning us of global cooling. Once again, immediate and drastic action was recommended” (Jackson, Jr. 2007).

7) Al Gore is Wrong:

“It is hard to say which of Al Gore’s awards seems more improbable: his Academy Award, although he does not possess a single skill required for filmmaking, or his Nobel Peace Prize for his work on global warming, although he has no technical skills in that area and he has misled the world profoundly as to the danger” (Blankley 2007).

8) Global Warming is Actually Beneficial:

“The glaciers may be receding, but the polar bear population is growing, alarmingly in some Canadian Indian villages. Though more people on our planet of 6 billion may die of heat, estimates are that many more may be spared death from the cold. The Arctic ice cap may be shrinking, but that may mean year-round passage through northern Canadian water from the Atlantic to the Pacific

and the immense resources of the Arctic made more accessible to man”

(Buchanan 2007).

9) There are Man-Made Causes of Global Warming, but it is not because of Carbon Dioxide:

“Turns out, cows are the climate’s worst enemy. Cows, it seems, are culpable for 18 percent of greenhouse gases. Their cud-chewing, flatulence and burping create giant clouds of methane” (Shapiro 2007).

Changes to the Framing Strategies

In examining the potentially shifting frames of the U.S. conservative media when describing issues related to anthropogenic climate change, I separated the articles into four major periods, indicated by the article publication date: 1) January-June 2007; 2) July-December 2007; 3) January-June 2008; 4) July-December 2008. Each quarter of my data set includes at least one significant event which could dictate the saliency of certain topics among media members.

Stage 1: January 2007-June 2007

The January-June 2007 time frame will cover two significant incidents: the Nobel Peace Prize nomination of Al Gore and the IPCC as well as Al Gore’s Oscar win for *An Inconvenient Truth*. As Al Gore and the IPCC are prominent within this six-month period, it is expected that they will be the primary focus for the conservative columnists who published articles during this time. It is also expected that the Academy Awards will be criticized and ridiculed.

Stage 2: July 2007-December 2007

The July-December 2007 time frame contained Al Gore and the IPCC's Nobel Peace Prize win. While Al Gore and the IPCC remained a hot topic because of their achievements in 2007, it is expected that the same anger in the first six-month stretch related to Gore's Oscar win will flare up again surrounding the Nobel Peace Prize win.

Stage 3: January 2008-June 2008

Articles were separated in the January-June 2008 because it was during this time when the Warner-Lieberman bill was not only being proposed but also debated on the Senate floor. This domestic policy was incredibly relevant at the time, as was the International Conference on Climate Change, which was held in New York in February 2008. This conference gave climate skeptics a forum for airing their counter-arguments and was highly publicized and promoted by conservative media outlets such as Fox News. Based on these two events, it is expected that domestic policies will become more salient.

Stage 4: July 2008-December 2008

The final category covers the 2008 U.S. Presidential election, as well as commentary on potential environmental policy changes after the election of President Obama. It is expected that policies will become more relevant during this period, as both presidential candidates were in support of a domestic climate change policy.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

General Topics⁴

I analyzed 99 articles relevant to global warming written by conservative syndicated columnists featured on www.townhall.com. Of those 99 articles, 60 were published in 2007 and 39 were published in 2008. There were 57 different authors of the 99 columns and the two months with the most articles published were February and March 2007.

The term “global warming” was used in 92% of the articles, compared to 26% for “climate change” and only 6% for “anthropogenic global warming.” It appears the columnists are using the most commonly known term to describe climate change. It was expected that anthropogenic global warming be the least popular term used in the columns, as that term implies human influence on global warming, which does not coincide with the Republican or conservative views of climate change.

There were negative references to climate science in 12% of the articles analyzed, which were fewer than the references to the IPCC (18%). That suggests that certain columnists were not always associating the IPCC with “junk science” or other less legitimate sources of climate science in the articles. Both of these categories were prominent in 2007 articles and were non-existent in all but a handful of 2008 articles. The Nobel Peace Prize and the Oscars were discussed nearly equally in the articles: 12% for the Nobel Peace Prize compared to 10% for the Oscars. Almost all of the references

⁴ Tables and bar charts showing the distribution of each general topic by publication month can be found in Appendix 4

occurred in 2007, which is expected because of the awards received by Al Gore and the IPCC.

The Kyoto Protocol (18% of the articles) was discussed more than the Warner-Lieberman bill (7%) or any other unspecified policy (15%). This suggests that the Kyoto Protocol, even almost 10 years after being discussed by the Clinton Administration, still is salient with the conservative media and in the public lexicon. Most of the Kyoto Protocol references were in 2007, while nearly all of the Warner-Lieberman and the other policy references occurred in 2008.

Counter Claims to Global Climate Change⁵

Of the 99 articles, there were five claims that were more frequent than any other claim. The claim that Al Gore got it wrong was the most frequent, appearing in 29% of the articles analyzed. Most of these references occurred in 2007, around the months when he received the Academy Award for Best Documentary and when he received the Nobel Peace Prize. It was expected that Al Gore would be a popular alternative claim in 2007, but his name was still referenced in almost 20% of the articles published in 2008.

Four claims were nearly as prominent as the Al Gore claim. The claim of unreliable evidence and the one claiming that there is no consensus among scientists were both equally used (24% each), while the unreliable evidence was more prominent in 2008 than the consensus-based argument. This could be explained by the impact felt by the Heartland Institute's International Conference on Climate Change in early 2008, where prominent skeptics disputed the evidence presented by mainstream climate scientists. Two other claims, the climate is actually cooling and climate change can be explained by

⁵ Tables and bar charts showing the distribution of each counter claim by publication month can be found in Appendix 5.

Earth's natural processes, were found in 22% of the articles in 2007 and 2008. The climate is cooling argument was also much more prominent in early 2008 than any other claim, which could again reflect claims made at the International Conference on Climate Change.

Two other claims were used primarily in 2007 but were almost non-existent in 2008: 1) warming can be explained by sun/solar cycles and 2) climate scientists should not be trusted due to past inaccuracies. The sun/solar cycles claim was found in 12% of the articles, but only in one article published in 2008. This suggests that perhaps columnists recognized this argument was not resonating with the public. Similarly, the argument citing past inaccuracies of climate scientists was used far less in 2008 than 2007. This explanation is similar to one George Will stated in one of his 2009 columns and he was met with severe backlash from outraged readers and other journalists.

Two of the claims were used far less than any other claims. The explanation that global warming is beneficial was found in 4% of the articles, as was the claim that global warming has man-made causes other than carbon dioxide. I believe the low percentage of these claims can be attributed to the fact that both claims confirm the idea that climate change does indeed exist. It should be no surprise that these two claims were least prominent, as they both suggest not only that climate change is occurring, but that humans could or should alter their lives because of it (whether it be to prevent further damage or to maximize potential benefits from climate change).

Changes in the Framing Strategies⁶

STAGE ONE

Stage one refers to all articles published from January 2007 through June 2007. There were 40 articles in this stage, written by 30 different columnists. The 40 articles were spread out over all six months; however, most of the articles (72.5%) were written in either February or March 2007, which coincides with Al Gore's Academy Award for *An Inconvenient Truth* and the deadline for submitting nominations for the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

General Topics

The term “global warming” was used in 92.5% of the articles, compared to “climate change” used in only 30% of the articles. While “global warming” may have been a more salient term at the time, I believe it to be a more popular option for the conservative columnists because it implies a warming trend, whereas “climate change” simply involves fluctuation. Of the policies discussed, the Kyoto Protocol appeared more often than any other policy, with only four other policies being mentioned in the six month span.

There were ten articles with negative references to climate science and nine articles referencing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. There was only one reference to the Nobel Peace Prize, compared to eight to the Oscars. There are two possible reasons for this: first, the Oscars were more heavily publicized than were the Nobel Peace Prize nominations. Second, the Oscars provide a much easier target for the conservative columnists to de-legitimize. The perception of a liberal bias in Hollywood

⁶ Bar charts illustrating the distribution of topics discussed and counter claims for each stage can be found in Appendix 6

was already in place for the conservative columnists, whereas the same perceptions were not as salient toward the Nobel Peace Prize.

An overwhelming majority of articles (65%) referenced Al Gore more than any other topic, which would seem appropriate considering the prominence of the Academy Awards during this stage. The columnists did reference Al Gore three times more than they did the Academy Awards. This implies that they are attempting to associate Al Gore to issues of global warming more so than any other topic observed. Al Gore is most likely the most polarizing topic and the columnists perhaps realized that they could easily convince their readers that global warming was irrelevant by labeling Al Gore as less credible.

Counter Claims to Global Climate Change

Three counter claims were more prominent in stage one than any other claim. Columnists wrote that there is no consensus among climate scientists in 40% of the articles published in stage one. They also argue that Al Gore was wrong in 35% of the articles. This was expected, as Al Gore's Oscar nomination and win was a salient topic at the time. The third claim used most often, that Earth's natural processes are to blame, was found in 33% of the articles written in stage one. The majority of articles claiming either no consensus or claiming global warming was an example of Earth's natural processes were published in February and March 2007, which coincides with Al Gore's award for *An Inconvenient Truth*.

The claims that the climate is actually cooling and that there is unreliable evidence were referenced in 23% of the articles. Two other claims were used nearly as often, as the sun/solar cycle claim and the past inaccuracies claim were found in 20% of

the articles. The two least prominent claims, that anthropogenic global warming is occurring but not because of carbon dioxide and that global warming is beneficial, were found in 10% and 3% of the articles, respectively. This again implies that conservative columnists were less likely to admit that anthropogenic global warming might actually be occurring.

STAGE TWO

Stage two refers to all articles published from July 2007 through December 2007. There were 20 articles in this stage, written by 18 different columnists. The 20 articles were spread out over a five-month span through November 2007, as there were no articles relevant to global warming published in December 2007. As the 2008 Presidential nomination campaign races drew more public attention, there were fewer columns written about topics such as global warming. Most of the articles (50%) were written in October 2007, which coincides with the announcement that Al Gore and the IPCC had received the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

General Topics

The term “global warming” was used in every article published in stage two, compared to “climate change” being used in only 10% of the articles and “anthropogenic global warming” not used in any of the articles. This again could reflect an agenda by the conservative media to dictate which terms are used, as global warming carries a different connotation than climate change does. References to the Kyoto Protocol dropped in stage two to 15%, while references to other policies increased to 20% of the articles.

As was the case in stage one, the majority of conservative columnists (75%) cited Al Gore in the articles written in stage two. This topic was again by far the most

prominent of issues discussed across all published articles. The Nobel Peace Prize (35%) and the IPCC (25%) were also discussed at a fairly high rate. This can be attributed to the announcement in October 2007 that Al Gore and the IPCC won the Nobel Peace Prize. The Academy Awards was still a salient topic (20%), although was mentioned more in passing than how it was discussed in stage one. There was only one article with negative references to climate science in stage two, down from ten articles in stage one.

Counter Claims to Global Climate Change

There were three counter claims that were more prominent than any others in stage two. Conservative columnists blamed Al Gore for misleading the public in 40% of the articles published in stage two, much more than any other reason cited. Again, this should be expected as Al Gore was still garnering mainstream media attention for his Nobel Peace Prize win. The columnists also cited unreliable evidence (25%) and Earth's natural processes (20%) as reasons why global climate change was not an issue.

Three other stage two claims were found much less frequently than in stage one. The argument of no consensus was found in 15% of the articles, down from 40% in stage one. The sun/solar cycles case was made in 15% of the articles, as compared to 20% in stage one. The idea that scientists should not be trusted because of past inaccuracies was used in 10% of the articles, as opposed to 20% in stage one. A fourth explanation, that global warming is beneficial, saw an increase from stage one, going from 3% to 10% in stage two. The two claims with the least prominence in stage two were arguments that the climate is actually cooling (5%) and that man-made causes other than carbon dioxide are the reason behind the warming trends (0%).

STAGE THREE

Stage three refers to all articles published from January 2008 through June 2008. There were 27 articles in this stage, written by 24 different columnists. The 27 articles were spread out over a six-month span through June 2008, with most of the articles (37%) published in May 2008. This month corresponds with the approximate time when the Warner-Lieberman bill was being introduced and debated on the U.S. Senate floor, as well as the time when John McCain appeared to have secured the Republican presidential nomination. McCain's victory in the primary signaled to conservative columnists that both candidates in the Democrat and Republican parties acknowledged global warming as a problem and sought legislation to address potential causes.

General Topics

Global warming (85%) was used in almost all 27 articles, while climate change was found in 33% of the articles in stage three. Once again, anthropogenic global warming was nearly non-existent, as it was found in only one article of the 27. The Kyoto Protocol was discussed in 15% of the articles, while the Warner-Lieberman bill was referenced in nearly as many articles (11%). Stage three continues the trend in stage two of policies other than the two aforementioned policies being discussed at a higher percentage (41%).

Al Gore remained a salient topic for the conservative columnists in stage three, even though he did not receive nearly the amount of mainstream media coverage in this stage as he had in the previous two stages. The Oscars were not referenced at all, although the Nobel Peace Prize was discussed in two of the articles in stage three. The

IPCC was referenced in three articles, while there was only one article with a negative reference to climate science.

Counter Claims to Global Climate Change

Three claims were found more frequently than any other claims. The most common explanation, that the climate is actually cooling, was found in 33% of the articles in stage three. This is a large increase from stage two (5%) and could possibly reflect arguments made at the International Conference on Climate Change in early 2008. The second most prominent claim was that of unreliable evidence (26%). This explanation, along with the Al Gore argument (22%), was yet again one of the more popular claims, similar to the results from stage two.

The argument of no consensus was found in 15% of the articles, the same percentage as was found in stage two. The explanation that Earth's natural processes are the cause was found in 11% of the articles, down from 33% in stage one and 20% in stage two. Only two articles (8%) cited past inaccuracies of climate scientists as a counter claim, which is the same amount of articles making that case in stage two. The sun/solar cycles argument and the global warming is beneficial argument were both found in only 4% of the articles, while the man-made causes other than carbon dioxide explanation was once again not found in any articles.

STAGE FOUR

Stage four refers to all articles published from July 2008 through December 2008. There were 12 articles in this stage, written by 10 different columnists. The 18 articles were spread out over a six-month span, although no articles were published in either August or September 2008. Again, this can be explained by the increased salience of the

2008 Presidential campaign, as most conservative columnists were writing about that topic more than any other. Most of the articles (60%) were written in July 2008, which supports the notion that as the presidential election approached, it became the primary focus of many conservative columnists.

General Topics

Keeping with the trend in the first three stages, global warming was used in nearly every article published in stage four (92%). Climate change was discussed in 25% of the articles, as was anthropogenic climate change. While this is the largest percentage of articles including the term anthropogenic, there was still a very small number of articles using the term. The Kyoto Protocol and Warner-Lieberman bill were both discussed twice in this stage, while policies other than those two were found in six (50%) of the articles published.

Al Gore remained a salient topic once again in stage four, as he has been in all three previous stages, as 50% of the articles discussed him while talking about global warming. This indicates that the conservative columnists have been able to recognize that his name resonates loudly with their readers and perhaps it is easier for the columnists to make disparaging comments about Al Gore than it is to produce scientific evidence refuting global warming. No columnists discussed the Oscars, the Nobel Peace Prize, or made negative references to climate science, while only one article referenced the IPCC.

