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Has the Narrative Shifted?

An Examination of Newspaper Coverage of Officer-Involved Fatalities

Before and After Largescale BLM Protests

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### Abstract

In recent years, activism involving the criminal justice system has consistently made headlines. While research underscores several issues within the system, less emphasis has focused on whether these movements are aiding change. The current study seeks to explore the impact of one such movement: Black Lives Matter. This paper presents an examination of the language used to discuss people killed by law enforcement in local newspapers before and after largescale BLM protests. This is done by examining the inclusion of discussion points that increase (aggravating factors) or decrease (mitigating factors) the perceived blameworthiness of victims. The results indicate that following the local protests, newspapers discuss fewer mitigating factors for victims but had no difference on the discussion of aggravating factors. However, state differences in mitigating and aggravating factors may indicate that ongoing protests influenced news coverage over an extended time. Other results and implications for the research are further explored in the discussion.

*Keywords:* Policing, Media Framing, Officer-Involved Fatalities, Black Lives Matter

## Introduction

The complexity of the police role has provoked captivating discussions over the years. The ever-evolving responsibilities of police officers can further complicate matters. At the forefront of the distinctive police role is the notion that police must prevent crime and maintain order (Moore, Trojanowicz & Kelling, 1988). Unlike any other public or private officials, police are granted dynamic powers that can deprive people of their freedoms and liberties through arrest, infringe on their privacy through frisks and searches, control individuals using force and possibly take one's life through deadly force (Walker & Archbold, 2019). Police officers' ability to lawfully take one's life and use physical force authoritatively to protect society further feeds into the complexity of the police role (Skogan & Meares, 2004).

Police in the United States kill far more people than police in other countries of similar economic and political standing (Lartey, 2015). However, problems with undercounting (GBD 2019 Police Violence US Subnational Collaborators, 2021) and the lack of relevant data sources (Fyfe, 2002; Kane, 2007; Hickman & Poore, 2016) has made it difficult to capture exactly how many people are killed by the police. This lack of transparency has propelled the growth of open-source data collection efforts by various newspaper agencies (Swaine et al., 2016; The Washington Post, 2021). High-profile deaths, coupled with lack of proper police accountability mechanisms, ushered in much public discourse and outrage about issues revolving around officer use of force. This public outrage culminated into the growth of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM).

While the BLM movement has attempted to shape the narrative on police violence against Black citizens, mass media encompasses a unique position in society by being a driving agent of information while also having the distinct ability to shape the narrative on a topic, especially as it relates to social justice movements. The media has the power to skew the portrayal of policing issues through their coverage of events (Bennett, 1996; Cook, 1998; Gamson et al., 1992; Lawrence, 2000; Paletz & Entman, 1981). The media has played an integral part in shaping the narrative as policing has progressed as a profession over the years. This is particularly true when it comes to topics related to police use of force.

## Literature Review

### Historical Progression of Police Use of Force

Early American policing was greatly influenced by the British, but chattel slavery truly spurred the field of policing (Reichel, 1988). Due to slavery, there was also a clear division between how policing developed in the northern states versus the southern states. While the northern states saw the development of policing take shape through the unification of departments, the birth of modern policing in the South was directly linked to slave patrols (Hadden, 2001; Reichel, 1988; Turner, Giacomassi & Vandiver, 2006). Walker (1980) elucidates that slave patrols were the first publicly funded police departments in the American South. Slave patrols were comprised of men who were responsible for searching slave lodges, keeping slaves off roadways and dismantling any meetings organized by slaves (Hadden, 2001). To maintain control over the slave population, patrollers often used aggressive, brutal and abusive tactics. After the end of the Civil War and during early Reconstruction, state militia, federal military and the Ku Klux Klan arose from the dismantled slave patrols to continue to control Black citizens (Walker, 1980; Hadden, 2001). These reformed groups began to operate eerily similar to the newly established police departments seen throughout the United States. Some scholars note that this transition from slave patrols to formalized police agencies was a smooth transition (Reichel, 1988; Walker, 1980).

In conjunction to the influence that chattel slavery had on the development of policing, so did the field of politics. According to Walker (1977), early police departments were inefficient, corrupt and lacked overall

professionalism. During the political era, police agencies from the 1840s until the early 1900s were intimately connected to political figures. Essentially, police officers served as tools for partisan political movements and lacked a clear vision as to what good policing should entail (Walker and Archbold, 2019). Due to this lack of guidance and oversight, police officers could use virtually unfettered power to control citizens. Police officers often relied on physical force to control disorderly situations and force citizen compliance (Lersch & Mieczkowski, 2005). During this time, unjustified use of police force mostly went unpunished and created division between the police and the communities that they serve (Kelling & Moore, 1988).

Reformers wanted to drastically change the landscape of policing by professionalizing the occupation. The first wave of reform, taking place at the turn of the 20th century, brought with it a great deal of changes within police departments throughout the country. The first reformers wanted to acquire a better image of the police by taking steps to professionalize them. Incremental changes in the ways that police officers were recruited, hired, and trained began to take shape (Walker, 1977; Fogelson, 1977). Despite these reform efforts, police use of force and misconduct issues remained (Kelling & Moore, 1988).

