



# Politicians, Photographers, And A Pope: How State-Controlled And Independent Media Covered Francis's 2015 Cuba Visit

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## Abstract

Pope Francis's 2015 visit to Cuba provided a unique opportunity for a comparative study of state-controlled and independent media systems. This study, grounded in the interpretivist tradition, uses symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis to explore how visuals created by United States-based AP Images, United Kingdom-based Reuters, and Cuba-based Prensa Latina reveal the underlying rhetorical visions, ideologies, and priorities of each culture's media system. More specifically, state-controlled and independent media depicted the Pope's visit differently in the degree of personalization shown, the social actors who were depicted, the purpose of the visit, how the Pope was shown in relation to others, and the location where the action occurred. Each media system highlighted its news values and priorities through these differences. Additionally, the images revealed two master narratives: Cuba as a model of Catholicism and the Pope as a model of hierarchy and conformity.

T. J. Thomson, **Gregory Perreault** & Margaret Duffy (2018). Politicians, Photographers, and a Pope, *Journalism Studies*, 19:9, 1313-1330, DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1268929. Publisher version of record available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1268929>

# POLITICIANS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, AND A POPE

## How state-controlled and independent media covered Francis's 2015 Cuba visit

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**KEYWORDS** fantasy theme analysis; media ownership; media production; news media values; Pope Francis; religious leaders; symbolic convergence theory; visual analysis

### Introduction

Information availability is fundamental to citizens' decision-making ability and a critical determinant and reflection of political and economic systems (Djankov et al. 2001; Stiglitz 2000). Many studies (Amin 2002; Norris 2006; Winfield and Peng 2005) have examined countries' or markets' media systems and how they cover salient events and topics; however, fewer studies have been able to compare how multiple diverse and structurally divergent media systems operate within a single market or country. Pope Francis's September 2015 trip to Cuba provided such an opportunity, as the event was extensively covered by state-controlled Cuban media as well as by independent media from American and European countries. This event provides an opportunity for analyzing the underlying assumptions and worldviews of each culture through the visual news media produced and disseminated.

The present study examines the image-based coverage of the Pope's historic visit through the lens of visual rhetorical criticism, an interpretivist and humanistic perspective that seeks understanding of phenomena but does not claim to measure effects. We first examine the historical role of religious leaders in political transformation, then review the relationship of the Catholic Church to Cuba, before focusing on literature in visual framing, symbolic convergence theory, and fantasy theme analysis studies. We hope to

contribute to our understanding of how religion and ideology are represented in differing media systems and how they may contribute to different ideological interpretations. We analyze AP Images, Reuters, and Cuba's official state news agency, Prensa Latina, to see how their photographers covered the Pope's 2015 Cuban visit.

Mass media provide important tools for guiding and directing public opinion, and without them oppressive systems, such as totalitarian governments, would not exist (Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). In the same vein, media critic Todd Gitlin argues that persistent journalistic media frames in the United States and other Western democracies shape discourse largely for the benefit of elites, thus encouraging passive acceptance of the status quo (Gitlin 1980). Thus, studying how different media cover a religious leader in the wake of political transformation promises to reveal insight into the ideologies each culture and, thus, its media agencies, espouse.

## Literature Review

### *Role of Religious Leaders in Political Transformation*

Political transformation does not just occur through parliaments, legislatures, and presidents. Religion has, over time, claimed one of the top spots as a mechanism for managing social change, both on the individual and group levels (Ellis and Ter Haar 2004). From the self-immolation of Buddhist monks, the non-violent protests of Hindu Mahatma Gandhi, and the equality championing of Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr., religious leaders have a documented history of inspiring political change and advancing human rights. Social actors use religion as a shorthand to communicate with constituents and, in the case of demagogues, can use it to advance personal goals (Bass 1995). Such was the case with David Koresh, Sun Myung Moon, Charles Coughlin, and Jim Jones. The latter "became a faith healer who built a theocratic dictatorship that used religion to camouflage a bitter class hatred and a fascination with Marxism" (Lindsey 1978, 1). Although religious symbols and messages may be deployed in different ways, religion can provide for many a sense of stability and continuity in a rapidly-changing, technologically evolving environment. Thus, it is attractive as a means for political transformation because it can unite people across diverse races, cultures, and classes (Bass 1995).