Counter Claims to Global Climate Change

The two most common claims in stage four were the unreliable evidence argument and the argument that the climate is actually cooling. Both claims were found

in 24% of the articles, which is only a slight drop-off from their stage three percentages. Four other claims were found in stage four articles. The justification that climate change is one of Earth's natural processes was cited in 16% of the articles, a marginal increase from stage three. Al Gore was blamed in only one article (8%), down from six references in stage three. Only one columnist cited past inaccuracies of climate scientists, which was approximately the same percentage as stage three. The claim of no consensus was found in only one article as well, down from four articles in the previous stage. The other three claims, sun/solar cycles, global warming is beneficial, and man-made causes other than carbon dioxide are to blame, were not found in any articles in stage four. This is consistent with stage three, when those claims were also the least frequently found.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The American anti-environmental movement—itsself a component of the conservative movement—has found strength in resisting reflexive modernization through the support of five key actors: the fossil fuel industry, conservative think tanks, contrarian scientists, conservative politicians, and conservative media. As the anti-environmental movement has shifted its focus from broad environmental skepticism to more specific climate skepticism, it has relied more heavily on the conservative media outlets to promote agendas of anti-reflexivity which attempt to uphold the Dominant Social Paradigm. Over the past twenty years, with the emergence of twenty-four hour cable news networks, certain conservative political pundits, specifically syndicated columnists, have become influential in swaying public opinion. As these conservative syndicated columnists gain heightened prominence in shaping public discourse, they should also be held accountable for the claims they are making.

As the example with George Will illustrates, newspapers often allow star columnists the freedom to write about the topics of their choice. As was the case with Will, he misrepresented scientific evidence to strengthen his argument. His article was not properly fact-checked and the erroneous statements would have remained unnoticed if not for a collection of vocal activists, scientists, and journalists. This example highlights the importance of including columnists and their op-ed pieces when researching media bias. As is the case with global warming, the conservative anti-

environmental movement has a distinct position on the topic and will utilize the conservative media to push its agenda.

Over the two-year period from January 2007-December 2008, the conservative syndicated columnists were consistent in how they broached the topic of global warming. They opted more often to label the phenomenon “global warming” instead of “climate change” or “anthropogenic global warming,” indicating a preference for the term that specified direction (in this instance, warming patterns). In doing so, the columnists could then provide evidence of colder years in recent memory as a way to remove credibility from the climate scientists. Another tactic utilized by the columnists to delegitimize global warming evidence was by negatively characterizing Al Gore. Once the connection between Gore and the evidence was made, the columnists could then attack the messenger instead of attempting to dispute the evidence itself.

As for the counter claims given by the conservative columnists, Al Gore was once again the most prominent justification why global warming should be considered a non-issue. While it was expected that Al Gore would be a salient topic for the columnists because of the awards he received in 2007, it seems as though he was singled out due not only to his high profile but also because of the legitimacy bestowed upon him and the climate scientists in the form of the Oscar and the Nobel Peace Prize. Four other claims were prominent throughout the 24-month period, but most notably were the two claims that were least utilized. These two claims—that global warming is actually beneficial and that man-made causes other than carbon dioxide were to blame—were the only two claims that gave credibility to the idea that global warming was occurring and that something could or should be done in response.

Over the two-year period, most columnists focused on the influence Al Gore has had on the global warming debate. Negative references to climate science peaked in early 2007 but then were almost non-existent after that. After the candidates from the Democratic and Republican parties were selected for the 2008 Presidential election, the columnists began to focus in on potential policies—domestic or international—aimed at alleviating problems associated with global warming. As for the counter claims discussed by the conservative columnists, most of the claims were most common in early 2007 as well, with the exception of a few. The notion that the climate is actually cooling was popular among columnists in early 2007 but then reappeared in early 2008, as did the idea that there is unreliable evidence. The popularity of these two claims might be a reflection of the rhetoric emerging from the Heartland Institute’s International Conference on Climate Change, which was held in early March 2008.

Tracking the manifest content of the conservative columnists provides a small window into the denial machine currently against climate scientists. This study shows that there is a need to research columnists and consider their influence as one would consider other members of the conservative media, whether it be right-wing radio members or political pundits on conservative television stations such as Fox News. There are wide-ranging possibilities for future research aimed at studying conservative columnists, particularly those relating to the latent themes underlying the discussion of these general topics and counter claims.

This study builds upon the growing research surrounding media bias concerning environmental issues. While past research has largely ignored the presence and influence of conservative syndicated columnists, this study has shown a need for future research.

While these columnists may not be as polarizing as members of other media outlets, they still need to be exposed for the erroneous statements they make. By including columnists into future studies of media bias of environmental issues, we may be able to shed more light on the anti-environmental movement's attempt to uphold the Dominant Social Paradigm and resist forms of reflexive modernization.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Date of Article	Author	Title
1/30/2007	Saunders, Debra J.	<i>See No Dissent, Call It Science</i>
2/2/2007	Prelutsky, Burt	<i>Global Warming and Other Urban Legends</i>
2/6/2007	Murchison, Bill	<i>Warm or Not, It's a Climate of Undercooked Legislation</i>
2/6/2007	Driessen, Paul	<i>Global Warming Ethics, Pork and Profits</i>
2/6/2007	Saunders, Debra J.	<i>Hot House Science</i>
2/8/2007	Elder, Larry	<i>Global Warming Turns People Gay</i>
2/9/2007	Lowry, Rich	<i>The Church of Climate Panic</i>
2/10/2007	Giles, Doug	<i>Anna Nicole Smith's Death Blamed on Global Warming</i>
2/13/2007	Sowell, Thomas	<i>Global Hot Air</i>
2/14/2007	Sowell, Thomas	<i>Global Hot Air: Part II</i>
2/15/2007	Sowell, Thomas	<i>Global Hot Air: Part III</i>
2/21/2007	Bozell III, Brent	<i>Al Gore's Recycled Doom</i>
2/22/2007	Fields, Suzanne	<i>The Inconvenient Truth</i>
2/22/2007	Rusher, William	<i>The Global-Warming Hysterics Strike Again</i>
2/28/2007	Coulter, Ann	<i>Let Them Eat Tofu!</i>
3/1/2007	Reagan, Michael	<i>An Inconvenient Fraud</i>
3/1/2007	May, Cliff	<i>Hollywood Shuffle</i>
3/2/2007	Prelutsky, Burt	<i>An Inconvenient Truth about Al Gore</i>
3/6/2007	Harris, Phil	<i>Global Warming: Caused by Pepsi, Coke, and Al Gore?</i>
3/6/2007	Limbaugh, David	<i>Don't Knuckle Under to the Enviro-Luddites</i>
3/7/2007	Blankley, Tony	<i>Al Gore's Remission of Sin</i>
3/15/2007	Elder, Larry	<i>If They're Wrong About Gore-bal Warming, So What?</i>
3/15/2007	Sowell, Thomas	<i>Global Warming Swindle</i>
3/18/2007	Bluey, Robert	<i>The Left-Wing Echo Chamber</i>
3/19/2007	Fund, John	<i>Whose Ox is Gored?</i>
3/20/2007	Hawkins, John	<i>10 Questions for Al Gore and The Global Warming Crowd</i>
3/21/2007	Coulter, Ann	<i>The Coming Ass Age</i>

3/23/2007	Goldberg, Jonah	<i>Turning Up the Heat on Gore</i>
3/25/2007	Jacob, Paul	<i>Winning the War on Warming?</i>
3/26/2007	Barone, Michael	<i>Gore's Faith is Bad Science</i>
3/28/2007	Williams, Walter E.	<i>Global Warming Heresy</i>
3/29/2007	Mackenzie, Ross	<i>Some Inconvenient Realities about Warming</i>
4/2/2007	Jackson Jr., Harry R.	<i>Global Warming on the Hot Seat</i>
4/12/2007	Chapman, Steve	<i>Mistakes to Avoid in the Global Warming Fight</i>
4/12/2007	Will, George	<i>The Media and Global Warming</i>
4/16/2007	Galen, Rich	<i>Global Warming Turns People Gay</i>
5/4/2007	Limbaugh, David	<i>Leftist Thought Control</i>
5/16/2007	Williams, Walter E.	<i>Things To Think About</i>
5/23/2007	Lowry, Rich	<i>The Cost-Free Global Catastrophe</i>
5/30/2007	Shapiro, Ben	<i>What I'm Doing to Stop Global Warming</i>
6/25/2007	Saunders, Debra J.	<i>Hooey Denier Deniers</i>
6/27/2007	Bartlett, Bruce	<i>Climate History</i>
7/9/2007	Carpenter, Amanda	<i>The Gospel of Gore</i>
8/6/2007	Steigerwald, Bill	<i>The Sun, Stupid</i>
8/14/2007	McCaslin, John	<i>Global Warming in the '20s</i>
8/16/2007	Fumento, Michael	<i>Global Warming and James Hansen's Hacks</i>
9/8/2007	Driessen, Paul	<i>Global Warming Insanity?</i>
9/14/2007	Saunders, Debra J.	<i>Wouldn't It Be Nice?</i>
9/26/2007	Williams, Walter E.	<i>Global Warming Hysteria</i>
10/8/2007	Jackson Jr., Harry R.	<i>Global Warming: Scientists, Cynics, and Conservatives</i>
10/12/2007	Charen, Mona	<i>Of Polar Bears and Consensus</i>
10/14/2007	Hill, Austin	<i>Al Gore: Leading Us to Peace? Really?</i>
10/15/2007	Jackson Jr., Harry R.	<i>"Gored" By the Nobel Prize</i>
10/16/2007	Thomas, Cal	<i>Global Warming: The Conservatives' Opportunity</i>
10/17/2007	Blankley, Tony	<i>Gore Wins, Facts Lose</i>
10/17/2007	Bozell III, Brent	<i>Al Gore's Nobel Propoganda Prize</i>
10/23/2007	Buchanan, Patrick J.	<i>Apocalypse Now?</i>
10/24/2007	Stossel, John	<i>The Global-Warming Debate Isn't Over Until It's Over</i>
10/25/2007	Rusher, William	<i>Poor Al Gore</i>

11/1/2007	Carpenter, Amanda	<i>Global Warming Committee Examines Forest Fires</i>
11/2/2007	Prelutsky, Burt	<i>The Nobel Peace for Gorebal Warming</i>
11/2/2007	Greenberg, Paul	<i>Shocking: Scientists Commit Heresy</i>
11/10/2007	Borelli, Tom	<i>Wake Up Wal-Mart: Global Warming Regulation is Bad for Business</i>
1/21/2008	James, Kevin	<i>Global Warming: The All-Purpose Farce to Control Your Life</i>
2/10/2008	Driessen, Paul	<i>Humpty Dumpty Policies</i>
2/12/2008	Sowell, Thomas	<i>The Media and Politics</i>
2/28/2008	Gainor, Dan	<i>A Change in the Climate Discussion</i>
2/28/2008	Sowell, Thomas	<i>Cold Water on "Global Warming"</i>
3/1/2008	Nichols, Nick	<i>A Total Crock of Doo-Doo!</i>
3/4/2008	Steigerwald, Bill	<i>Cool News About Global Warming</i>
3/6/2008	Rusher, William	<i>Global Warming Doubters Strike Back</i>
3/13/2008	Steigerwald, Bill	<i>Elizabeth Kolbert's Alarming Global Warming Sermon</i>
4/19/2008	Driessen, Paul	<i>Global Warming Tax Hikes Headed Your Way</i>
4/24/2008	Menefee, Amy	<i>Voters Don't Care about Global Warming, But They Should</i>
4/24/2008	Hanson, Victor Davis	<i>A New Environmentalism</i>
4/25/2008	Charen, Mona	<i>Let The Eat Ethanol?</i>
5/7/2008	Williams, Walter E.	<i>Environmentalists' Wild Predictions</i>
5/13/2008	Limbaugh, David	<i>John McCain and the Global Warming Train</i>
5/15/2008	Hagelin, Rebecca	<i>Climate Control: A Costly Proposal</i>
5/15/2008	Thomas, Cal	<i>McCain Joins Global Warming Cult</i>
5/16/2008	Tucker, Rich	<i>Global Warming: Playing it Cool</i>
5/18/2008	Bluey, Robert	<i>McCain's Global Warming Plan Threatens Economy</i>
5/21/2008	Stossel, John	<i>McCain Finds His Crisis in Global Warming</i>
5/21/2008	Goldberg, Jonah	<i>The Church of Green</i>
5/22/2008	Will, George	<i>The United States' New Pre-Emptive War</i>
5/31/2008	Krauthammer, Charles	<i>Environmentalists Pick Up Where Communists Left Off</i>
6/4/2008	Bozell III, Brent	<i>Hurricane Lieberman-Warner</i>
6/13/2008	Weyrich, Paul	<i>Global Warming Legislative Possibilities</i>
6/19/2008	Lowry, Rich	<i>The Global Warming Bubble</i>

6/20/2008	Gallagher, Mike	<i>Global Warming Hypocrites</i>
6/26/2008	Tyrrell, Emmett	<i>Tracing the Roots of Environmentalism</i>
7/2/2008	Ridenour, Amy	<i>James Hansen's Hissy Fit</i>
7/9/2008	Weyrich, Paul	<i>A Falst Frenzy on Global Warming</i>
7/23/2008	Strom, David	<i>Do Conservatives Hate Their Children?</i>
7/26/2008	Barone, Michael	<i>A Step Back From Enviro Lunacy</i>
7/29/2008	Feulner, Ed	<i>Kyoto Treaty: Pointless Promises</i>
7/30/2008	Strom, David	<i>Revealed: Conservatives Have Escape Plan for When They Destroy the Earth</i>
10/11/2008	Driessen, Paul	<i>Following Europe's Lead on Climate Change</i>
		<i>ConocoPhillips' Push for Global Warming Regulations Could Lead to the Next Government Takeover</i>
10/18/2008	Borelli, Tom	<i>Obama's Grand Experiment: Global Warming Cap-and-Trade Policy</i>
11/29/2008	Borelli, Tom	
11/29/2008	Giles, Doug	<i>The Global Warming Goons Want Your Little Ones</i>
12/17/2008	Bialosky, Bruce	<i>What Has Al Gore Wrought?</i>
12/24/2008	Williams, Walter E.	<i>Global Warming Rope-A-Dope</i>

APPENDIX 2

1. It's the sun
2. Climate's changed before
3. There is no consensus
4. It's cooling
5. Models are unreliable
6. Surface temp is unreliable
7. Ice age predicted in the 70s
8. We're heading into an ice age
9. It hasn't warmed since 1998
10. Al Gore got it wrong
11. CO2 lags temperature
12. Global warming is good
13. Antarctica is cooling/gaining ice
14. Hurricanes aren't linked to global warming
15. Mars is warming
16. It's freaking cold!
17. 1934 - hottest year on record
18. It's cosmic rays
19. Urban Heat Island effect exaggerates warming
20. Greenland was green
21. Other planets are warming
22. Water vapor is the most powerful greenhouse gas
23. Hockey stick was debunked
24. Arctic icemelt is a natural cycle
25. Human CO2 is a tiny % of CO2 emissions
26. We're coming out of an ice age
27. It warmed before 1940 when CO2 was low
28. Mt. Kilimanjaro's ice loss is due to land use
29. It cooled mid-century
30. Glaciers are growing
31. There's no empirical evidence
32. Oceans are cooling
33. Satellites show no warming in the troposphere
34. Climate sensitivity is low
35. If scientists can't predict weather, how can they predict long term climate?
36. Greenland is cooler/gaining ice
37. Neptune is warming
38. Jupiter is warming
39. It's Pacific Decadal Oscillation