The heavy-handed and sometimes violent approach that officers took to protect and serve communities was met with much citizen resistance beginning in the 1950s (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). Precipitated by calls for action by various communities, the 1960s brought forth a clear agenda to transform police agencies. A series of Supreme Court cases and the civil rights movement both served as powerful external accountability mechanisms as well as change agents for police agencies across the country (Walker & Archbold, 2019). During this time of social and political upheaval, Black citizens engaged in a variety of nonviolent protests that sought to challenge the status quo and called attention to racial discrimination, segregation, the cruelty of the Jim Crow system and police brutality. The police now focused their attention on quelling any movement that sought to fight the existing social and political ideologies that were pervasive throughout America at the time (Kappeler, 2014). Peaceful and nonviolent protests were often met with police violence.

The horrifying events that took place on March 7, 1965, in Selma, Alabama demonstrates this clearly. Peaceful activists who were in Selma to protest the denial of voting rights to Black citizens as well as the murder of activist Jimmie Lee Jackson, were met with troopers brutally attacking them (Pratt, 2017). Termed "Bloody Sunday" due to the brazen attacks by police officers, the horrific images of this violence were broadcasted on televisions across the country. For many Americans, this was the first time that they saw the horrors experienced by civil rights protesters. During this same time, race riots that were prompted by years of oppression and police brutality took place in various American cities. These race riots continued in even more cities in the spring of 1968 after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. (Kappeler, 2014). The civil rights movement coupled with the multitude of race riots seen throughout the country provoked even more calls for change within the field of policing.

The ubiquitous standard model of policing was also challenged because the reactionary cookie-cutter approach did not allow much room for customization and proactivity. The stifling aspects of the standard model of policing placed much emphasis on arrests and punishment without concern about the other possible roles that officers can fulfill within the communities in which they serve (Skogan & Frydl, 2004). In conjunction with use of force issues, under much scrutiny during this time were the limitations of rapid response, random patrol and generally applied follow-up investigations and intensive enforcement and arrest policies (Skogan & Frydl, 2004). The unbridled criticisms of the standard model of policing motivated many scholars and policing professionals to challenge and dismantle the paradigm that many policing organizations operated within, forcing them to build rapport with the communities that they served under the Community Problem-Solving era of policing (Kelling & Moore, 1988).

Within the current era of policing, confidence in the police is still an issue. Highly publicized incidents of police misconduct have eroded trust, particularly within the Black community (Santhanam, 2020). The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott, Sandra Bland, Samuel DuBose, Alton

Sterling, Laquan McDonald, Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Philando Castille have all demonstrated how certain police/citizen interactions can result in precarious situations.

### The Intersection of Race and Police Violence

The topic of tension among the police and residents of racially/ethnically diverse communities is a common theme woven throughout the history of policing. Walker (1977) talks quite extensively about how the riots within urban communities often pitted the police against minorities. Black individuals were abused at the hands of police officers. Sometimes, Black individuals were seen as less than and undeserving of fairness and justice (Fogelson, 1977). The historical account in which Fogelson (1977) provided, showcased how minority communities were often disproportionately subjected to police brutality and were stifled when trying to voice their concerns.

The tension between racially/ethnically diverse communities and the police can still be seen today. Just as it was important five decades ago, it is equally important today to understand the intersection of race and police violence, particularly when it comes to Black citizens. For instance, research on race and policing has demonstrated that the percent of nonwhite citizens in an area increased police use of deadly force (Liska and Yu, 1992). Jacobs and O'Brien (1998) examined 170 U.S. cities and found that racial inequality and rises in Black population growth accounted for increases of officer-involved deaths. The use of lethal force has also been found to be predicated on unequal distribution of economic resources (Jacobs & Britt, 1979). Similarly, using UCR data, Sorenson and colleagues (1993) found that economic inequalities provided the most accurate predictor for officer-involved homicides. The percentage of citizens living below the poverty line and percent Black were both found to be accurate predictors of police-involved killings (Sorenson et al., 1993). Finally, Chamlin (1989) found that the racial and economic composition of states has a significant impact on the number of officer-involved homicides.

### The Birth of the Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter movement was born out of frustration with recent events which exemplify abuse of police power within Black communities. Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a social movement that emerged following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013 (Day, 2015). The movement gained momentum in 2014 following the death of Michael Brown when BLM organized to transport people from across the United States to Ferguson, MO to protest the event. Since then, BLM has organized several protests following police-involved shootings and has formalized their objectives for police reform in "campaign zero" (McKesson, Sinyangwe, Elize & Packnett, 2016).

While research on the impacts of BLM is currently underway, some scholars express skepticism about the movement's ability to achieve their goals. For example, Szetela (2020) formulates a critique of the BLM movement by outlining some limitations of the movement. One of these critiques is that BLM will be unable to accomplish a united base that is large enough to produce change. This, Szetela (2020) argues, is due to the movement's overreliance on the systemic impacts on Black Americans specifically, rather than producing a movement that is inclusive of all racial and ethnic groups. These concerns of inclusivity, or lack thereof, are echoed by other scholars and research subjects as well (Carney, 2016; Clayton, 2018). Despite these criticisms, BLM has changed the landscape when it comes to discussions about police use of force and accountability. These discussions can be shaped by the way the news media chooses to frame stories involving police officer use of force and the social justice movements connected to these events. However, while BLM strives to influence societal discussion, newspapers already have some influence in shaping public perceptions.