### *Cuba and the Catholic Church*

The Catholic Church lost a major foothold on Cuba when Fidel Castro took power during the 1959 revolution. Religious schools closed and the government began persecuting Christians, leading many to flee the island and further weakening the Church's influence (Chadwick 1998). This loss continued a trend started in the 1800s when the church lost much of its European property and assets during the Italian Unification. These changes weakened the church's temporal power (Bokenkotter 2007) and reduced its ability to operate directly in politics. In Pope John Paul II's 1998 plea, "May Cuba ... open itself up to the world, and may the world open itself up to Cuba" (Gjelten 2015), the Pope passively called for action without involving himself in a solution. Pope John Paul II's successor, Benedict XVI, whose 2012 visit to Cuba received relatively little coverage, stated "The Church is not a political power but a moral and spiritual institution" (Benedict XVI 2012). Pope Benedict's successor, Pope Francis, however, took a significantly different stance. Some analysts

posit that he is better known for his economic and environmental stances than for his moral teaching (“The Politics of Pope Francis” 2015) and prior to his visit to Cuba in 2015, he spent months personally overseeing secret negotiations at the Vatican between long-hostile neighbors Cuba and the United States. His efforts appear to have borne fruit when, in July 2015, US President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raul Castro announced that the two nations would begin to mend a more than 50-year rift. Two months later, against the backdrop of massive steel memorials to the deceased Cuban revolutionaries Che Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, Pope Francis spoke to hundreds of thousands of people gathered at the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana for a Mass on neighborly commitment and peace (Watts 2015).

### *Visual Framing*

All communication, including photography, involves framing, which Goffman (1974) described as a way of organizing information that renders some characteristics more prominently than others. Information can be included, excluded, emphasized, or deemphasized, based on the photographer and his or her intent. Goffman and other scholars through the 1970s and 1980s regarded framing as both unintentional and subjective, though others in later decades (Entman 1993) conceptualized framing as an active process. Media consumers do not interpret news stories as social constructions but rather accept them as descriptions of reality (Gamson et al. 1992), which makes them effective communication devices. Photographs offer a slice of reality flavored by the ideological and cultural forces of their creators’ environments. In line with the study’s paradigmatic assumptions, photographs are both credible representations of something that happened and also cultural products that evidence socialization and enculturation. Past research on framing suggests that news photographs often draw from a narrow range of frames (Fahmy 2007; Kim 2012), but that they also tell a more nuanced version of international stories compared to text-only stories (Greenwood 2012).

Photojournalists usually adopt an eyewitness frame (Newton 1998), attempting to document events with as little interaction with subjects as possible. Photojournalists operate under at least two assumptions, according to Newton: the first is that photojournalists portray their subjects accurately, fairly, and objectively; while the second is that a photojournalist has both the duty and right to create images that satisfy these requirements so one’s audience can understand the scene as the photojournalist experienced it. Due to the camera’s perceived mechanical recording ability, people generally think of photographs as being closer to the truth than other forms of communication (Adatto 1993; Messaris and Abraham 2001; Perlmutter 1998), which highlights the unobtrusive nature of visual frames.

### **Theoretical Lens and Approach**

Symbolic Convergence Theory is a dramatic approach that provides the theoretical framework for this study through the fundamental notion that “individual’s meaning for symbols can converge to create a shared reality (and shared frames) for participants” (Foss 1996, 122). Reality is not a fixed entity that people comprehend in the same way. People’s understandings of the world are socially constructed (Crotty 1998). That is to say that the symbols individuals use to communicate re-create a version of the world

that works for specific communities. Along with its related fantasy theme analysis method (Bormann 1972, 1982b, 1985; Mohrmann 1982a, 1982b), Symbolic Convergence Theory allows the systematic identification of the worldviews of groups, organizations, and media representations. The cultural symbols that a social group crafts entail specific understandings of reality that make sense for the members of particular communities. Our study is based on the notion that the symbols people use to communicate convey the beliefs that organize their societies (Schudson 1987). Through the visual cues that each news agency used to cover the Pope's visit to Cuba, these media organizations offered particular meanings for that event. As Hall (1995, 357) stated, "the same event could be signified in different ways." The news agencies' representations illustrate the values and shared understandings of their audiences.

This method is based on three sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1954). The first one is fantasy themes, expressed in dramas featuring characters, actions, and scenes. According to Bormann, as cited by Foss (1996, 123), a fantasy theme is not a psychological concept but a technical term defined as "the creative and imaginative interpretation of events." Scholars have used fantasy themes to analyze not only small-group communication but also mass communication and news media contexts (Bishop 2003; Bormann 1982; Duffy 1997). Fantasy type is the second core concept in this study: "When similar scenarios involving the same scenes, characters, and settings have been shared by members of a community, they form a rhetorical vision ... that appears repeatedly in the rhetoric of a group" (Foss 1996, 124). After identifying all possible fantasies in the data, these are compared and contrasted with one another. This analysis identifies commonalities and differences in each representation.