40. Less than half of published scientists endorse global warming
41. It's the ocean
42. It's volcanoes (or lack thereof)
43. CO2 measurements are suspect
44. It's aerosols
45. Can animals and plants adapt to global warming?
46. It's methane
47. It's Solar Cycle Length
48. Naomi Oreskes' study on consensus was flawed
49. Water levels correlate with sunspots
50. Solar cycles cause global warming

APPENDIX 3

Sun/Solar Cycles

1, 15, 18, 21, 37, 38, 47, 49, 50

Natural Earthly Processes

2, 20, 24, 26, 34, 39, 41, 42

Consensus-based

3, 40, 48

It's actually cooling

4, 8, 13, 16, 30, 32, 36

Unreliable Evidence/Models

5, 6, 9, 11, 17, 19, 23, 29, 31, 33, 35, 43

Past Inaccuracies

7

Al Gore

10

Global Warming is Beneficial

12

Carbon Dioxide is not the Problem

22, 25, 27, 44, 46

Residual Non-Coded Categories

14, 28, 45

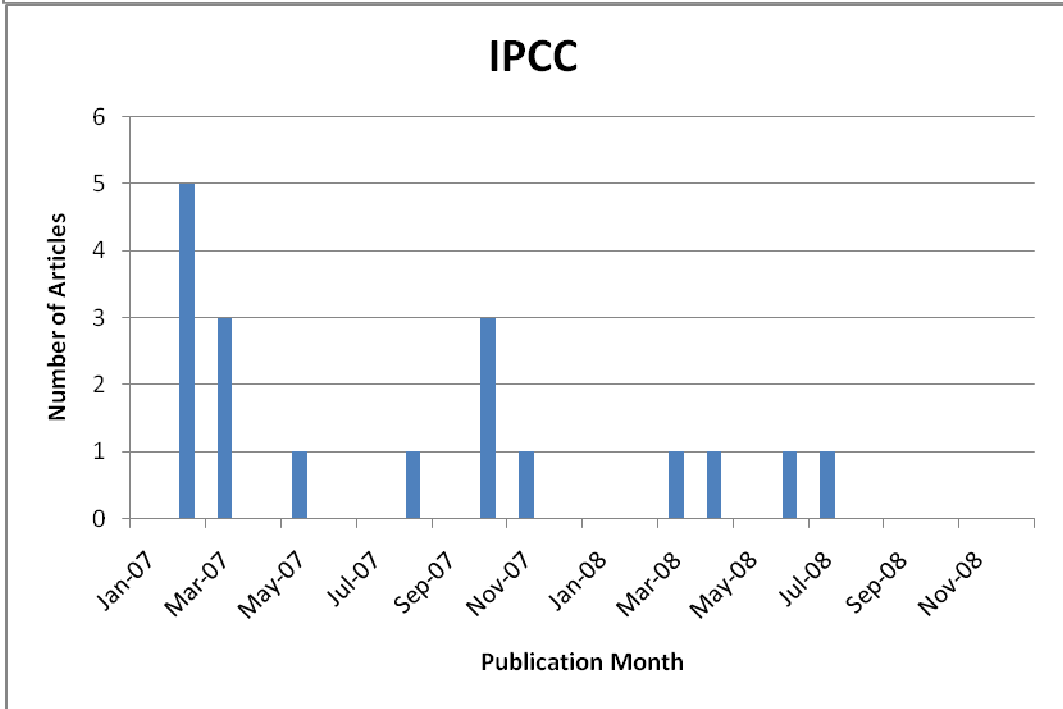
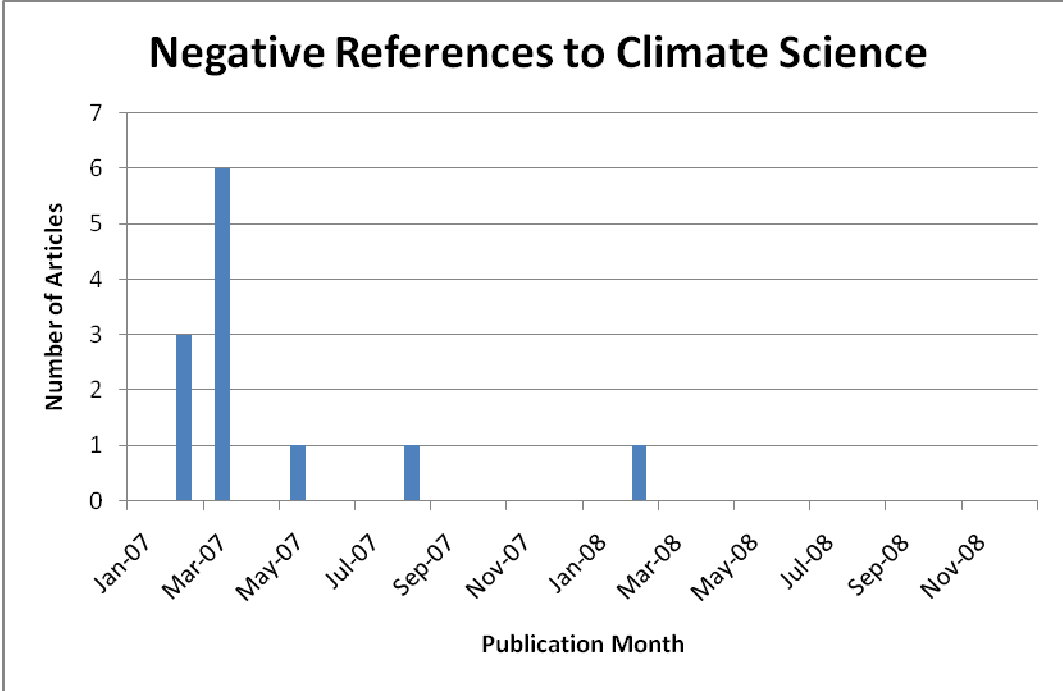
APPENDIX 4

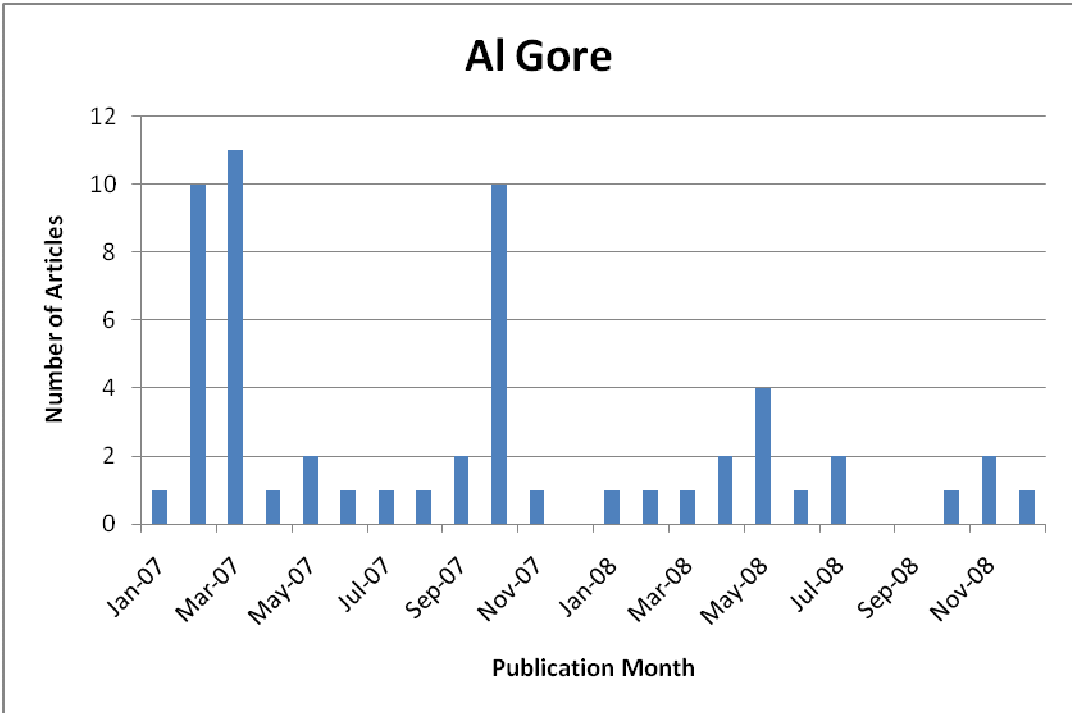
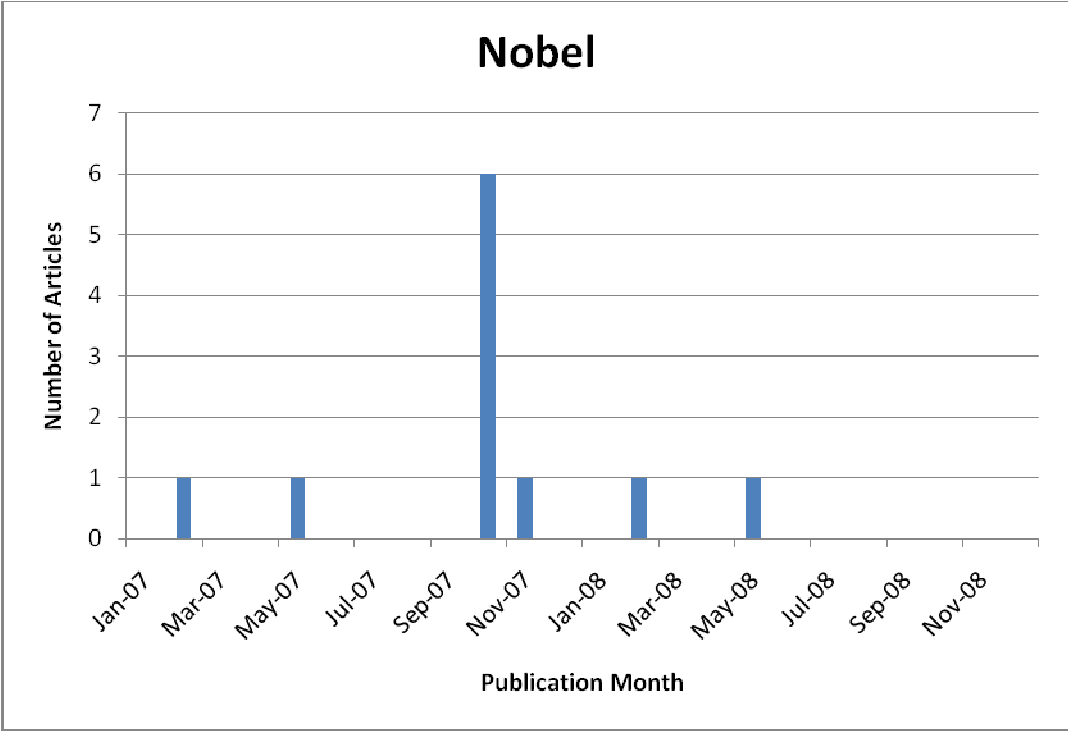
Table 1. Frequency of Relevant Topics Discussed by Conservative Syndicated Columnists by Publication Month in 2007 (N=60)

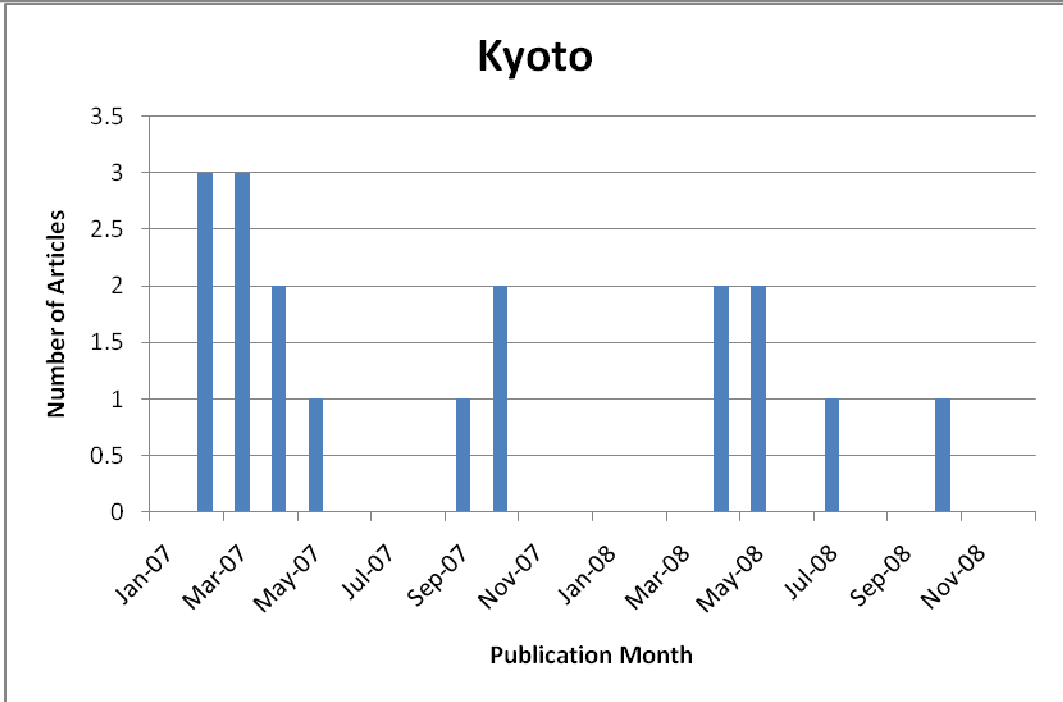
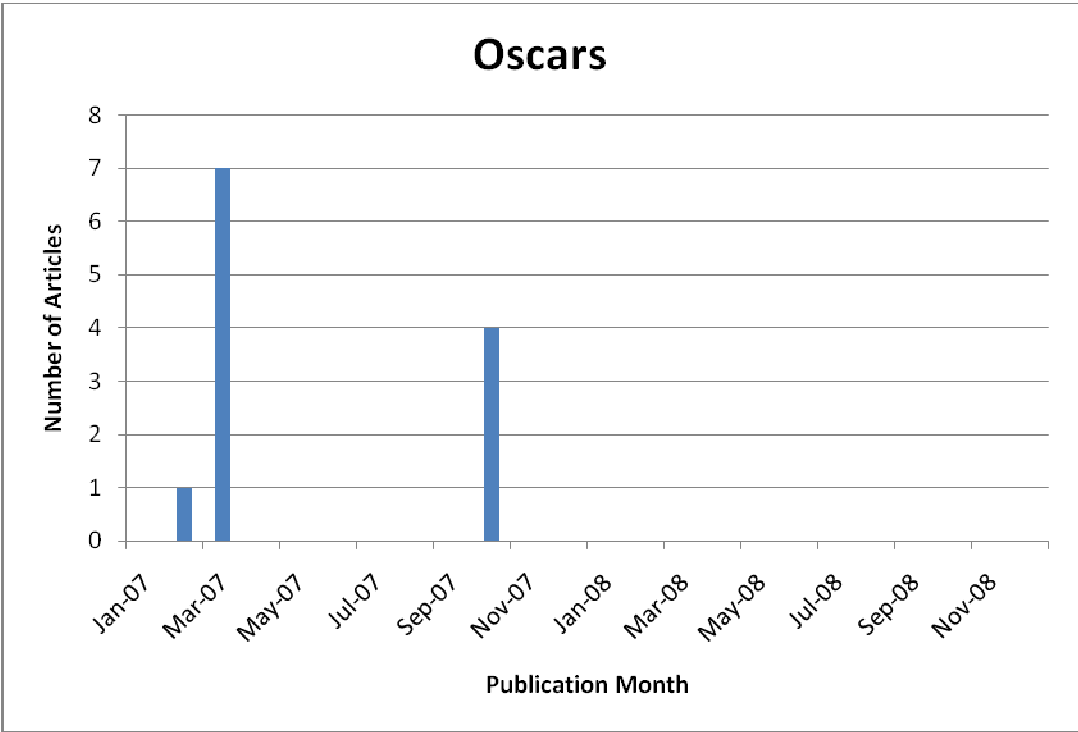
Month	Global Warming	Anthropogenic Global Warming	Climate Change	Negative References to Climate Science	IPCC	Nobel Peace Prize	Al Gore	Oscars	Kyoto	Warner-Lieberman	Other Policies
January 2007	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
February 2007	14	1	2	3	5	1	10	1	3	0	1
March 2007	14	0	4	6	3	0	11	7	3	0	2
April 2007	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1
May 2007	3	0	3	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0
June 2007	2	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
July 2007	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
August 2007	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
September 2007	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
October 2007	10	0	1	0	3	6	10	4	2	0	0
November 2007	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
December 2007	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2007 Totals	57	2	14	11	14	8	41	12	12	0	8