## Newspapers and the Ability to Shape the Narrative

Throughout the past few decades, the media has served as an omnipresent force seeking to shape the narratives surrounding the police and the communities in which they serve. This distinctive power posits mass media as a driving force of information to construct, transmit and legitimate racial discourse (Van Dijk, 2012). The media can also infuse blatant and clandestine stereotypes when covering topics specific to communities of color (Hall, 1990; Gilens, 2004; Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011). Several studies have found that when covering violent crime, the media often casts Black communities in a negative light (Dixon, 2008; Dixon, 2006; Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman, 1997). In addition to this, the news media often dismisses the insidious role of systemic racism when faced with trying to explain police violence (Carlson, 2016; Lawrence, 2000; Pollack & Allern, 2014). Hence, the media has the unique ability to frame discussions surrounding complex social topics.

Framing is defined as the media's ability to promote a particular position to structure public dialogue and influence the audience's attitudes and opinions on certain topics (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Iyengar, 1991; Popkin, 1991; Gamson et al., 1992). According to Gamson and colleagues (1987), an issue frame is the prevailing "...idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events and weaves a connection among them" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p.143). Framing can influence the ways in which people view complex social issues (Carlyle et al., 2014; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Greer, 2012; Popkin, 1991; Webster et al., 2020). In addition, exposure to the media can be a major factor in the construction of reality and stereotypical views of different racial/ethnic groups (Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011). The media's power to construct certain narratives is quite evident when analyzing the coverage of social movements.

Since most individuals learn about social movements through mass media (Lee, 2014), the media also can shape perceptions of these movements (Updegrave et al., 2020; Cottle, 2008; Banks, 2018; Nelson & Oxley, 1999). Research on media framing of social protests has generally taken two approaches: a general approach or an issue-specific approach (D'Angelo, 2018). A general approach will typically explore broad coverage patterns that are used across multiple contexts and topics (Ophir et al., 2023). Conversely, some scholars examine media frames that are keenly specific to the context of the social movements and protests (Ophir et al., 2023). The "protest paradigm" is intricately connected to this approach. McLeod and Hertog (1999) identified four prominent frames in protest coverage: riot, confrontation, spectacle and debate. This theory postulates that these frames delegitimize the protest and can, in turn, affect public opinion. Recent studies have demonstrated that when it comes to social movements, framing is consistently the prevailing factor that can predict audience engagement and interpretation (Brown & Summer, 2019; Harlow et al., 2017).

Since the Black Lives Matter movement is intricately tied to a broader discussion on race relations in America, the media has been forced to contend with how they will frame discussions surrounding the policing of Black communities. This is particularly true when it comes to local newspapers' coverage of officer-involved shootings of Black citizens. Since most sworn officers are employed at the local level in cities and counties, it would make sense that local newspapers play an integral role in disseminating information about local cases of police violence. Local newspapers have the power to frame and socially construct racial discourse on a deeper level. There is a paucity of research that examines how local newspapers frame officer-involved deaths in news stories amid social movements. This paper seeks to compare the portrayal of police-involved deaths in three states before and after large-scale Black Lives Matter protests. Specifically, the study will use three large-scale events in the BLM movement as intervention points in a pre-post analysis. These events include the police involved deaths of Michael Brown (died from police gunshot in 2014 in Ferguson, MO), Eric Garner (died after a police chokehold in 2014 in New York City, NY), and Philando Castile (died from police gunshot in 2016 in Falcon Heights, MN).

## Methodology

### Sample

The current study examines trends in how victims of officer-involved killings are discussed in newspaper articles. Specifically, the study seeks to examine whether the representation of victims in newspapers has shifted following mass protests and highly publicized cases—particularly ones promoted by the Black Lives Matter movement. To do so, a quasi-experimental before and after research design was used following three cases of officer-involved killings.

Cases were selected through a variety of criteria. To select a sample for the study, the incidents of officer-involved fatalities were restricted to cases that drew protests led by the Black Lives Matter Movement. Incidents were also narrowed to only include those that received prolonged national attention. The current study also sought intervention cases that had higher transparency within the event. Ample video footage and bystander testimony were preferred as they improve the clarity surrounding the events. Lastly, the death had to have occurred prior to 2018 to allow for adequate post-event data collection. From the narrowed sample, the cases of Eric Garner in New York, Michael Brown in Missouri, and Philando Castile in Minnesota were selected. These cases meet all the above criteria, became pivotal discussions for the policing use of force discussion, and provide a spectrum of officer outcomes.

The Mapping of Police Violence Dataset was used to begin creating a sample of cases of officer-involved killings since there is no national database which tracks the names of people killed by law enforcement. The Mapping of Police Violence Dataset is a non-official data source which tracks police-involved killings. The information is sourced from official police data programs, the Fatal Encounters database, and information from police reports, social media, obituaries, and criminal record databases. Collectively, the dataset has tracked victim and officer information from police-involved killings since 2013.