Those representations create rhetorical visions, which is the third key concept in this study. According to Bormann (2000, 8), a rhetorical vision is a "unified putting together of the various scripts which gives the participants a broader view of things." Following Foss (1996, 125), those rhetorical visions "provide a credible interpretation of reality." In addition, group fantasies may "chain out" to create group fantasy events. A rhetorical vision is comprised of a set of fantasy themes that serve to give groups a conception of themselves and become a rhetorical community. That representation of reality constitutes the main element that will inform the findings of this investigation.

According to Cragan and Shields (1995), rhetorical visions tend to have one of three "master analogues" or reflections of deeper values and structures of belief: righteous, social, and pragmatic. These three analogues "compete as alternative explanations of symbolic reality" (33). A righteous analogue "stresses the correct way of doing things with its concerns about right and wrong, proper and improper, superior and inferior, moral and immoral and just and unjust" (42). The social master analogue "emphasizes primary human relation as it keys on friendship, trust, caring, comradeship, compatibility, family ties, brotherhood, sisterhood and humaneness" (42). The pragmatic master analogue "accentuates expediency, utility, efficiency, parsimony, simplicity, practicality, cost effectiveness, and whatever it takes to get the job done" (42).

### *Rhetorical Criticism and Analysis*

A significant body of literature exists on rhetorical criticism, including studies that focus on particular political issues and mass media. Such examples include Bormann (1973), who used a fantasy theme analysis to explain the role of rhetoric in transforming

political figures during the 1972 US presidential campaign. Bormann (1982a) also studied the coverage of American hostages from Iran and President Reagan's inaugural address on January 20, 1981, concluding that the pictures produced by media create a misconception of reality. "The pictures ... are stitched into dramatically improvised scenes. The viewer sees an artistic, interpretative, organized portrayal of social reality" (145). In turn, Benoit et al. (2001, 390) explore the "discourse concerning the investigation, impeachment, and trial of President Clinton." These three studies show a link between fantasies created by the media and their impact on public opinion. Along with the predominance of rhetorical studies focused on written texts, there is also a growing body of research on visual analysis from a rhetorical perspective (Bormann 1982a; Benoit et al. 2001; Bishop 2003; Duffy and Gotcher 1996; Duffy, Page, and Young 2012; Mullen and Fisher 2004). These studies show that visual representations also create rhetorical realities that are clearly worthy of study. Thus, this study explores the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What fantasy themes are revealed through the characters, actions, and settings that state-controlled and independent media represented visually during Pope Francis's 2015 trip to Cuba?

**RQ2:** What news values and priorities do state-controlled and independent media support as evidenced through the visuals they produced during Pope Francis's 2015 trip to Cuba?

**RQ3:** What rhetorical visions do the visuals of state-controlled and independent media during Pope Francis's 2015 trip reveal about the cultures of Cuba, America, and the United Kingdom?

## Method

This study used purposive sampling (Riffe et al. 2014), allowing the researchers to explore content produced by specific organizations within a specific timeframe. Still photographs available from United States-based AP Images, Cuba-based Prensa Latina, the state's official news agency, and United Kingdom-based Reuters, are the study's units of analysis. Still images were selected over other forms of visual media because they are more salient and cognitively memorable than video (Irby 2004). Wire services and news agencies were used as their content is distributed more widely and published more so than any single media outlet. Additionally, these wire services were the only ones that offered advanced search features that could narrow a query to images only, those with certain keywords, and those created within a specific timeframe.

Each media system has unique characteristics and modes of production, thus providing valuable opportunities for rich analysis and comparison. Cuban media are state-controlled and operate in an authoritarian and socialist political structure (Kalathil and Boas 2001; Rockwell and Janus 2003). US media, including the Associated Press (AP), are mostly market-driven entities that operate in a liberal-pluralistic democracy (McNair 2009). The United Kingdom's media are largely independent and operate in a liberal-pluralistic parliamentary system (Newman, Dutton, and Blank 2012). Additionally, each nation has had unique political and economic relationships (Bulmer-Thomas 2003; Huntington 1999). Critics lampoon the United States for its hegemonic influence on Cuba and worry that better relations with between the two countries will revert Cuba to its "pre-1959