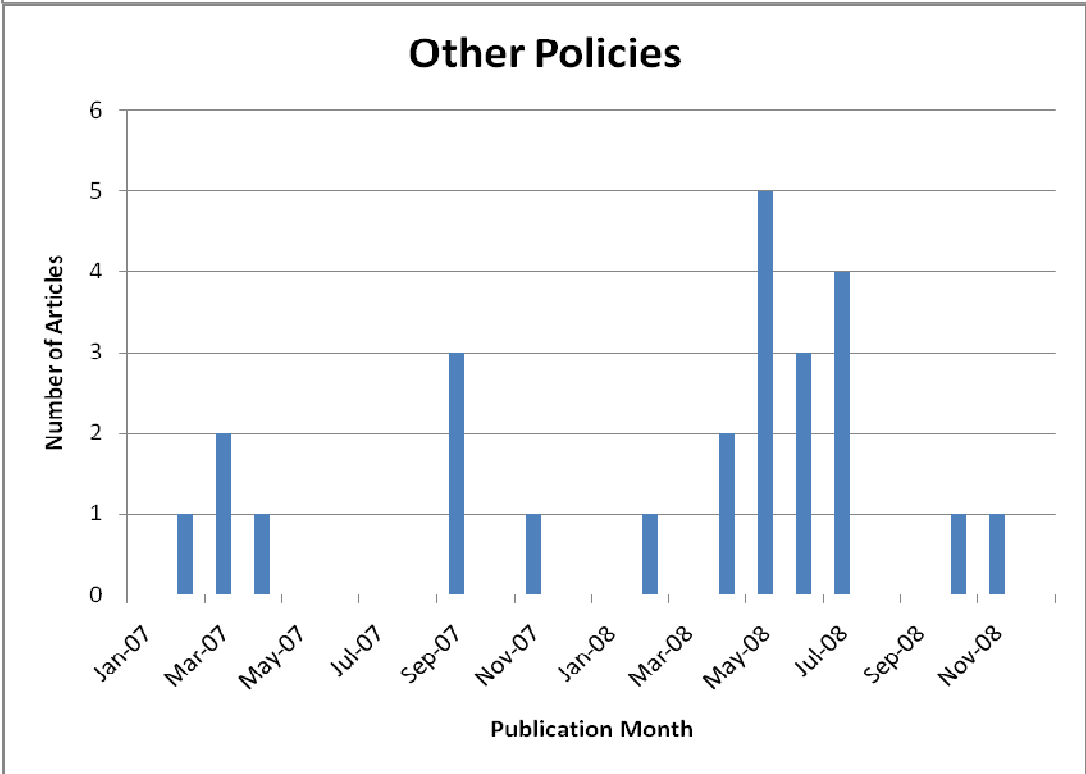
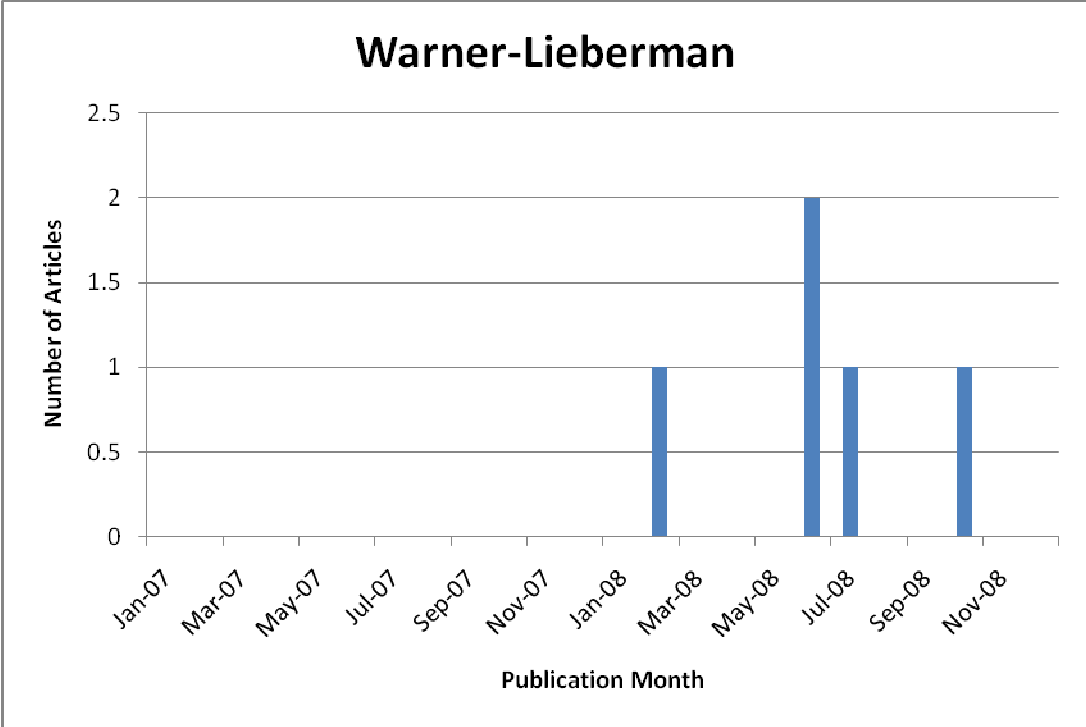
Table 2. Frequency of Relevant Topics Discussed by Conservative Syndicated Columnists by Publication Month in 2008 (N=39)

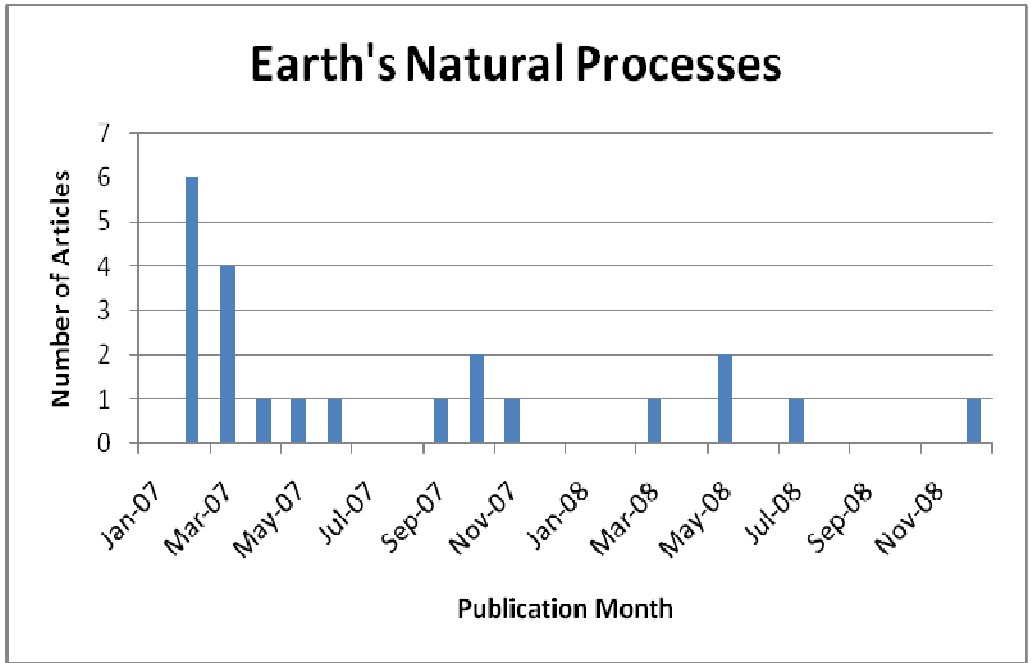
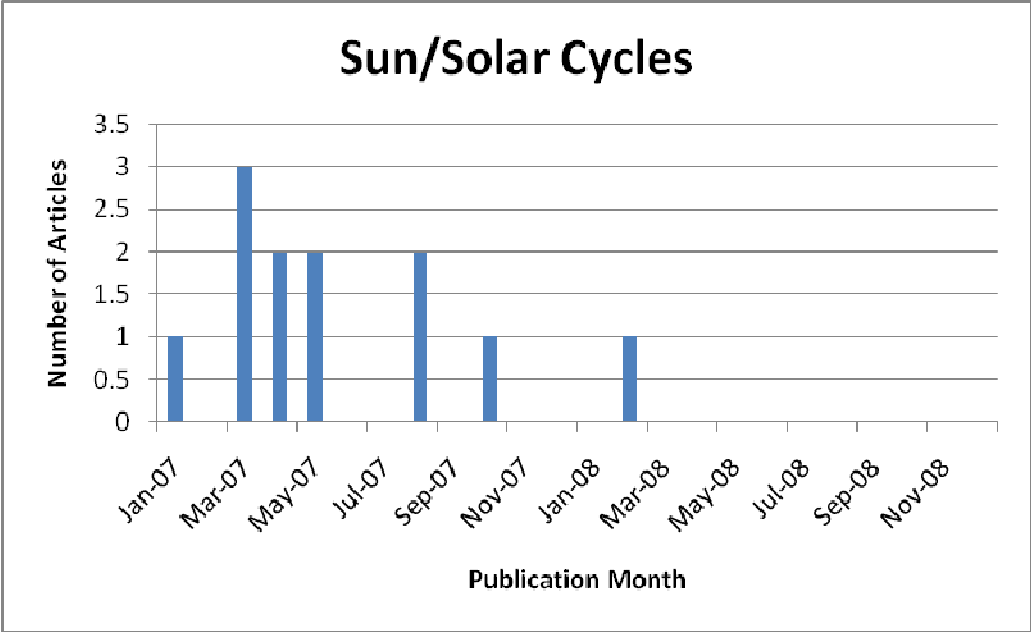
Month	Global Warming	Anthropogenic Global Warming	Climate Change	Negative References to Climate Science	IPCC	Nobel Peace Prize	Al Gore	Oscars	Kyoto	Warner-Lieberman	Other Policies
January 2008	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
February 2008	3	0	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
March 2008	4	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
April 2008	2	0	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	2
May 2008	8	1	3	0	0	1	4	0	2	0	5
June 2008	5	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	3
July 2008	5	2	1	0	1	0	2	0	1	1	4
August 2008	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
September 2008	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
October 2008	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
November 2008	2	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
December 2008	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
2008 Totals	34	4	12	1	4	2	16	0	6	7	17