Several inclusion criteria for cases were used to create the sample of incidents of police-involved killings from the Mapping of Police Violence dataset. First, eligible cases had to occur in one of the states within the study: Minnesota, New York, or Missouri. Any cases that occurred outside of these three states were not included in the study. In addition, cases were restricted to only include incidents that occurred the year of the incident or the year prior to or following the incident. This allowed for a three-year period to be collected from each of the three states. For example, the killing of Eric Garner occurred on July 17, 2014; therefore, all cases in New York that occurred between January 1, 2013 through December 31, 2015 were included. Michael Brown was killed the same year (August 9, 2014) so the same three-year parameter was used. Lastly, Philando Castile was the most recent, with his death occurring July 6, 2016, making the three-year parameter January 1, 2015 through December 31, 2017.

Using these criteria to narrow down cases, a final sample was created. In total, the current study pulled newspaper articles on 180 cases of police-involved killings. In New York, 66 cases met the parameters of the study with 33 occurring prior to Eric Garner and 33 occurring after. The Missouri sample consists of 77 cases (42 pre- and 35 post-Michael Brown). Lastly, Minnesota had the fewest cases with 37 incidents meeting the parameters of the study (20 prior to Philando Castile and 17 after).

Newspaper articles were then pulled for each case using Newspapers.com and a search through Google. Similar to the instances of police-involved killings, the newspaper articles were also required to meet criteria to be included in the study. Since local and national newspapers may have differences in how information is presented, the current study focuses only on local newspapers. For the purposes of this study, local refers to any newspaper published in the state that does not have a national or regional circulation. Additionally, to be eligible for inclusion in the study, articles were required to discuss the incident of the officer-involved killing or the immediate aftermath. Articles that focused on gun reform, legislation, or the Black Lives Matter movement

and merely mention the victim's name were excluded from the study. For each case, several search terms were used to find all applicable articles. The search terms include: victim name; victim name City, State; victim name, police shooting; victim name, police death. The search yielded 498 unique local newspaper articles, 236 that covered cases occurring before the intervention and 262 articles that cover cases after the intervention.

## Variables

The aim of the current study is to explore whether local newspaper coverage of police-involved fatalities shifted following highly publicized cases promoted by BLM. The main interventions for this study are the cases of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, and Philando Castile. Thus, a dummy variable was created to indicate whether each case took place before and after the intervention event in the corresponding state.

The dependent variable for the study is the tone of the discussion surrounding the victim in the incident. To measure this, two variables were developed: aggravating factors and mitigating factors. Aggravating and mitigating factors are traditionally circumstances considered in criminal law that can respectively be considered to grant more severe or lesser sentences. In practice, mitigating factors are circumstances that can lessen the severity of the crime and lead jurors to favor life in prison over the death penalty. For the current study, these concepts were modified to include discussion topics that may serve to decrease (mitigating) or increase (aggravating) the perceived blameworthiness of the victim. The authors used a deductive approach to the coding scheme by using the federal guidelines for mitigating and aggravating factors to develop an initial coding framework. After developing an initial framework for the initial codes, both authors reviewed a sample of the articles collected to note emerging themes. This information was used to further revise and finalize the coding scheme. The final scheme resulted in six discussion points that collectively make up mitigating factors. Two of the codes are derived directly from the federal legal guidelines: presence of mental health struggles, severe inebriation resulting from drug/alcohol use. The other four codes are also outlined in the federal code under the "other factors" category, however, were separated into four distinct groups for the purposes of this study. These include family/friend/acquaintance testimony of the victim's character, the victim's compliance with officer's orders, notable accomplishments in school/work/community, and other.

For aggravating factors, ten categories were created. Discussion of past criminal behavior/convictions, pointing at or threatening an officer with a weapon, and using a weapon on or injuring an officer were each derived from the federal codes. In addition, authors also created seven codes that may be important aggravating factors within a news consumption framework. These include discussion of victim aggression and/or hostility, pointing at or threatening a civilian with a weapon, using a weapon on or injuring a civilian, resisting arrest, attempting to obtain a weapon off the officer, other character testimonies that portray the victim in a negative light, and other. Once the coding framework was developed, articles were split between the authors to code. To assess interrater reliability, ten percent of the articles were selected for both authors to code. This resulted in two interrater reliability scores: authors had agreement of 78.7% for circumstances decreasing blameworthiness and of 79.0% for circumstances increasing blameworthiness. Prior literature suggests that the minimum standard for interrater reliability for exploratory studies is between 70 and 75% (Compton, Love, & Sell, 2012; Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002).

The current study also includes several control variables in the analyses. The first category of control variables included is victim demographic information, including age, race, and gender. Age is coded as a continuous measure and gender uses a dichotomous variable of male and female. Due to low rates of Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Asian, and Native American people in the sample, a three-category measure of race was used. These categories include white, Black, and other. In addition to victim demographics, situational variables were also included in analyses. These include dichotomous (yes or no) measures for whether the victim was armed, if



the event was recorded, and if witnesses were present. Lastly, a three-category variable was used to differentiate between the state in which the incident occurred.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

The current study begins with univariate analyses of the control variables. In total, 180 unique cases of police-involved killings were included within the current study. Of these, Missouri had the largest number of cases with 77 incidents, followed by New York (66 cases) and Minnesota (37 cases). The full descriptive statistics for each state and the full sample are presented in Table 1.

