



Information Source or Sink?

**Print media use of scientists as sources in two fisheries
controversies in Florida**

J. Stuart Carlton

**School of Natural Resources and the Environment/
Wildlife Ecology and Conservation
The University of Florida**

Susan K. Jacobson

**Wildlife Ecology and Conservation
The University of Florida**

AAAS/Pew: science, the media, and public opinion

85%

think public ignorance is

a major problem

76%

think news coverage is

inadequate

32%

of the **public** believe in

evolution

49%

of the public believe humans contribute to

climate change

84%
of the public view **scientists'**
effect on society as **mostly**
positive

What's happening?

**How do media (ab)use
scientists?**

2

- Net ban

- Reef fishery

A photograph of a fishing net with red and black floats on a sandy beach at sunset. The net is spread out on the sand, and the floats are arranged in a line. The background is a soft, warm glow from the setting sun, creating a serene and somewhat somber atmosphere. The text "Save our Sealife?" is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and slightly above the middle vertically.

Save our Sealife?

A photograph of a sandy beach at dusk or dawn. In the foreground, several red and black buoys are scattered on the sand. A fishing net is visible in the lower left corner. The background shows the ocean and a few more buoys. The text "Save our Seafood?" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

Save our Seafood?

**There was very little scientific
evidence for the net ban.**

74%

VOTE HERE



VOTE AQUI

Method: content analysis

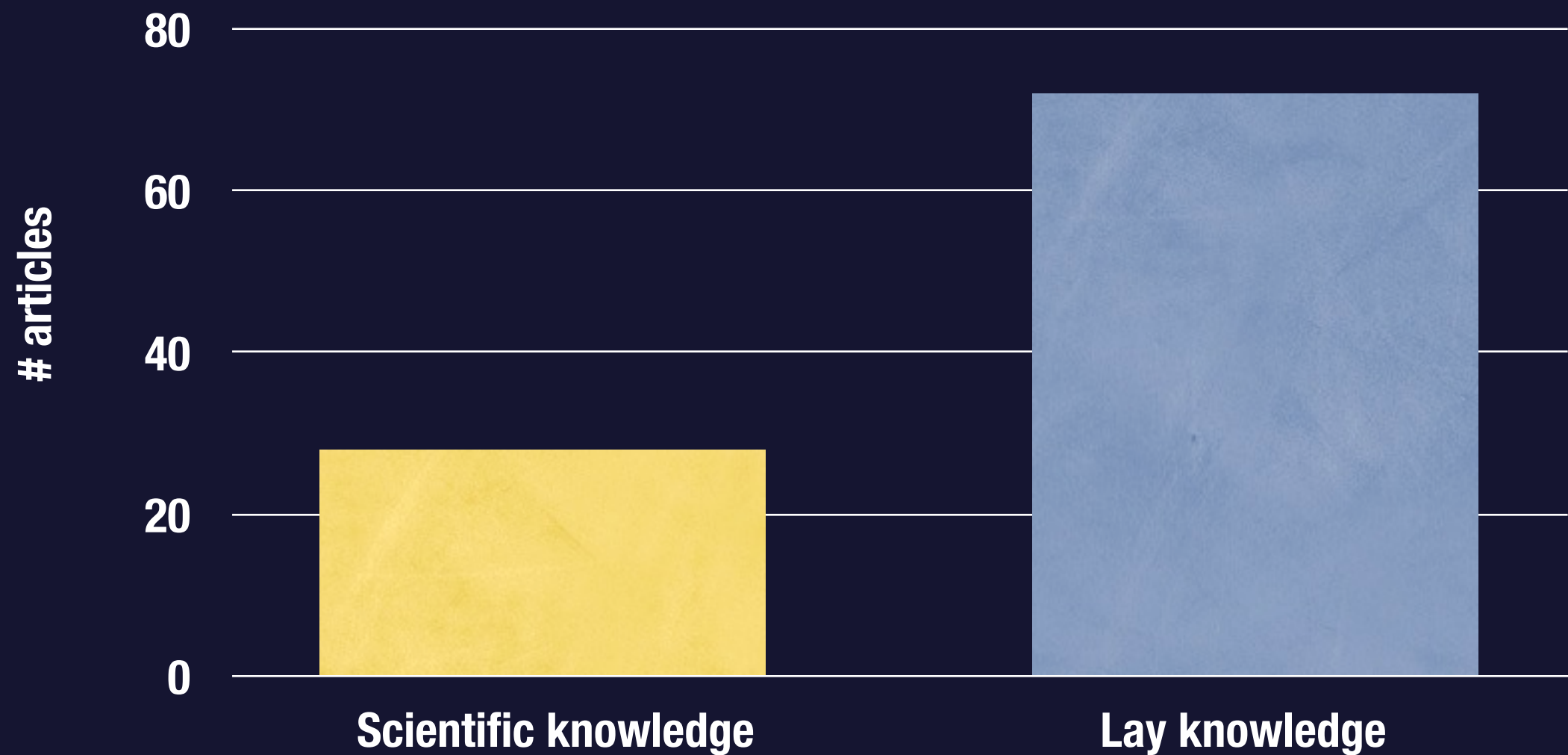


1992–1994

**RQ: How important was
scientific information in net ban
coverage?**

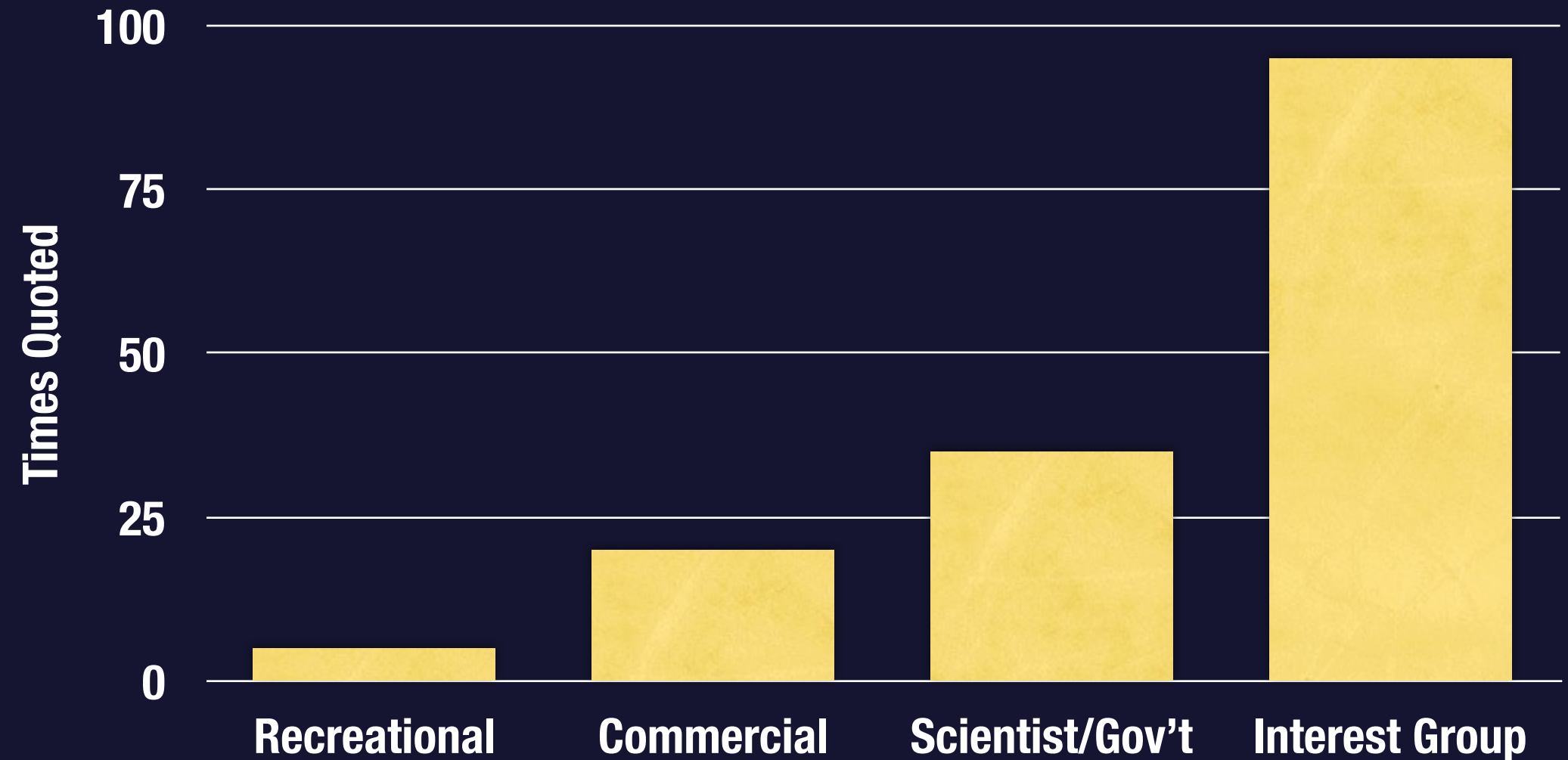
Scientific vs. Lay Knowledge

Scientific vs. Lay Knowledge