identity: as a cultural and economic extension of the Floridian peninsula" (Brooks and Prodger 2015). The United Kingdom has shared many of the same goals with the United States concerning Cuba, including advancing human rights, promoting sustainable economic growth, and mitigating security threats, though its interest in the western hemisphere predated the United States's founding. For years the United Kingdom, with hundreds of other members of the United Nations, annually passed a resolution condemning the United States's Cuban embargo. UN members welcomed the United States's 2015 shift toward more amiable relations (Brooks and Prodger 2015) and, in October 2016, the United States amended its regulations to allow more American–Cuban business to occur (Davis 2016). These unique political as well as historical relationships justify the study of visual media from each of these diverse systems.

On November 18, 2015, any visuals with "Pope Francis" or "Papa Francisco" in the headline, caption, or keywords, that were created from September 19 to 22, 2015 (the duration of the Pope's visit to Cuba), were downloaded from Prensa Latina, AP Images, and Reuters. Using Dow Jones's Factiva to access Reuters content, along with the photo sites of Prensa Latina and AP Images, 1182 images matching the study's subject and timeframe criteria were downloaded for initial review. After familiarizing ourselves with all the images made during the trip, we selected the Pope's first full day in Cuba, September 20, 2015, as our analysis day for several reasons. First, it was one of only two full days. The first and fourth days consisted of little more than arrivals and departures. Second, it was the day that the state-controlled media agency published the most images. Had all four days been examined, an American/British perspective would have dominated and we felt it was important to try to be equitable to the number of images from each country that we examined. Third, our selected day had the greatest diversity of events. September 20 included religious events, government visits, and meetings with everyday Cubans. The following day included only religious events, including a Mass, blessing, meeting with bishops, and a prayer with bishops and the Papal entourage. Thus, our analysis day provided the only opportunity to see if the relevant media systems framed the day as religious, political, humanitarian, etc.

We first examined the images inductively in the grounded tradition (Glaser and Strauss 1998) to examine each system's news values and priorities and then later deductively analyzed them for fantasy themes and rhetorical visions using Cragan and Shields's (1995) "master analogues" concept. After analysis, an independent, Cuban-born media scholar reviewed our findings and said they resonated with his perceptions of how Cuba has traditionally been depicted. "I am not surprised by the findings, but it validates some of what we've seen in the past. Reuters is perhaps the foreign outlet that understands Cuba's nuances much better than others" (A. Gonzalez, personal communication, September 30, 2016). Though qualitative approaches usually eschew numbers, we include them in our findings for transparency and precision. Rather than highlighting singular exemplars and leaving the reader unaware of how these exemplars reflect on the data pool as a whole, we included numbers to give readers an exact sense of how convergent or divergent the media systems were from one another in their coverage.

## **Findings**

As might be expected, state-controlled and independent media visually depicted the Pope's 2015 Cuba visit differently in some ways and similarly in others. This study found

similarities and differences among the visuals created by AP, Reuters, and Prensa Latina in the degree of personalization shown, the social actors who were depicted, the purpose of the visit, how the Pope was shown in relation to others, the location where the action occurred, and the news values and priorities of each media system.

### *Research Question 1*

*Degree of personalization.* To address RQ1 concerning fantasy theme characters, we first examined the degree of personalization provided in the captions of each media system and the number of people in each frame. Perhaps because of language barriers or media values that differ for foreign correspondents, AP and Reuters identified fewer people by name in captions than did Prensa Latina. AP and Reuters often used generic descriptors, such as “a faithful, a man, people, security agents, clergymen, and evangelicals.” While Prensa Latina used some of these same generic references, too, its photographers also focused more on people with recognizable identities than everyday citizens. Thus, all three media systems adopted the same approach in referring to non-elites by generic descriptors rather than individual names.