The majority of participants within each state are male, ranging from 94.6% of the sample in Minnesota to 97.0% in New York. Within all three states, 25 to 34-year-olds made up the largest age category of victims with ages ranging from 14 to 86 across the sample. In Missouri and Minnesota, the majority of victims were white, making up 50.6 and 59.5% of the samples respectively. In New York however, victims were most commonly Black (51.5%).

Table 1 also provides descriptive statistics for situational factors related to each incident. Overall, the majority of cases in all three states involved an armed victim. This was lowest in New York (69.7%) and highest in Minnesota (83.8%). Additionally, in most cases, no witnesses were present/interviewed by the press. Lastly, very few cases reported a recording of the incident, ranging from 4.5% in New York to 8.1% in Minnesota.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Cases

	Missouri (n=77)		New York (n=66)		Minnesota (n=37)		Full Sample (n=180)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Number of Cases								
Before Incident	42	54.5	33	50.0	20	54.1	95	52.8
After Incident	35	45.5	33	50.0	17	45.9	85	47.2
Cases by Victim Gender								
Male	74	96.1	64	97.0	35	94.6	173	96.1
Female	3	3.9	2	3.0	2	5.4	7	3.9
Cases by Victim Race								
White	39	50.6	22	33.3	22	59.5	83	46.1
Black	29	37.7	34	51.5	8	21.6	71	39.4
Other	9	11.7	10	15.2	7	18.9	26	14.4
Victim Age								
Under 25	18	23.38	9	13.6	4	10.81	31	17.22
25-34	27	35.06	17	25.7	11	29.73	55	30.56
35-44	14	18.18	14	21.2	7	18.92	35	19.44

				21.2					
	45-54	12	15.58	14	1	9	24.32	35	19.44
					10.6				
	Over 55	5	6.49	7	1	3	8.11	15	8.33
	Missing	1	1.30	5	7.58	3	8.11	9	5.00
	Mean (s.d)	33.95 (11.878)		38.46 (13.874)		38.79 (12.182)		36.51 (12.815)	
	Min-Max	16-61		14-86		20-73		14-86	
Victim Armed									
	Armed	56	72.7	46	69.7	31	83.8	133	73.9
	Unarmed	21	27.3	20	30.3	6	16.2	47	26.1
Witnesses									
	Witnesses	22	28.6	29	43.9	6	16.2	57	31.7
	No Witnesses	55	71.4	37	56.1	31	83.8	123	68.3
Recording									
	Recorded	5	6.5	3	4.5	3	8.1	11	6.1
	Not Recorded	72	93.5	63	95.5	34	91.9	169	93.9

In addition to reporting descriptive information for the cases included in the sample, univariate analyses were also used to provide an overview of the independent variables. This information is shown in Table 2. In both Missouri and New York, the most prevalent mitigating factor included in articles was character testimonials (17.2 and 15.4% respectively). However, in Minnesota, discussion of mental health issues (35.8%) was the dominating mitigating factor by a wide margin. As for aggravating factors, criminal history was the most commonly mentioned in Missouri and New York (36.7 and 50.0% respectively), while use of a weapon was the most common in Minnesota (38.3% of articles).

Table 2: Percent of Articles that Mention Mitigating and Aggravating Circumstances

	Missouri (n=180)		New York (n=156)		Minnesota (n=162)		Full Sample (N=498)		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Mitigating									
	Character	31	17.2	24	15.4	12	7.4	67	13.5
	Mental Health Issues	22	12.2	16	10.3	58	35.8	96	19.3
	Drug/Alcohol in System	4	2.2	6	3.8	7	4.3	17	3.4
	Victim Complying	2	1.1	0	0.0	4	2.4	6	1.2
	Personal Achievements	5	2.8	2	1.3	3	1.9	10	2.0
	Other	5	2.8	8	5.1	4	2.4	17	3.4
Aggravating									
	Criminal History	66	36.7	78	50.0	51	31.5	195	39.2
	Hostility	30	16.7	24	15.4	18	11.1	72	14.5
	Pointed Weapon at Officer	65	36.1	24	15.4	21	13.0	110	22.1

Used Weapon on Officer	29	16.1	59	37.8	62	38.3	150	30.1
Pointed Weapon at Bystander	16	8.9	2	1.3	3	1.9	21	4.2
Used Weapon on Bystander	5	2.8	24	15.4	17	10.5	46	9.2
Resisting Arrest	25	13.9	17	10.9	7	4.3	49	9.8
Attempt to Obtain Officers Firearm	3	1.7	7	4.5	12	7.4	22	4.4
Character Testimony	0	0.0	9	5.8	7	4.3	16	3.2
Other	0	0.0	2	1.3	0	0.0	2	0.4

### Mitigating Factors

Multivariate analyses begin with an examination of the mitigating factors discussed in news articles. This was examined in two ways: as a dichotomous and continuous measure. To begin, a stepwise binary logistic regression analysis was conducted using the dichotomous measure of mitigating factors. The first model consists of victim demographic information, including age, sex, and race. When only victim demographics are included in the model, none of the three variables are significantly related to the discussion of mitigating factors in the article. The second model adds situational factors into analysis. As can be seen in Table 3, race approaches significance at the  $p < 0.10$  level when these additional variables are included in the model. Specifically, the results indicate that mitigating factors were significantly more likely to be present in the article if the victim was Black compared to if the victim was white. Additionally, incidents in Minnesota were significantly more likely to discuss mitigating factors compared to cases that occurred in Missouri. The final model adds the before-after intervention variable into analysis. After adding the final variable into the model, both race and state maintain their significance. In addition, the before-after intervention variable also reaches significance. The negative coefficient indicates that mitigating factors were present in news articles significantly more prior to the intervention cases than they were following the intervention case. These findings indicate that newspapers were more likely to discuss information that reduces victim blameworthiness prior to the high-profile police killing.