(N=90 articles, Fisher's exact $p < 0.001$)

Quotations



Scientists' quotes stories were more likely to appear in episodic stories

Conclusion: Net ban

Most stories relied on lay knowledge

Conclusion: Net ban

Most stories relied on lay knowledge

Scientists weren't a major source of quotations

Florida's grouper fishery



**“Some of the ugliest data I’ve
ever seen...” -Steve Martell**

Method: Content analysis



2004–2006

Grouper News Sources

Source	Total Quotes	Avg. Quotes/article
Recreational	52	0.96*
Commercial	34	0.63
Scientist	26	0.48
Other	27	0.5

(N=59 articles, *significantly higher@ $p<0.05$)

Grouper News Sources

Source	Quotes present	Quotes absent
Recreational	24	35
Commercial	16	43
Scientist	22	37
Other	19	40

(N=59 articles, Fisher's exact: no significant differences)

Quotes' Readability

Quotes' Readability

Source	# Sentences	Reading Ease (higher=easier)	Grade Level (higher=harder)
Scientist	83	70.11	7.19*
Non-scientist	341	74.30*	5.94



Uncertain

Might

Seem

Could

Suggest

Hedging: Newspapers

Source	Unhedged quotes	Hedged quotes
Scientist	18	9
Non-scientist	4	120

($p < 0.001$)

Conclusion: Grouper


Scientists weren't quoted in most articles

Conclusion: Grouper

Scientists weren't quoted in most articles

Scientists' quotes were more uncertain and harder to read

**Why do media (ab)use
scientists?**



“Many technical controversies are primarily disputes over political goals and only secondarily concerned with the veracity of scientific issues which are related to these goals.”

-Mazur (1981)

Newspapers often focus on the fight



Technical, hedged quotes are confusing





Make your voice heard



Information Source or Sink?

**Print media use of scientists as sources in two fisheries
controversies in Florida**

Contact

Stuart Carlton

stuart.carlton@ufl.edu

352-388-1234