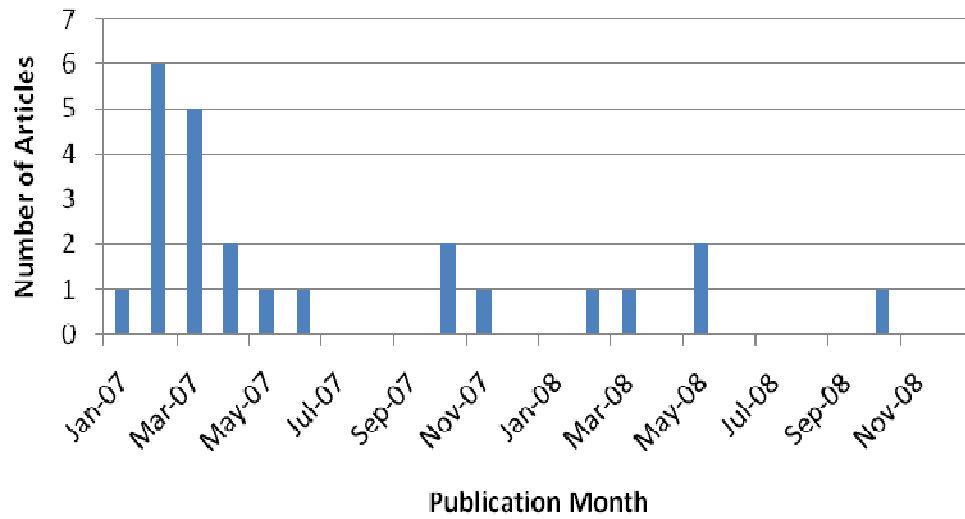




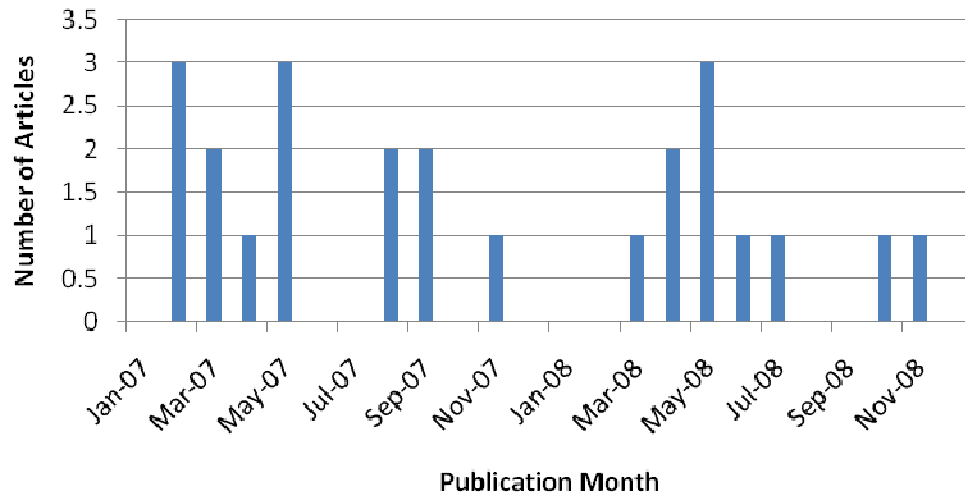


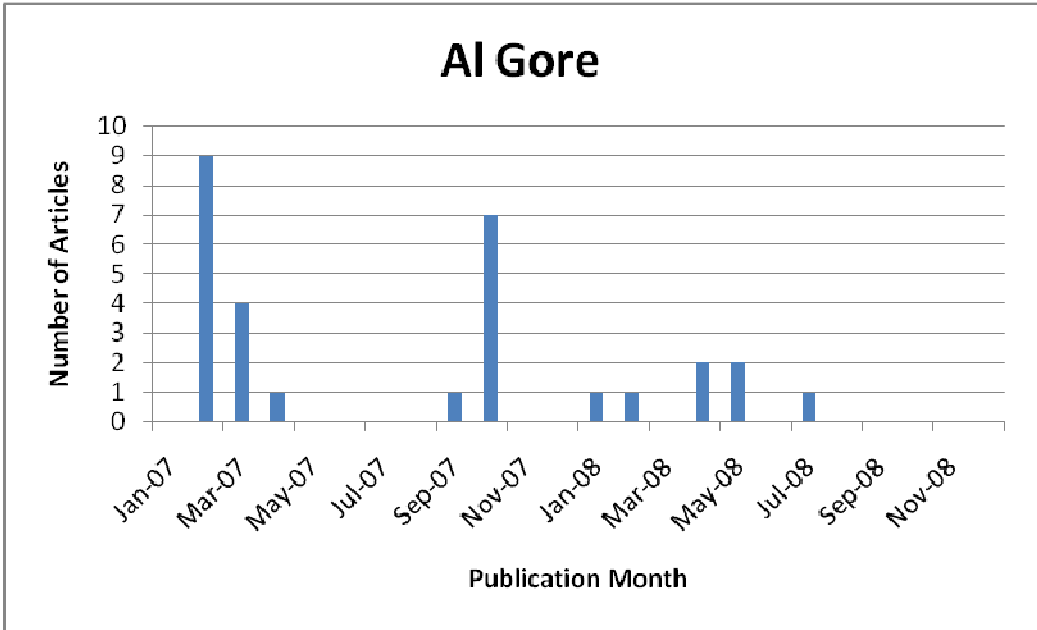
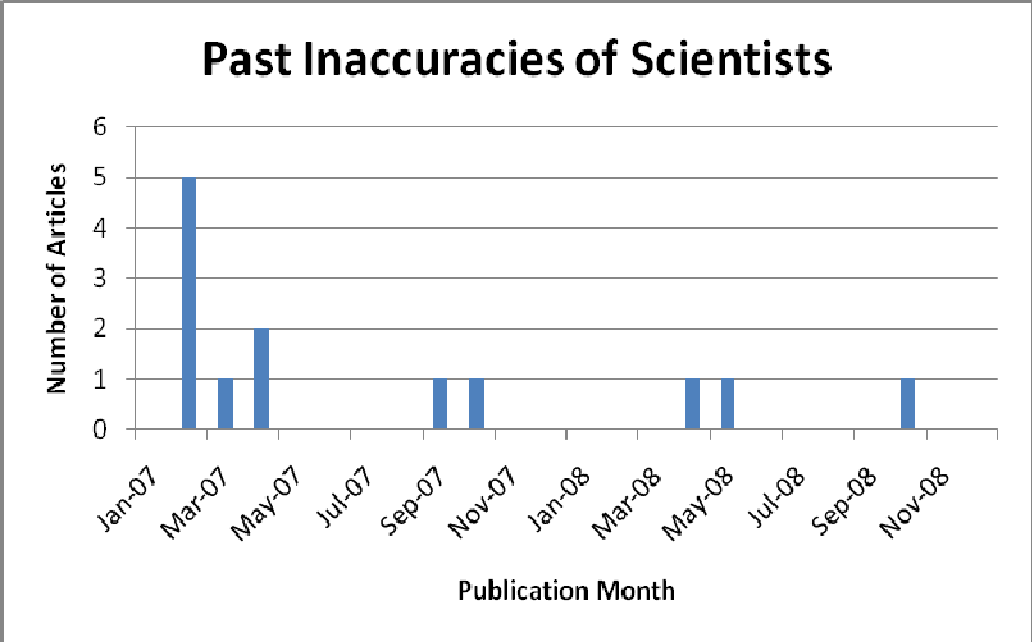


There is No Consensus

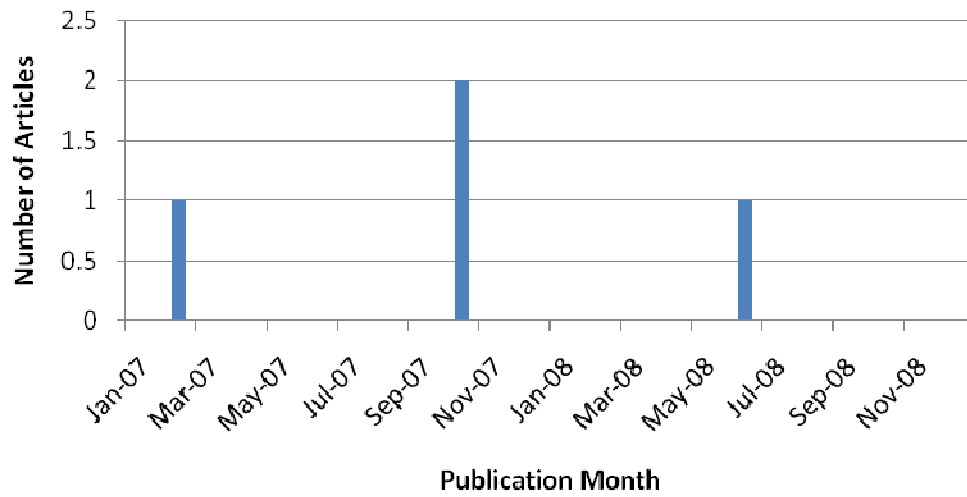


Unreliable Evidence

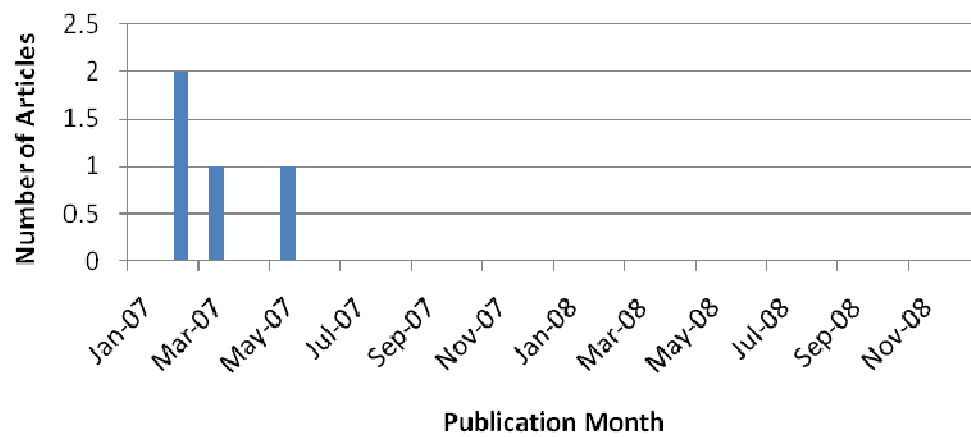


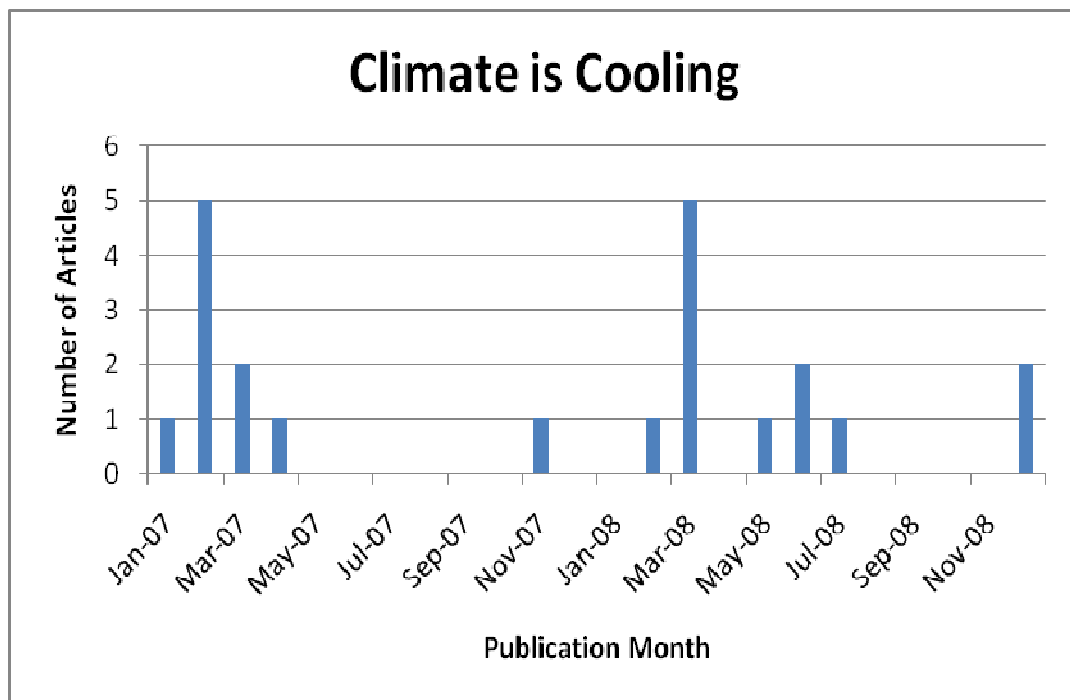


Global Warming is Beneficial



Man-Made Causes Other than Carbon Dioxide





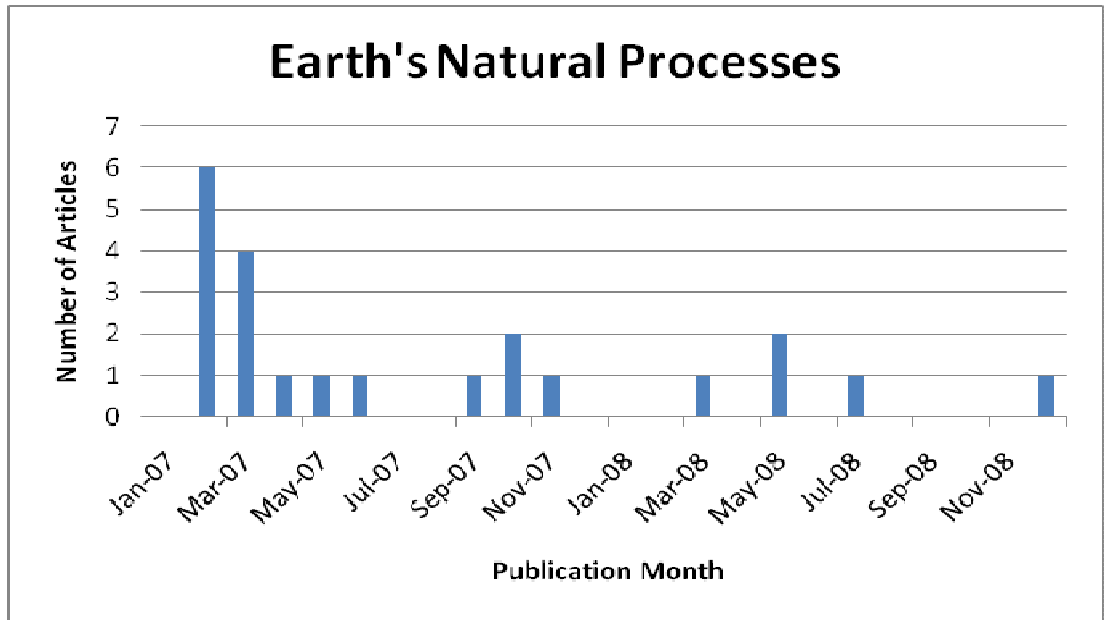
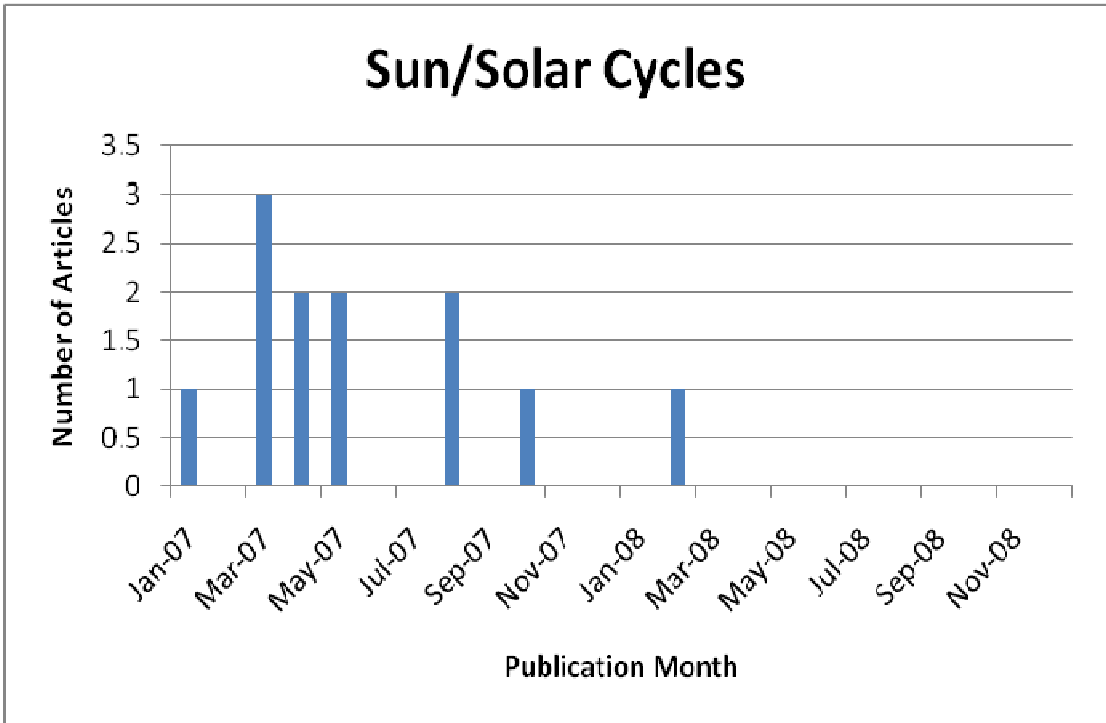
APPENDIX 5

Table 3. Frequency of Counter Claims by
Conservative Syndicated Columnists by Publication Month in 2007 (N=60)