Table 3: Logistic Regression Assessing the Presence of Mitigating Factors in Articles

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	S.E.	Exp (B)	B	S.E.	Exp (B)	B	S.E.	Exp (B)
Victim Age	0.006	0.008	1.006	0.004	0.008	1.004	0.005	0.008	1.005
Victim Sex (ref.=male)	0.262	0.556	1.300	0.561	0.577	1.752	0.590	0.580	1.803
Victim Race (ref.=white)									
Black	0.160	0.222	1.174	0.402	0.243	1.494^	0.457	0.245	1.579^
Other	0.193	0.335	1.213	0.245	0.353	1.278	0.214	0.358	1.238
Victim Armed (ref.=unarmed)				-0.130	0.234	0.879	-0.054	0.237	0.948
Witnesses (ref.=no witnesses)				-0.044	0.236	0.957	-0.180	0.244	0.835
Recording (ref.=no recording)				0.251	0.319	1.285	0.333	0.325	1.396
State (ref.=Missouri)									
New York				-0.201	0.263	0.818	-0.126	0.266	0.882
Minnesota				0.908	0.250	2.480**	0.854	0.252	2.349**
Before/After Intervention (ref.=before intervention case)							-0.054	0.215	0.582*
Constant	-0.853	0.350	0.426*	-1.056	0.407	0.348*	-0.870	0.411	0.419
-2 Log Likelihood		598.018			574.510			568.106	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>		0.004			0.072			0.090	

Note: ^ is sig at .1, \* is sig at .05, \*\* is sig at .01

The second method used to examine changes in article discussion of mitigating factors was through analysis of a continuous measure. To do so, a continuous variable of the number of mitigating factors discussed in each article was created. Then a multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine articles from each case as well as the overall sample. These results are presented below in Table 4.

The first three models in the regression table present the results for each of the three states included in the study. Within all three state samples, victim age, gender, and race were not significantly associated with the number of mitigating factors discussed. Additionally, several situational variables, including whether the victim was armed, if the incident was recorded, and whether the event occurred before or after the intervention case did not reach significance. The only variable that reached significance in the individual state analysis was whether witnesses were present, however, this only reached significance in Missouri. The negative coefficient indicates that the absence of witnesses was associated with more mitigating factors in the article.

The full sample analysis is presented in the final model in the table. Similar to the state analysis, none of the victim demographic factors reached significance. However, in the full sample, two situational variables reached significance: witnesses and before-after intervention. The results suggest that articles discussed significantly more mitigating factors when witnesses were not present during the incident. Mitigating factors were also mentioned significantly more in cases before the intervention compared to cases that occurred after the intervention.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression Assessing Number of Mitigating Factors Discussed in Articles

	Missouri Sample			New York			Minnesota			Full Sample		
	B	t	P-value	B	t	p-value	B	t	P-value	B	t	P-value
Victim Age	-0.005	0.953	0.342	0.003	0.885	0.378	0.004	1.037	0.302	0.001	0.571	0.568
Victim Sex (ref.= Male)	0.009	0.042	0.967	0.605	1.506	0.134	0.464	1.093	0.277	0.045	0.272	0.786
Victim Race (ref.= Black)	-0.143	1.187	0.237	0.102	-0.963	0.337	0.034	-0.284	0.777	-0.075	-1.189	0.235
Victim Armed (ref.=unarmed)	-0.051	0.422	0.674	0.002	0.023	0.982	0.089	0.666	0.507	0.020	0.310	0.757
Witnesses (ref.=no witnesses)	-0.216	2.019	0.045	0.105	0.863	0.390	0.086	-0.632	0.528	-0.128	-1.929	0.054
Recording (ref.=no recording)	0.096	0.557	0.578	0.025	-0.133	0.895	0.054	0.397	0.692	0.108	1.189	0.235
Before/After Intervention	-0.155	1.518	0.131	0.042	-0.348	0.729	0.160	-1.575	0.117	-0.096	-3.298	0.001
R <sup>2</sup>		0.062			0.045			0.044			0.030	

#### Aggravating Factors

In addition to mitigating factors, the current study also provides analysis of aggravating factors mentioned in news articles. To begin this analysis, a logistic regression was conducted using the dichotomous aggravating factors variable. These results can be found in Table 5. The first model in Table 5 includes only victim demographic information. As can be seen, when only demographic variables are entered into analysis, none of the variables significantly influence the presence of aggravating factors. The second model adds situational variables. When these variables are included, race approaches significance. The negative coefficient indicates that articles about white victims were significantly more likely to discuss aggravating factors compared to articles who discuss other (non-white and non-Black) victims. Additionally, two situational variables reached

significance: victim armed and state. Articles written about victims who were armed were significantly more likely to discuss aggravating factors. In addition, articles discussing cases that occurred in Minnesota were significantly less likely than cases in Missouri to discuss aggravating circumstances. The final model includes the before-after incident variable. Model 3 indicates that whether cases occurred before or after the high-profile incident was not significantly related to discussions of aggravating factors.