*Social actors depicted.* To further explore the character aspect of RQ1, we also looked at which broad types of people, such as politicians, religious authorities, regular citizens, dissidents, etc., were photographed. As seen through Cuban media, the country’s culture is markedly hierarchical. This sometimes implicit cultural value is illustrated by the frequency of social actors appearing in the same frame together. The official state media agency, Prensa Latina, seemed to place dissidents at the lowest rung of society, as its photographers did not show them at all, in contrast to AP and Reuters photographers, who photographed Cuban security agents arresting and detaining dissidents nearby one of the Masses Pope Francis celebrated. Prensa Latina photographers also showed neither politicians and regular citizens nor politicians and the press interacting together within the same frame. Moving up the social ladder to regular citizens, the bulk of any society, Prensa Latina photographers depicted regular Cubans much less frequently than did the British or American media systems. Prensa Latina showed regular Cubans alone in the frame only five times, compared to 26 times by Reuters photographers and 17 times by AP photographers. Further, Prensa Latina showed the upper echelon—politicians and religious authorities—interacting together almost twice as many times as did British or American photographers. Thus, the characters in the fantasy themes represented coalesced to a fantasy type of “people should know their places” in Prensa Latina media. In photos from the British or US media, the fantasy type could be seen as “this is the people’s Pope and the Cuban people celebrate his visit.”

*Tone or purpose of visit.* To explore the action component of RQ1, we examined how the Pope’s visit was categorized by each media system. The Pope’s visit contained many components, including protests, diplomatic meetings, parades, Masses, and speeches, yet not all media systems depicted each of these components equally. AP and Reuters photographers highlighted the religious aspect of the Pope’s visit by publishing a number of their images, 35 each, showing Francis at one of the Masses he celebrated during his time in Cuba. About 42 percent of Prensa Latina’s images showed Francis at Mass compared to Reuters’s 45 percent and AP’s 47 percent. In contrast to British and

American media, Cuban media highlighted Francis's visit as a diplomatic one, with 27 images compared to 16 for Reuters and 10 for AP. Thus, the diplomatic visit angle comprised about 47 percent of all Prensa Latina imagery but only 21 percent for Reuters and only 14 percent for AP. Thus, the fantasy themes for Prensa Latina media created a fantasy type of "diplomacy not religion" while US and British media revealed a fantasy type of "religion and diplomacy come together."

*Angle of Pope in relation to others.* The Pope was shown from below in relation to others very sparingly. Fewer than 6 percent of any media system's images depicted him this way. British and American media showed him above the (common) people more often than any other angle while Cuban media showed him on the same level with others (almost exclusively elites) more often.

*Location.* To answer the final component of RQ1, that of the setting, we found that photographers documented scenes in government buildings, churches/cathedrals, private homes, and outdoor public spaces. This latter category was the most popular, as all three media systems overwhelmingly depicted the Pope's visit as happening outdoors. The second most popular location was a church or cathedral for AP and a government building for Reuters and Prensa Latina. The third most popular location was a tie between a government building and private home for AP, and a church/cathedral for Reuters and Prensa Latina. The most dominant fantasy type here was that the Pope is accessible and non-partisan. He is not just for Catholics or politicians; rather, since he is seen most often in neutral, public spaces, he is a symbol of the public and his message is applicable to all Cubans.

## *Research Question 2*

*News values and priorities.* We analyzed RQ2 by evaluating whether photographers favored aesthetics or information-value more highly and whether they showed behind-the-scenes imagery or only visuals from planned and/or scripted events. Most news photos focus on either aesthetics or information-value. In the first example, photographers use compositional tools, including framing, repetition, color, symmetry, juxtaposition, and lines to highlight the aesthetic properties of a scene or situation, often, though, at the expense of context. An example of this is a Reuters photo by Tony Gentile of Pope Francis walking to the altar in Revolution Square. The symmetry, strong leading lines, and complementary red and green colors make for an engaging and easy-to-read image, but the viewer knows little about the image beyond that it depicts the Pope in front of a crowd.

In the second scenario, photographers capture an information-rich scene that, while context-rich, is often lacking in visual panache. An example of this is another Reuters photo by Tony Gentile showing an aerial view of Revolution Square. In this image, symmetry is absent, leading lines do not exist, and the composition, framing, and color do not lend to the aesthetics of the image; however, the giant Cuban flag and figure of Che Guevara on the side of two buildings gives context that the viewer is looking at a photo of Revolution Square. The cross atop the pavilion and the Vatican flag at the left of the image hint that this is a religious, and more specifically, Catholic event. Reuters led the three media systems in favoring aesthetics over information. About 21 percent of its images highlighted

aesthetics over information-value, compared to 15 percent for AP and 12 percent for Prensa Latina.