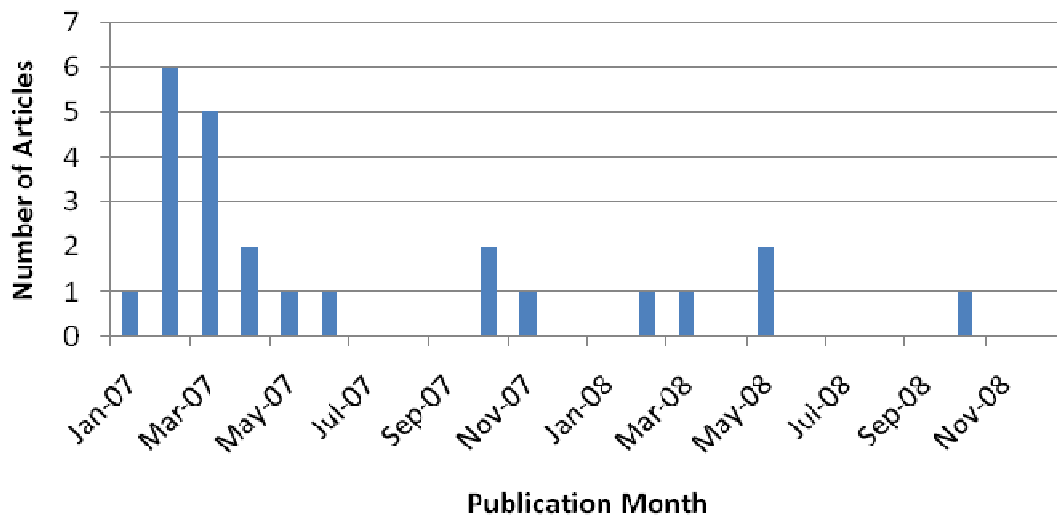
Month	Sun/ Solar Cycles	Earth's Natural Processes	There is no Consensus	The Climate is Cooling	Unreliable Evidence	Past Inaccuracies of Scientists	Al Gore	Global Warming is Beneficial	Man-Made Causes (not CO ₂)
January 2007	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
February 2007	0	6	6	5	3	5	9	1	2
March 2007	3	4	5	2	2	1	4	0	1
April 2007	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	0
May 2007	2	1	1	0	3	0	0	0	1
June 2007	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
July 2007	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
August 2007	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
September 2007	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	0
October 2007	1	2	2	0	0	1	7	2	0
November 2007	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
December 2007	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2007 Totals	11	17	19	10	14	10	22	3	4

Table 4. Frequency of Counter Claims by
Conservative Syndicated Columnists by Publication Month in 2008 (N=39)

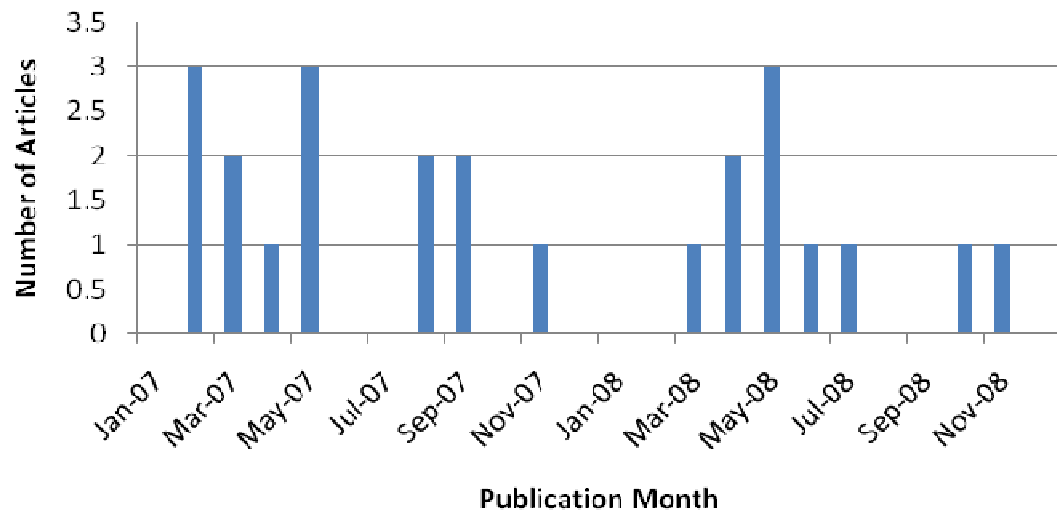
Month	Sun/ Solar Cycles	Natural Causes	There is no Consensus	The Climate is Cooling	Unreliable Evidence	Past Inaccuracies of Scientists	Al Gore	Global Warming is Beneficial	Man-Made Causes (not CO ₂)
January 2008	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
February 2008	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
March 2008	0	1	1	5	1	0	0	0	0
April 2008	0	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0
May 2008	0	2	2	1	3	1	2	0	0
June 2008	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0
July 2008	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
August 2008	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
September 2008	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
October 2008	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
November 2008	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
December 2008	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
2008 Totals	1	5	5	12	10	3	7	1	0