Table 5: Logistic Regression Assessing the Presence of Aggravating Factors in Articles

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	S.E.	Exp (B)	B	S.E.	Exp (B)	B	S.E.	Exp (B)
Victim Age	0.004	0.011	1.004	-0.001	0.013	0.999	-0.001	0.013	0.999
Victim Sex (ref.=male)	-0.666	0.681	0.514	-1.027	0.831	0.358	-1.028	0.829	0.358
Victim Race (ref.=white)									
Black	-0.073	0.322	0.930	0.017	0.366	1.017	0.025	0.336	1.025
Other	-0.600	0.426	0.549	-0.857	0.483	0.425^	-0.862	0.484	0.422^
Victim Armed (ref.=unarmed)				2.037	0.322	7.668**	2.052	0.325	7.786**
Witnesses (ref.=no witnesses)				-0.060	0.337	0.942	-0.094	0.347	0.910
Recording (ref.=no recording)				-0.432	0.448	0.649	-0.422	0.449	0.656
State (ref.=Missouri)									
New York				-0.658	0.415	0.518	-0.626	0.422	0.535
Minnesota				-1.016	0.394	0.362*	-1.026	0.395	0.358**
Before/After Intervention (ref.=before intervention case)							-0.130	0.326	0.878
Constant	1.854	0.504	6.388**	1.485	0.595	4.414*	1.530	0.607	4.619*
-2 Log Likelihood		355.916			301.362			301.203	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>		0.011			0.217			0.217	

Note: ^ is sig at .1, \* is sig at .05, \*\* is sig at .01

Analysis of aggravating factors were also supplemented with a multiple regression analysis. These analyses begin with an examination of the frequency of aggravating factors discussed in local newspaper articles from each state. This begins with Missouri in Model 1 and is followed by analysis of New York and Minnesota in Models 2 and 3. This information is presented below in Table 5.

The first few variables in the regression consist of victim demographic variables. Victim age is significant in the sample of Minnesota articles. The positive coefficient indicates that female victims have significantly more aggravating circumstances mentioned compared to male victims. Age

approaches significance in the Missouri (p=0.064) and New York (p=0.057) samples, however, in these two states, higher rates of aggravating circumstances were associated with male victims. Race is also significant within the Missouri sample, indicating that articles covering Black victims include significantly more aggravating factors than those covering victims of other races. Only one situational factor reaches significance among the state samples: victim armed. Victim armed is highly significant in the Missouri (p=0.001) and New York (p=0.000) samples and approaches significance in the Minnesota (p=0.057) sample. In all three states, articles covering victims that were armed include significantly more aggravating factors in their coverage of the incident.

Table 6: Multiple Linear Regression Assessing Number of Aggravating Factors Discussed in Articles

	Missouri Sample			New York			Minnesota			Full Sample		
	B	t	p-value	B	t	p-value	B	t	p-value	B	t	p-value
Victim Age	-0.010	1.864	0.064	-0.012	-1.917	0.057	0.010	2.172	0.032	-0.001	0.443	0.658
Victim Sex (ref.= Male)	-0.246	1.055	0.293	-0.596	-0.905	0.367	-0.742	1.331	0.185	-0.436	1.963	0.050
Victim Race (ref.= Black)	0.314	2.459	0.015	-0.193	-1.118	0.266	-0.081	0.515	0.607	-0.069	0.811	0.418
Victim Armed (ref.=unarmed)	0.420	3.316	0.001	1.117	6.619	0.000	0.336	1.922	0.057	0.606	6.914	0.000
Witnesses (ref.=no witnesses)	-0.087	0.764	0.446	-0.264	-1.331	0.185	-0.012	0.069	0.945	-0.113	1.257	0.209
Recording (ref.=no recording)	0.137	0.750	0.454	0.498	1.624	0.107	-0.274	1.535	0.127	-0.027	0.223	0.824
Before/After Intervention	0.005	0.050	0.960	0.007	0.035	0.972	-0.033	0.248	0.805	0.028	0.351	0.725
R <sup>2</sup>	0.101			0.311			0.110			0.114		

In addition to individual state analysis, Table 5 also presents the multiple regression analysis results for the full sample. In the full sample analysis, two variables reached significance. First, the results indicate that stories involving male victims discuss significantly more aggravating factors than articles covering female victims. Additionally, articles discussing incidents involving armed victims included significantly more aggravating factors. Whether the event occurred before or after the intervention case was not significant.