Another component of news values and priorities is whether the photographed action is arranged and managed, such as during scripted speeches and diplomatic visits, or if it extends past the planned and scheduled into the ordinary lives of citizens and how the scripted events affect their lives (or do not). Here, too, Reuters led the way with 21 percent of its images, compared to 16 percent of AP's and 5 percent of Prensa Latina's. Unlike AP or Prensa Latina, Reuters photographers ventured out into the streets of Holguin to show regular Cubans working, commuting, and watching media coverage of the Pope from within their homes. One Reuters photographer also contrasted the worship experience of other religious groups, such as Evangelicals, with those of the Catholics during the Pope's visit. Though AP and Prensa Latina focused only on places on the Pope's itinerary, they provided some behind-the-scenes views into those scenes, including the trash left behind after one of the Pope's Masses and a view inside the state's historic National Hotel of Cuba in Havana, where the foreign press stayed during the trip. Thus, the setting of the dramas presented during Francis's visit showed fantasy themes of a public Pope, not a private one.

Further, the images revealed that each country's media system had different news values and priorities. For Reuters, seeing how regular Cubans experienced, reacted to, and lived during the Pope's visit was important. For AP and Prensa Latina, this priority was less important. For these two media systems, the news was where the Pope was, though each did occasionally share some behind-the-scenes imagery during scripted events. This included images of everyday Cubans watching the Pope's visit on television, viewing a Papal procession from a balcony, and even images that had no clear reference to the Pope—an image of a busy Havana city street where the Pope would travel later that day. Prensa Latina, in contrast, emphasized images of diplomatic visits. In that the wire service is set in Cuba, scene setting, behind-the-scenes photos were less important. Prensa Latina also avoided photos of dissidents. Based on the photos in the sample, one protest with arrests occurred during the pope's visit. The AP and Reuters photographed it while Prensa Latina did not photograph the event, even though, based on its full set of images, a Prensa Latina photographer had the opportunity to do so. Cuban officials detained 768 dissidents in the weeks leading to the Pope's visit (Frank 2015) and continued to arrest or detain dissidents during the Pope's time in the country.

*Fantasy themes.* Two primary fantasy themes emerged from the analysis: the first was that Cuba was a model of Catholicism and the second was that the Pope served as a model of hierarchy and conformity. Each media system did not play into these fantasies equally, and the nuances of each approach will be explored more fully in the following discussion. In order to address RQ3, we will first point out the fantasy themes that emerged and then how they point toward the shared rhetorical visions of the media event.

*Cuba as a model of Catholicism.* AP and Reuters portrayed the Pope's visit primarily as a religious event. The high number of Mass photos reflected the notion that Mass is central to Catholic life. While this statement might be true, it is not a reality that is reflected among everyday Cubans. The country is one of the least Catholic nations in Latin America and fewer than 10 percent of Cubans attend church regularly (O'Reilly 2015). As Cuba is an officially secular country, it makes sense that its government-controlled media agency, Prensa

Latina, published more images that highlighted the diplomatic nature of the visit rather than the religious. Additionally, AP and Reuters published more photos where the Pope was often depicted as “above” everyday Cubans, which fits in line with Catholic theology—as a mediator between man and God.

For example, both AP and Reuters included an image (see [Figure 1](#)) at nearly the same angle and position. In this Reuters image, Pope Francis is processing into the first Mass of his visit—which was set at Havana’s Plaza de la Revolución. Francis is pictured with an entourage behind him, looking out over the crowd. His eyes are at a higher level than others’ in the frame—even those who appear to be taller than him in reality. This gives the Pope a larger-than-life characterization as he looks out over the crowd. The Havana skyline is in the background, emphasizing that the Papal Mass is the center of the action in this fantasy theme.

Both AP and Reuters photographs provided scene-setting images as well. One AP image, for example, depicts people on a balcony overlooking Pope Francis’s trek to San Cristobal Cathedral. The pictured church is Sacred Heart of Jesus, and a large photo of Pope Francis hangs off the side—overlooking the comparatively small Cubans on the balcony. The framing of Pope Francis in the scene-setting photographs helps cement the idea that Cuba is an essentially Catholic country. Again the placement of Francis in the photograph makes him appear to be a larger-than-life figure. AP and Reuters photographers focused heavily on the Papal Masses in their photography, which puts it in contrast to the photography produced by Prensa Latina.

In contrast, Prensa Latina emphasized photographs of Pope Francis visiting with Cuban politicians (see [Figure 2](#)). It is worth noting that AP and Reuters were also at these events, but included fewer diplomatic photos in their final product. In [Figure 2](#), Pope Francis “makes a courtesy call to Cuban President Raul Castro at the Palace of the Revolution,” according to the caption. [Figure 2](#) includes standard framing for diplomatic photos. Pope Francis is depicted as another foreign dignitary meeting the Cuban president. Various state flags line the wall behind them. He is at eye-level with Cuban President Raul Castro and both men have their arms at their side in an identical posture—both elements



**FIGURE 1**

Pope Francis holds his pastoral staff as he arrives to celebrate Mass in Revolution Square in Havana on Sept. 20, 2016. Photo by Tony Gentile/AP. Used with permission.