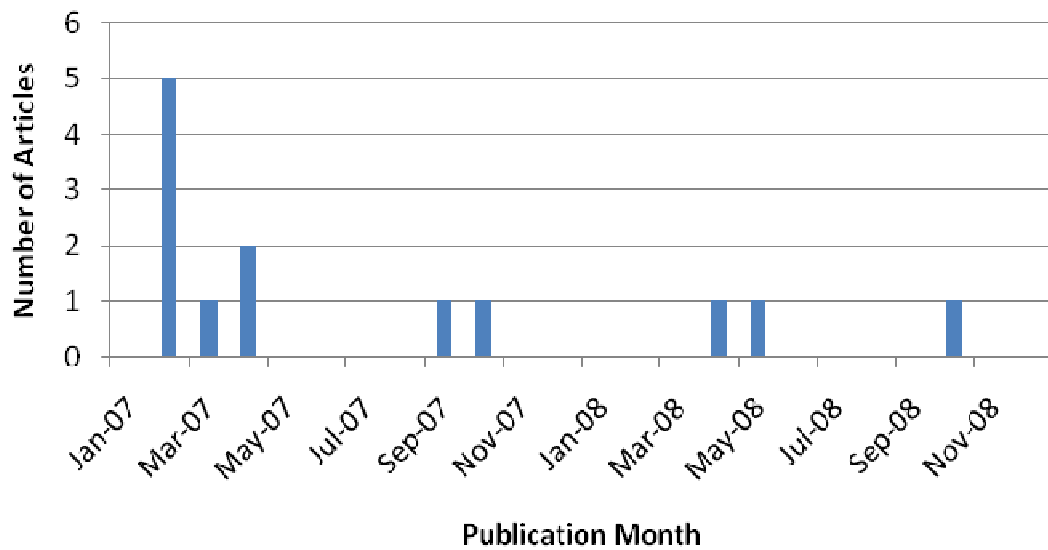
There is No Consensus



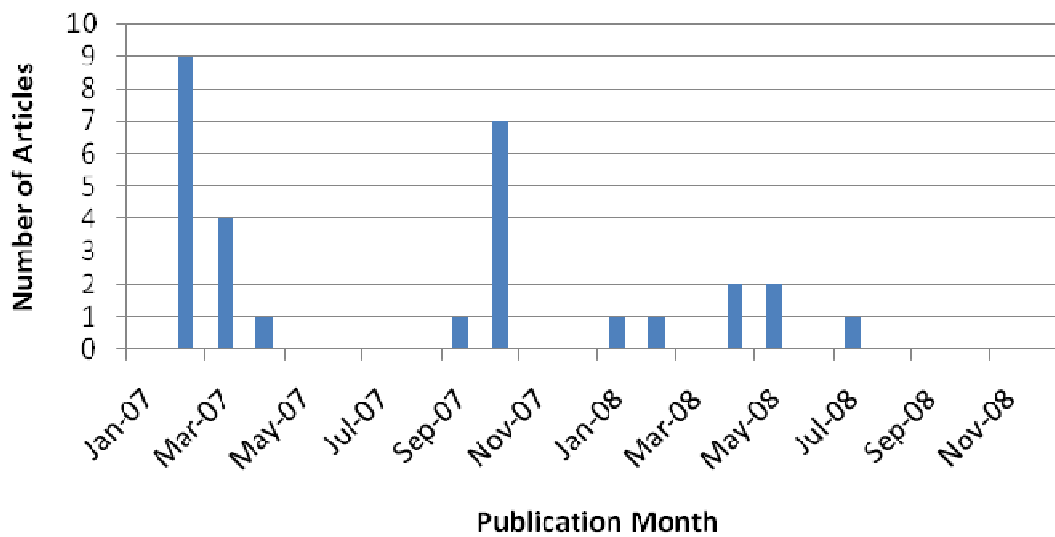
Unreliable Evidence



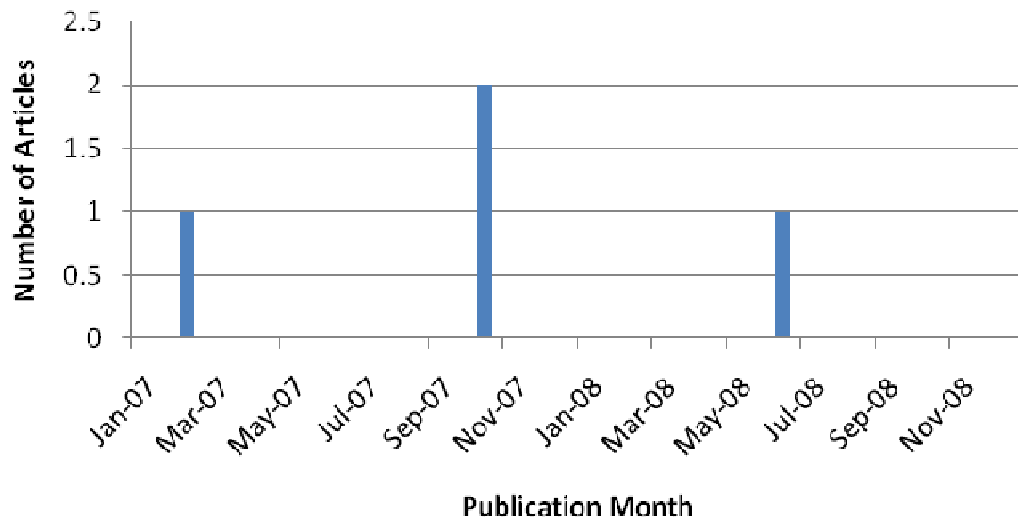
Past Inaccuracies of Scientists



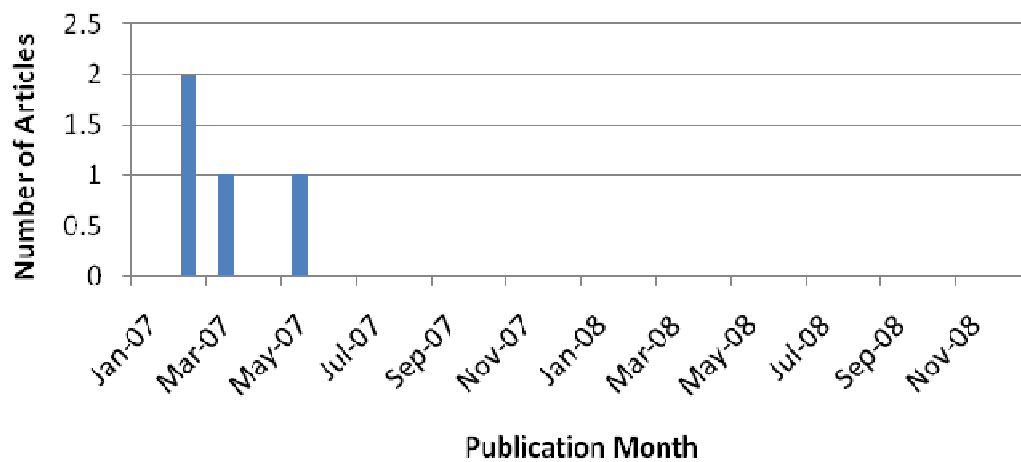
Al Gore

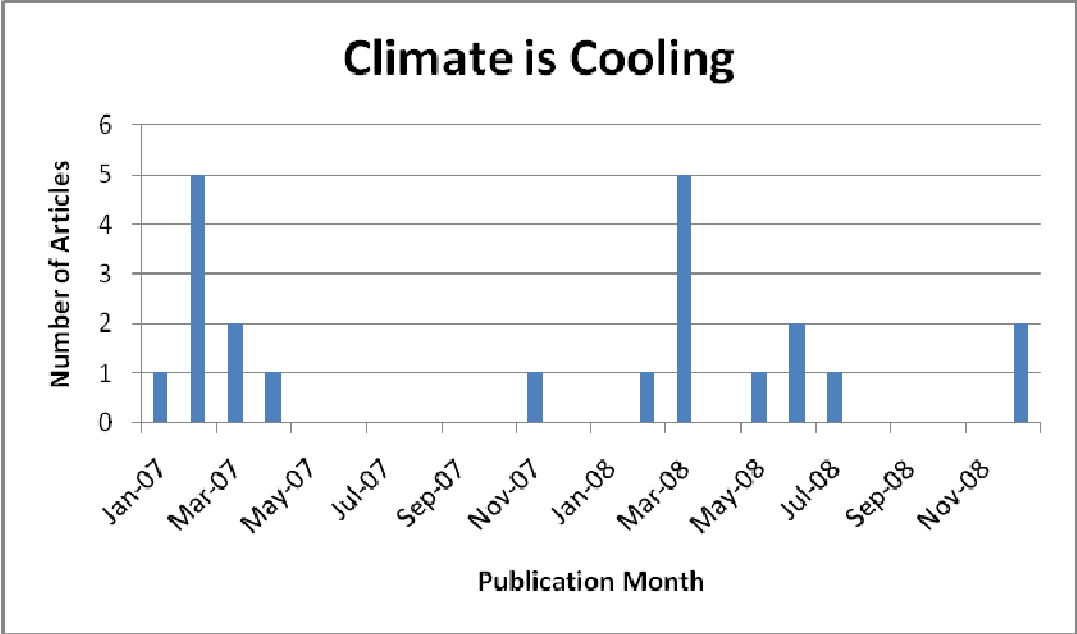


Global Warming is Beneficial



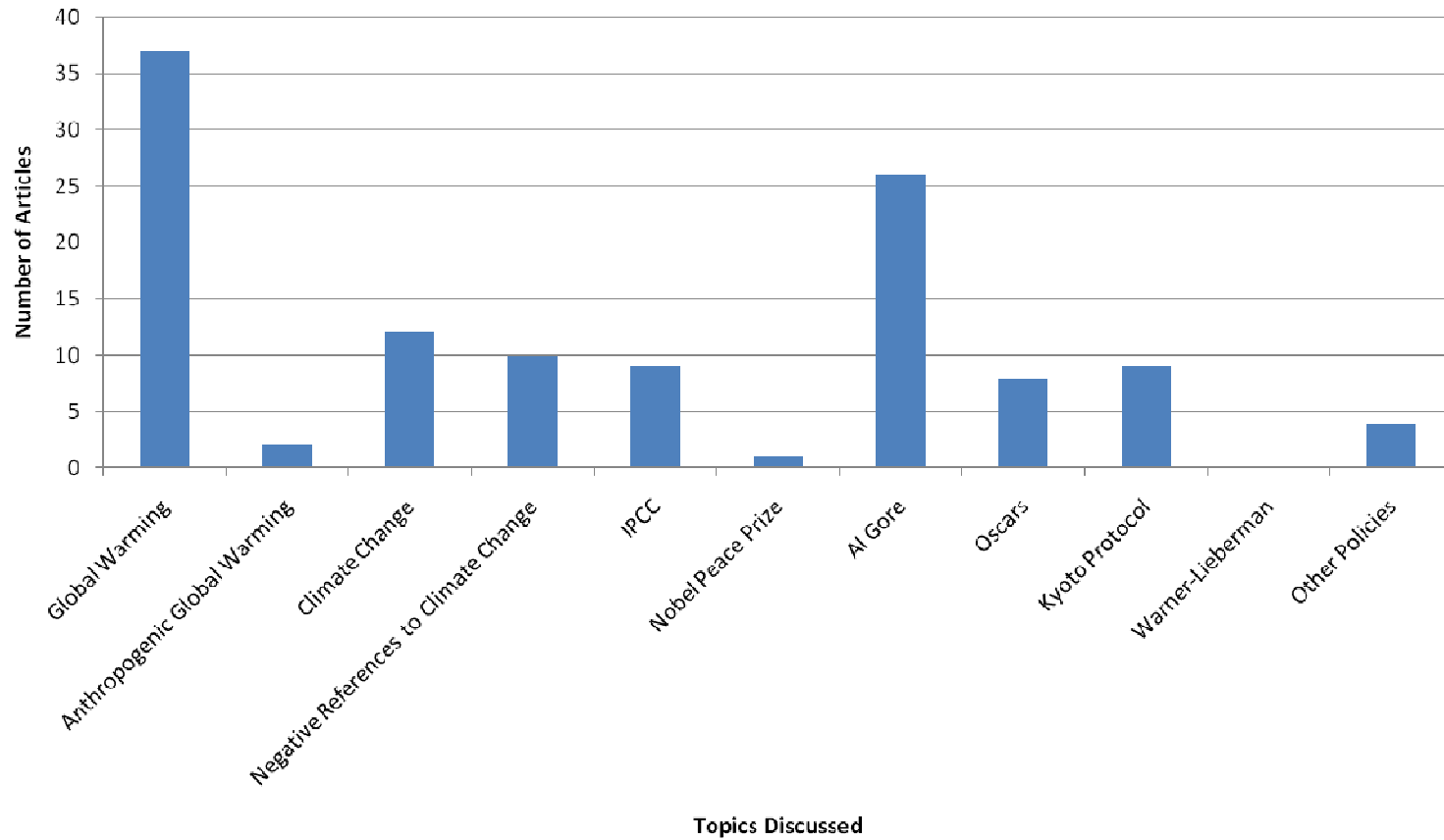
Man-Made Causes Other than Carbon Dioxide