## Discussion

The current study sought to explore shifts in local newspaper framing of officer-involved killings following largescale protests. To do so, the authors examined 498 newspaper articles covering 180 cases of officer-involved killings across three states. Regression analyses for mitigating factors reveal a few significant findings. First, analyses reveal that the discussion of mitigating factors varied by location. The results indicate that articles in Minnesota were significantly more likely to include a discussion of circumstances that reduce the blameworthiness of the victim compared to articles from Missouri. One explanation for this is that Minnesota is exhibiting a historical effect because of the year gap between the death of Philando Castile in Minnesota and earlier cases. The ongoing protests regarding police-involved killings in other areas may have led to a change in how news agencies cover events overall resulting in the significant difference between states. This may suggest that these protesting events are effective in influencing news framing, but that this change requires continual attention to establish. Further research is needed to parcel out what local factors contribute to the differences in discussions of police-involved killings and the impacts of prolonged social action.

In addition to regional differences in the discussion of mitigating factors, whether citizen deaths occurred before or after the major protest incident also reached significance. Specifically, the results demonstrate that incidents covered before the intervention cases were significantly more likely to include a discussion of mitigating factors than police-involved deaths that occurred after. While this could suggest that the ongoing protests have not had an impact on shaping the narrative of officer-involved killings, it could also portray a short-term shift in perceptions following highly publicized cases. For example, the intervention cases all represent officer-involved killings that portray a clear and well documented example of excessive use of force by police that became a topic of discussion years following the event. When these brash examples of police violence occur, subsequent cases may pale in comparison. Future research is needed to parcel out the impacts that these cases have on subsequent officer-involved killings.

Another noteworthy finding is that articles discussing Black victims are more likely, though not significantly more likely, to include mitigating factors than are articles covering White victims. This finding is unique considering prior research suggests that media tends to frame Black citizens in a negative light (Dixon, 2008; Dixon, 2006; Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman, 1997). To further explore this relationship, the authors conducted a chi-square analysis which showed the prevailing mitigating factor mentioned for Black victims was character testimony. The heightened reporting of character testimony for cases involving Black victims may highlight the perceptions of unfair police force among people of the Black community. In other words, the access to media outlets that families receive following these incidents may be more heavily utilized among Black families as it provides them an opportunity to highlight broader systemic issues that contributed to the event. This is something that should be considered and explored in future research.

As for the discussion of aggravating factors, location remains significant. Specifically, local articles from Minnesota are less likely to discuss aggravating factors than articles from Missouri. This again may highlight that there is a compiling impact of ongoing attention to police issues rather than isolated regional effects. Additionally, analyses examining the number of aggravating factors reveal a few significant demographic factors. First, victim age appears to have a relationship with the number of aggravating factors discussed. While age is not significant among analysis of the whole sample, when examining each state independently, age reaches significance in Minnesota. Specifically, the results suggest that articles discussing older victims in Minnesota include significantly more aggravating factors. Furthermore, Missouri marks the only state observed in which race reaches significance. Specifically, articles covering Black victims discuss significantly fewer aggravating factors. This could further support the impact that prolonged attention to police-involved killings have on news coverage or it may exemplify the impact that regional differences have on the



discussion of these issues. More research is still needed to identify the role that these regional differences in racial demographic and political affiliation have on these discussions.

As a whole, the results suggest that the protests surrounding police-involved killings have had a limited role in shaping local news discussions of officer-involved killings. The media frames associated with the “protest paradigm” can even delegitimize a social movement which can then affect public opinion (McLeod & Hertog, 1999) and newspaper coverage. The shifting narrative presented through the media has several implications. Multiple scholars have found that framing impacts the ways in which citizens view social issues (Carlyle et al., 2014; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Greer, 2012; Popkin, 1991; Webster et al., 2020). One implication with regard to shifting the narrative of officer-involved killings is that it may be able to influence police-community relations. Media should be cognizant not to oversimplify their coverage of these events as it could lead to citizens developing a more skewed perception of police or vice versa.

In addition, the results suggest that social movements such as Black Lives Matter may have a complex impact on how media portrays social issues. While this study reveals that media coverage tends to include fewer mitigating factors following the intervention cases, Minnesota consistently had more mitigating factors and fewer aggravating factors than the other two states. Cumulatively, this may suggest that in order to have an impact on media framing, social movements need to engage in consistent and ongoing social action. This means that isolated protests may not be enough to provoke substantive change.

However, these findings should be considered in unison with the limitations of the current study. First and foremost, the current study examined local newspapers in three states. The findings of the current study already suggest significant differences between states; therefore, it is unclear the impacts this movement has had on media discussions in other states or at a national level. The current study also does not provide a measure for state or regional demographics, local police policies, political affiliation of the area, or political leanings of the local newspapers and reporters. Each of these may have an impact on how these discussions are portrayed and should be considered in future research. Additionally, the use of news articles collected online also accompanies several limitations. Namely, some newspapers, particularly in more rural areas, may not publish online. Furthermore, articles were located using the victim's name in the search. Due to this, initial articles covering an incident (prior to names being released) are not included in the sample.

Despite these limitations, the current study provides an initial look at the impact of large scale social movements on the framing of policing issues. With the growth of social media as a rallying platform and rise in recent social criminal justice movements, there is a mounting need for scholarship on the impacts and limitations of these activities. Further research is still needed to examine the impacts that these types of movements have on other important measures such as police accountability and local policy changes.

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