**FIGURE 2**

Pope Francis makes (a) courtesy call to Cuban President Raul Castro at the Palace of the Revolution (in) Havana, Cuba. Photo by Joaquín Hernández Mena/Prensa Latina. Used with permission.

create a sense that the two men are on equal footing. [Figure 2](#) illustrates that Cuban media did not buy into this fantasy theme of Cuba as a model of Catholicism. Instead, Prensa Latina photographed the Pope and the country's top politicians on the same level, emphasizing a shared humanity and minimizing any hierarchical difference.

*The Pope as a model of hierarchy and conformity.* The Pope's visit to Cuba, though historic, was also rather uneventful and uncharacteristic compared to the Pope's past behavior. He issued no sweeping criticisms, met with no dissidents, and even entered into a private meeting with the controversial revolutionary Fidel Castro at his Havana home. The Cuban government detained about 60 dissidents before the Pope's visit in the hopes of preventing them from meeting each other (Yardley and Ahmed [2015](#)); however, some still arrived near where Pope Francis was celebrating Mass but were quickly arrested by plain-clothes Cuban security agents.

Both AP and Reuters captured photographs of the arrest of dissidents in the Plaza de la Revolución (see [Figure 3](#)); Prensa Latina did not. In [Figure 3](#), the dissidents are shown being taken away by security officers after throwing "leaflets," according to the photo caption. Both AP and Reuters captured images of the dissidents in similar framing to [Figure 3](#)—they are separated from the rest of the Cuban people. In none of the images are dissidents in



**FIGURE 3**

Two unidentified men are taken away by security officers after they threw leaflets as Pope Francis arrives for a Mass at Revolution Plaza in Havana, Cuba, Sunday Sept. 20, 2015. Photo by Ramon Espinosa/AP. Used with permission.

the same frame with the Pope, politicians, or other Cuban people—aside from the security officers. This depicts the dissidents as outside of the conformity of the mainstream of Cuba.

Many of the photos placed Pope Francis in a frame with a statue of Jesus and with the image of Che Guevara (see [Figure 4](#)). In one such image, Pope Francis is climbing the steps for his Mass in the Plaza de la Revolución. Framed in the background of the image are images of Jesus and Che. This creates a visual connection between the Pope and the two figures. While Che was a political revolutionary, he was also a traditionalist in terms of his Marxist views (Löwy 2007). Jesus is often seen as a symbol of traditionalism (Fredriksen 2000). This puts the Pope in a direct line from other traditionalists in the imagery.



**FIGURE 4**

Pope Francis is helped to the altar as he arrives to celebrate Mass in Revolution Square in Havana, Cuba, Sunday, Sept. 20, 2015, where a sculpture of revolutionary hero Ernesto “Che” Guevara decorates a nearby government building. Photo by Tony Gentile/AP. Used with permission.

Noting the precedent set by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, and that the previous two Popes' similarly tame visits were rewarded with government concessions including foreign missionary visas and the establishment of Good Friday and Christmas as national holidays, it seems logical that Francis followed an approach of scripted engagement (Rocca 2015). Francis seemed to have an eye to the future once the Castro brothers are out of the political scene, something that should occur by 2018, according to a 2013 statement that current President Raul Castro made. Catholics have been barred in the country from running schools, building new houses of worship, or maintaining old ones, so Francis likely modeled conformity in the hopes of effecting positive change for the Catholic church in the coming years.

### *Research Question 3*

*Rhetorical visions.* These fantasy types point toward two rhetorical visions. They largely map onto the fantasy themes above but evidence of each rhetorical vision was found among all three wire services. The first rhetorical vision views the Pope as a part of Cuban social order that was correctly controlled and hierarchical. His role in Cuba was shown as diplomatic rather than religious—and this was evidenced by the high concentration of photographs from the diplomatic visits in Prensa Latina photographs. This vision underscores the Cuban revolutionary myth of trust in the state and in leaders. The second rhetorical vision, most highly emphasized in the British and US press, views the Pope as a messenger of religious hope and brotherly love for citizens of Cuba. This framed the Pope as a saintly figure, above the crowds, but reaching out to the crowds. This is evidenced by the high number of Mass photos shared in both AP and Reuters. Here the Pope is a religious messenger, speaking to enormous crowds of Cuban citizens.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