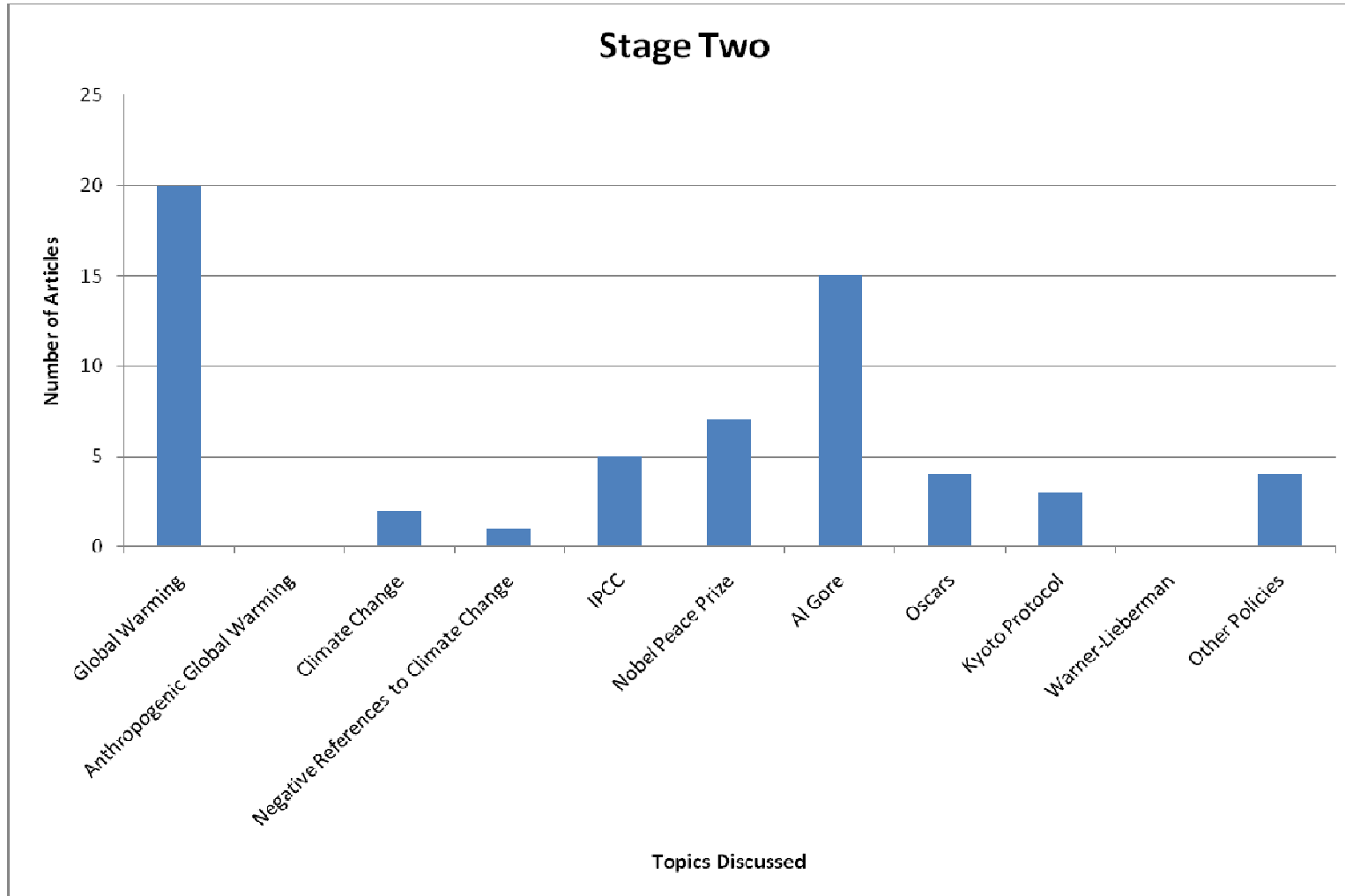


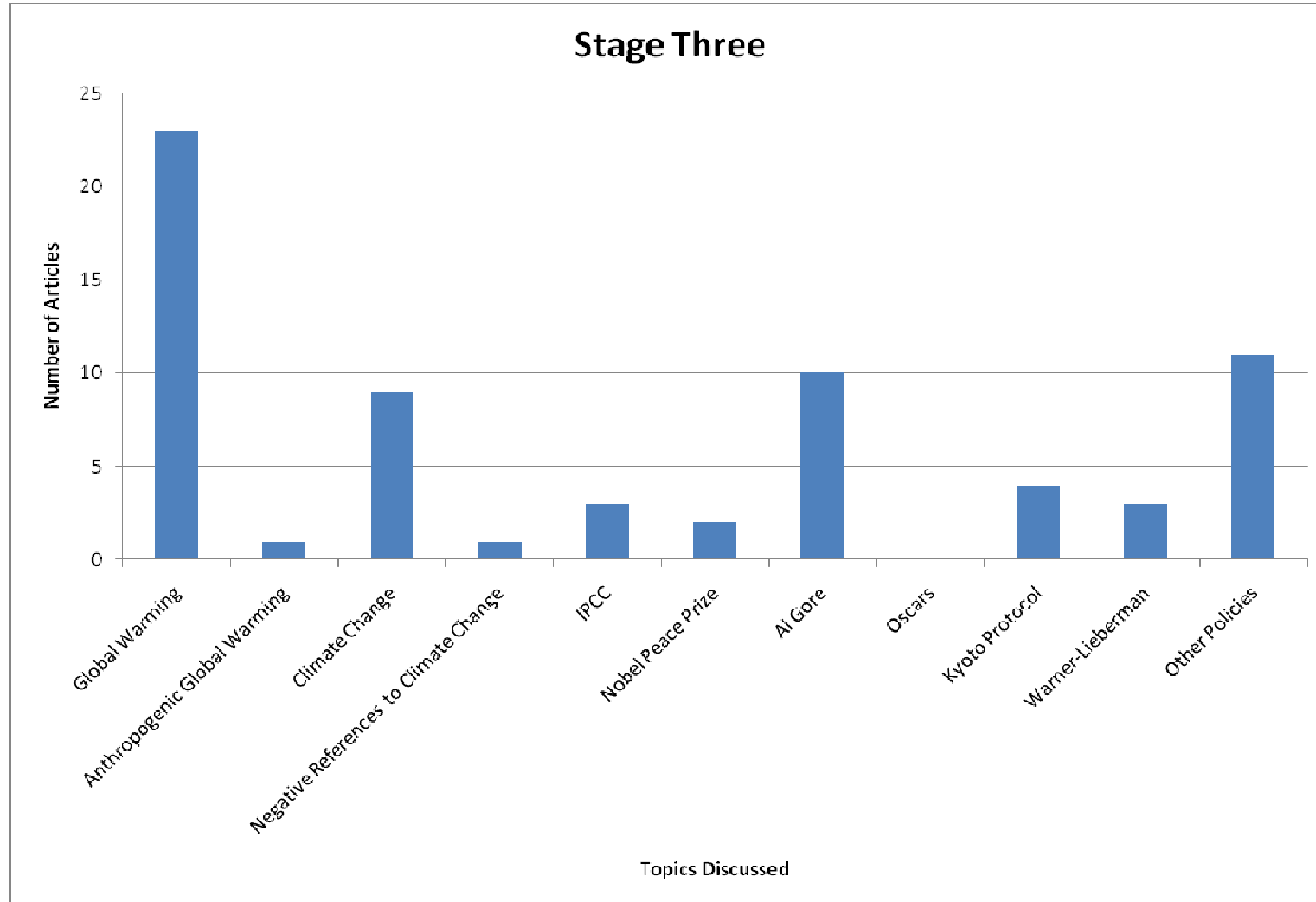


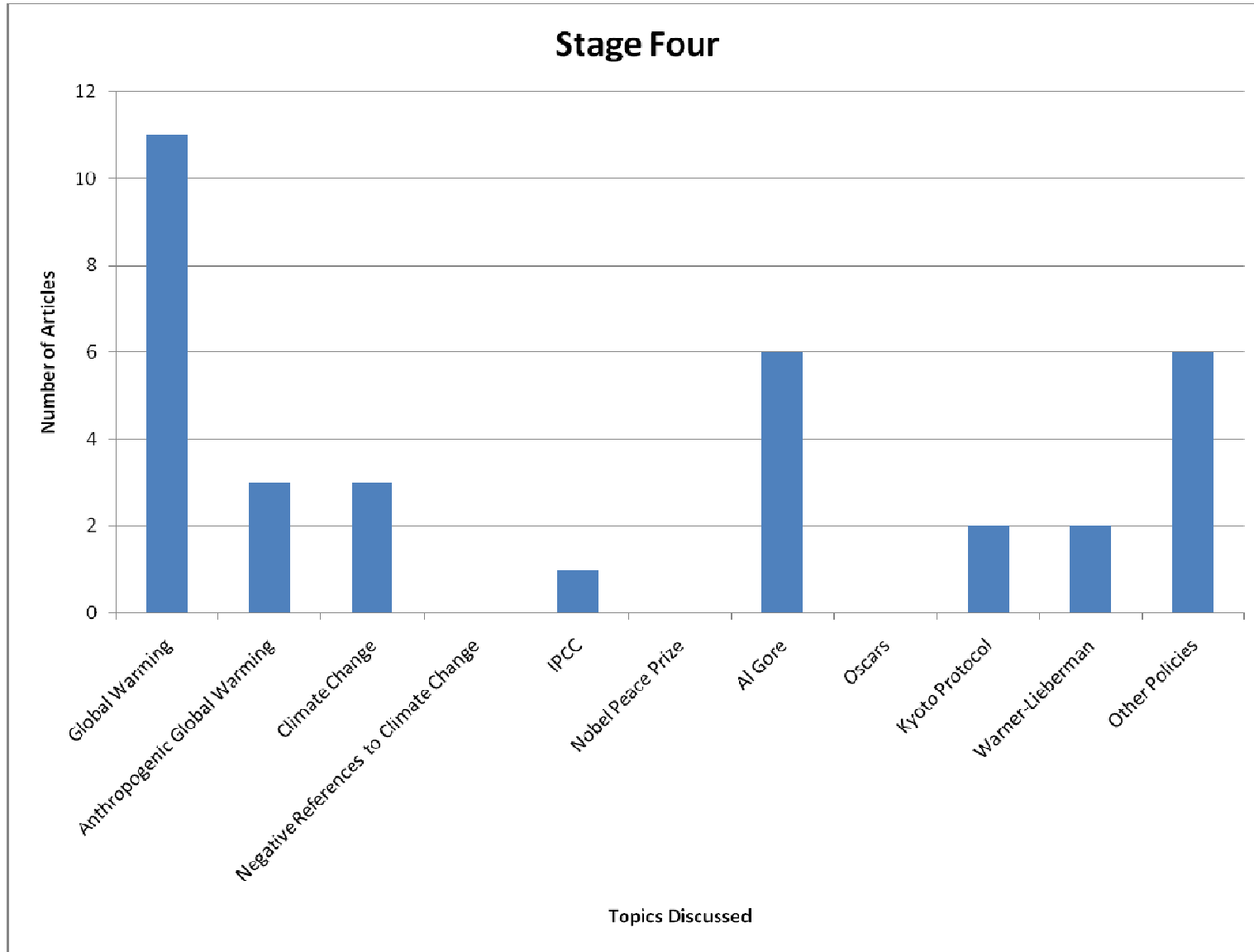
APPENDIX 6

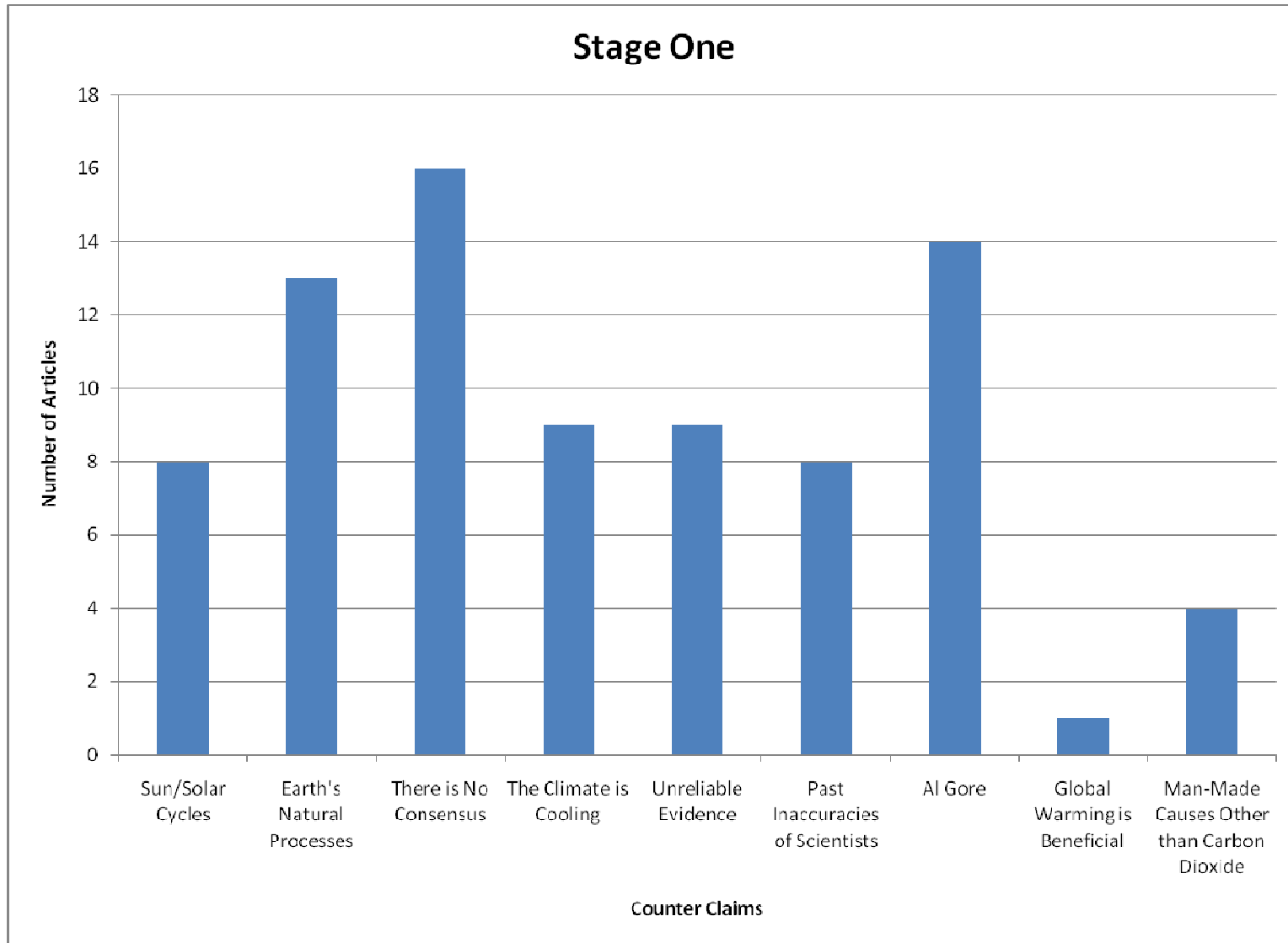
Stage One

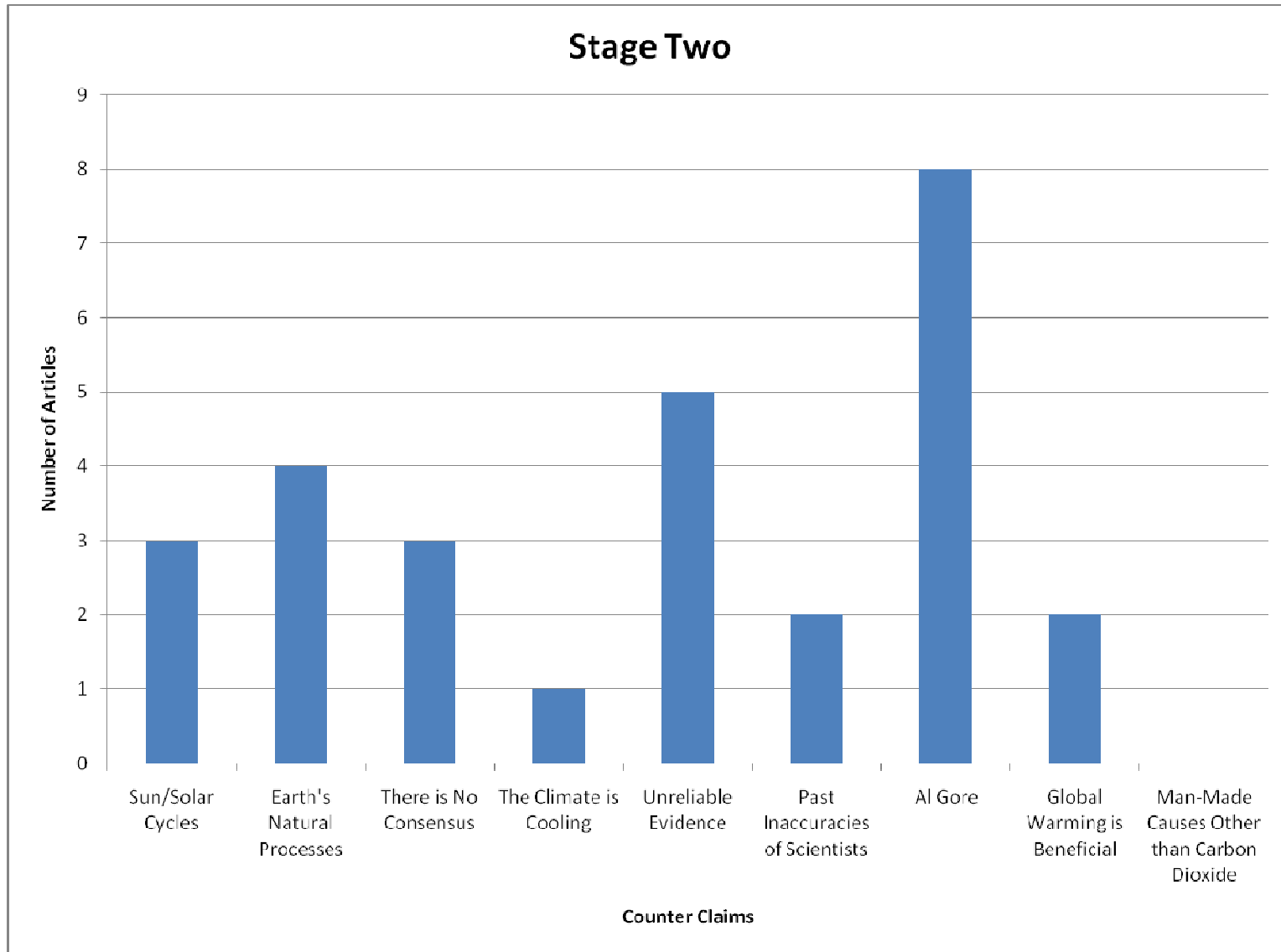


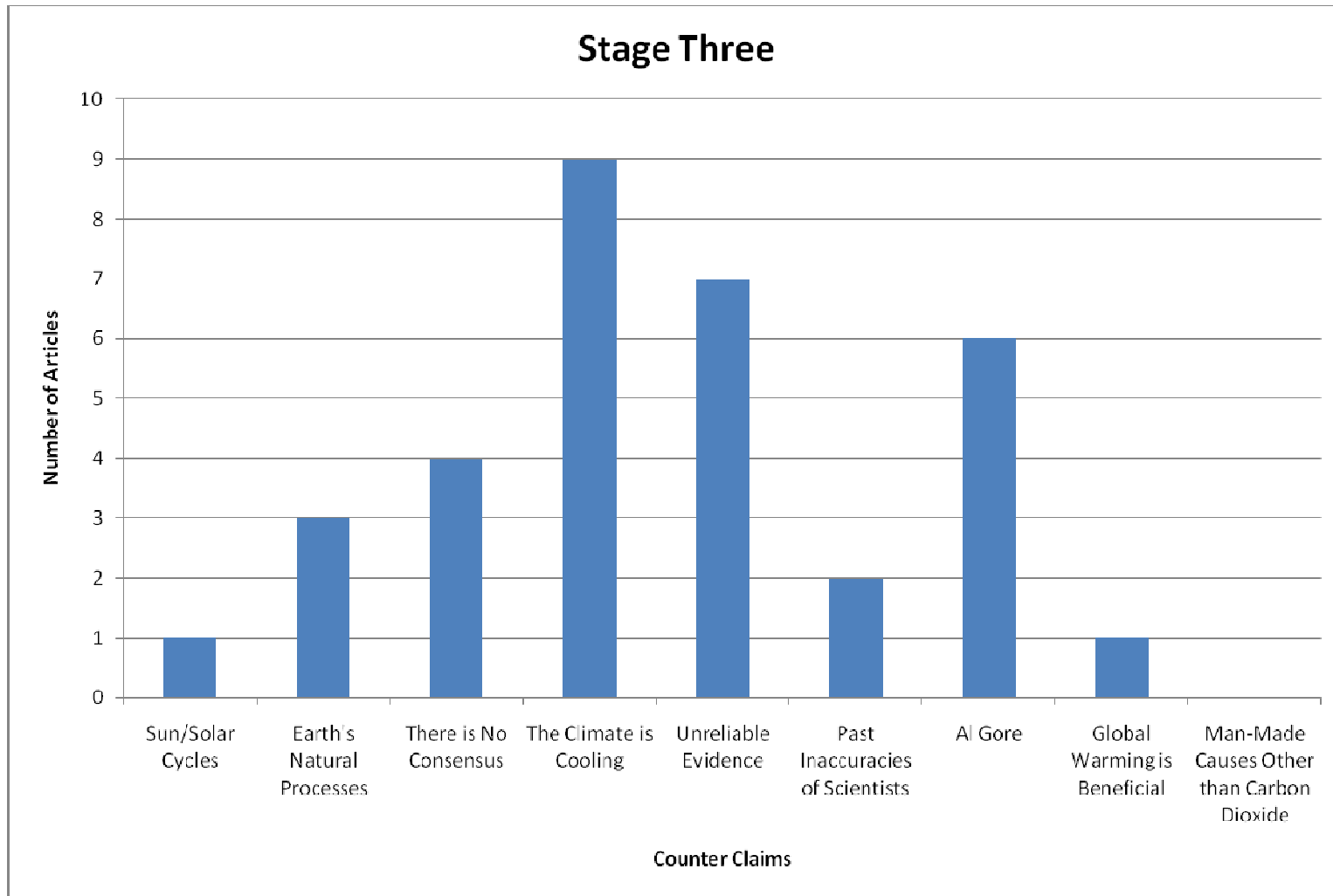


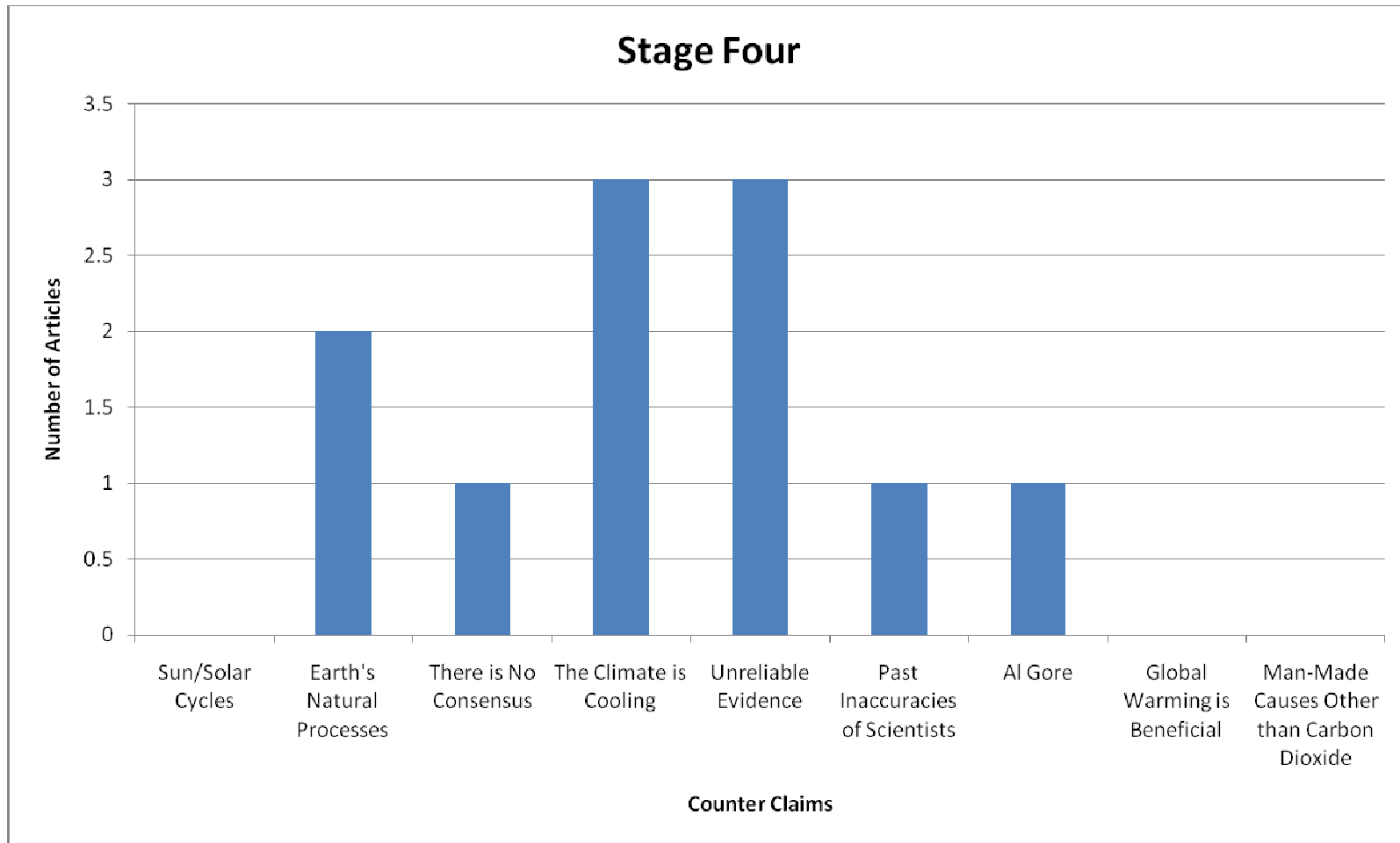












VITA

Shaun Elsasser

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Thesis: "GORE"-ING THE IPCC: HOW U.S. CONSERVATIVE MEDIA HAS
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Date of Degree: December, 2009

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FRAMED THE CLIMATE CHANGE DEBATE

Pages in Study: 84

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Sociology

Scope and Method of Study:

The purpose of the study is to examine the conservative U.S. media's response to global climate change in 2007 and 2008, focusing on manifest claims that emerged after the awards and nominations achieved by Al Gore and the IPCC. This analysis highlights the general topics mentioned and counter-claims made by conservative syndicated columnists when discussing global warming.

Findings and Conclusions:

Over the two-year period from January 2007-December 2009, the conservative syndicated columnists were consistent in how they mentioned the topic of global warming. The columnists chose "global warming" to define the phenomenon more often than "climate change." This would allow for single-year data to appear more credible in refuting long-term trends. They also frequently connected Al Gore to their discussion of global warming and proceeded to attack his credibility instead of attacking the scientific evidence or claims made by climate scientists. Finally, the two least used counter-claims by the columnists were the two claims that admitted (to some extent) that anthropogenic global warming is indeed occurring. This study provides a small window into the denial machine against climate scientists and shows a need to further examine the power and influence conservative syndicated columnists have as a member of the conservative media.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Riley Dunlap