In conclusion, RQ1 sought to address how the visual coverage of the Papal visit compared among three wire services in terms of the character, action, and setting of fantasy theme elements. We found that AP focused more on crowds than did Reuters or Prensa Latina and that all three media systems identified individuals in captions at similar rates, perhaps compared to language barriers or differing news values for foreign correspondents. The primary action in AP and Reuters was the celebration of Mass, whereas in Prensa Latina imagery, the primary action was the series of diplomatic visits Francis undertook. The primary setting was the same for all three media companies—outdoor public spaces—largely owing to Pope Francis' crowd-drawing initial Mass in Plaza de la Revolución on the day of the sample.

RQ2 sought to understand how the news values compared among the three news wire services covering the Papal visit. We examined the visual communication employed by the photographers as well as noted what was included and not included in the frame of these photographs. We found that Reuters was mostly likely to privilege aesthetically oriented photographs and to depart from scripted events and provide behind-the-scenes imagery that took place far from where Francis was. News values differed among the three media organizations, with the Cuban news service differing significantly from the US and UK services.

RQ3 sought to understand the rhetorical visions expressed through each country's visuals. The traditions of state-controlled media as compared with British and US media revealed differing rhetorical visions. In the rhetorical vision, most highly emphasized by

Prensa Latina, the Pope was envisioned as a part of Cuban social order that was correctly controlled and hierarchical. For the British and US media, the rhetorical vision envisioned the Pope as a messenger of religious hope and brotherly love for everyday Cuban citizens.

Returning to Cragan and Shields (1995), we argue that the master analogue presented visually in Prensa Latina's imagery represents the righteous analogue. The emphasis in Prensa Latina media was on preserving Cuba's revolutionary and Marxist social and political order. As such, the Pope's authority in these events is connected visually with other images of Cuban authority—Che Guevara and the Castro family, in particular. Less important would be images of dissidents, in that they are engaging in an activity that is improper according to Cuban social order. Hence it makes sense that Prensa Latina would publish no image of the dissidents. This analogue was emphasized in the setting and character categories, in particular. While Prensa Latina, AP, and Reuters all emphasized an outdoor setting, Prensa Latina's secondary emphasis was the setting of the government building. This creates a visual environment useful for emphasizing Cuban authority. Prensa Latina differed from AP and Reuters with its heavy emphasis on political characters in the images. This also helped to emphasize the country's political order.

The master analogue presented by the British and US photos represents the social master analogue. The imagery presented shows the Pope as a religious messenger, reaching out to an enormous citizenry that is eager to receive him. Images are included here of the Pope receiving flowers from children, waving to crowds, and laughing and smiling at diplomatic events. Hence it would make sense that, from this analogue, a fantasy theme viewing Cuba as essentially Catholic might emerge. This analogue similarly was evidenced through the setting and character categories. The secondary setting choice for AP and Reuters was the church/cathedral settings. This creates a visual environment that places the Pope in explicitly religious contexts. In a similar manner, both AP and Reuters deemphasized political characters in their images and both of them placed a heavier emphasis on religious authorities and ordinary citizens.

This research illustrates the role of journalism in meaning-making and social reality construction through visual communication. While the photojournalists' depictions of the Pope's Cuba visit are superficially similar, Symbolic Convergence Theory allows the analyst to discern the differing patterns woven into the reportage. In the present research, the master analogues appeared to shape an understanding of the primary characters and the primary actions, and define what is newsworthy and what is not. We argue the differences observed are more than the products of local or foreign perspectives. Reuter's Desmond Boylan, for example, is the organization's chief Cuba photographer and is based in Havana. He was born in London in 1964. Thus, he has the nuance and perspective of a local while also having the ideology and socialization of a British upbringing.

This research emerges from the interpretivist and cultural studies traditions and, hence, does not make any claims regarding the study's findings as generalizable. These traditions assume that interpretations are unavoidably those of the researchers and not objective descriptions of the texts (Hesse-Biber 2010). A strength of this study is its international, comparative approach that examines how implicit ideologies are embedded in a society's cultural products.

Future research should expand exploration of the role of media producers and how they function within and reproduce distinct rhetorical visions. As illustrated in the present study, media producers played an important role in presenting certain master analogues

through photographs. Future research could also investigate how media producers perceive their ideological and gatekeeping roles as they perform their work.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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