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*Culture and  
Conflict: The  
Framing of News  
in Three National  
U.S. Newspapers*



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### **ABSTRACT**

**OVERVIEW:** This research addressed how corporate political leanings of media organizations impacted journalistic coverage of issues of conflict and culture.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study was to identify how national newspapers with different editorial stances framed protest news coverage of the cultural issue of Black Lives Matter in order to attract audiences and differentiate their products. Journalists are influenced not only by what they see and hear at the scene of a news story but by the work practices and management decisions of their news organizations and parent companies.

**METHODOLOGY:** Three national newspapers were chosen for analysis. Computational and manual content analyses of news stories were conducted to identify differences in word usage, story bias, and source usage. Newspaper stories on Black Lives Matter were collected at the height of coverage in Spring 2020 following the death of George Floyd and again in Spring 2021 surrounding the trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer held responsible for the death. This timeframe provided an opportunity to measure differences in institutional and journalistic content decision-making in news stories during the heat of cultural exchanges.

**FINDINGS:** Analysis of newspaper coverage of the cultural movement indicated differences in coverage existed among newspapers where the liberal-leaning newspaper was more likely to engage in more sensational coverage, while the conservative newspaper engaged in more contextual coverage.

**KEYWORDS:** civility, social media, journalism, news, Black Lives Matter, peace journalism.

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## **CULTURE AND CONFLICT: THE FRAMING OF NEWS IN THREE NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS**

When covering cultural protest news, journalists are tasked with writing stories that inform and attract audiences, as well as provide fairness and balance in sensitive or difficult situations. This is challenging because, as Coleman (2011) states, America and many parts of the world are experiencing “intractable conflict” where encounters with the “other side” (political, religious, ethnic, racial or otherwise) are becoming more and more charged. Such intractable conflict in culture stifles information and understanding and promotes other views as being unreasonable, malicious, extreme, or even crazy.

This research analyzes how three national U.S. newspapers *New York Times*; *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal*, impacted the understanding of protest news as it came to dominate coverage across media platforms in the spring of 2020. Specifically, it addressed how editorial policy may have impacted word and source usage in news stories, as well as how journalists shaped coverage of the social movement of Black Lives Matter during the height of its controversy. To address this issue, differences in word usage and framing were compared among the newspapers with liberal, moderate and conservative editorial stances. The controversial Black Lives Matter movement of 2020-21 provided an ideal backdrop to better understand how newspapers compete by differentiating products in the framing of news and information on culture and conflict.

As journalists seek truth in the age of digital immediacy and corporate ownership, more understanding is needed regarding the how news content is evolving in coverage of cultural conflicts. According to De Michelis (2018) the media have an important role in cultural protest prevention by alerting policy makers – and the public opinion that influences them – to potential consequences. While graphic stories tend to take precedence, there is more that can be done to inform and create understanding. For example, the coverage of the Persian Gulf War highlighted the need for context to create understanding of centuries-old conflicts (Powers and Powers, 1991). Context was also needed in the coverage of health controversies to create understanding among stakeholders and the public (Powers, 1999). In recent years, discussions on civility in media have increased where media managers are concerned with covering protest news when incivility is on the rise (see Greenlee Summit, 2019). In 2020, the Black Lives Matter controversy gained momentum with the death of George Floyd and increased analysis into coverage of police violence (Aloe, June 4, 2020). Protest coverage of events such as Black Lives Matter was particularly challenging as journalists were often caught in

middle of organizational and societal demands. Journalists were influenced not only by what they saw and heard at the site of a news story but by work practices and how managers thought stories should be covered or framed. Powers and He (May 2020) found that media managers advocate for balance and responsibility by enforcing journalistic policies or ethics codes; however, these approaches often differ from newsroom to newsroom.

### **FRAMING CULTURAL NEWS**

The Project for Excellence in Journalism (Framing the news, 2020) found framing impacts public understanding, policy, and public opinion in a number of ways. Local papers tend to rely on traditional straight news accounts and try to explain how things work. National papers are more interpretative and try to put news into a larger perspective. Additionally, they found that news originates from decisions made in the newsroom rather than by events from the outside.

Given this information, analyzing the framing of news becomes increasingly important when covering sensitive issues or cultural conflicts. Furthermore, Entman (1993) says misunderstanding is quickly constructed with instantaneous coverage and biased story angles and interview sources. Hall Jamieson (2017) says while viewing of uncivil behavior promotes viewer interest, it negatively impacts political trust. Mutz (2007) believes uncivil discourse is emotionally arousing and catches our attention; however, he and others question the impact on culture and society, especially when news is unlimited geographically and instantaneous around the world (Gervais, 2015; Santana, 2015; Stroud et al., 2015).

Brooks and Greer (2007) were concerned that continuous framing of uncivil messages leads to polarity. Furthermore, they say when fairness eludes media, cultural harmony decreases. However, according to Thorson, Braga and Ekdale (2010), when a news article was embedded in an uncivil blog post, the article's perceived credibility increased. Borah (2013) found that incivility increased perceptions of credibility of a news article; however, it still decreased political trust. Furthermore, in a study of online comments, Coe, Kenski and Rains (2014) found that uncivil comments were more likely to include statistics as evidence and were also more likely to more often receive reactions from readers in the form of thumbs-down ratings.

Anderson et al. (2018) found that groups most affected by incivility in news stories on cultural and political issues were conservatives, and that liberals and moderates were less affected. This rise of incivility in the U.S. toward conservatives is also moving consumers to media that agree with their political views. Sydnor (2018) indicated that "as Americans place themselves

in increasingly homogeneous online communication networks, it seems probable that they will see more like-minded incivility and less disagreeable incivility.” The risk in surrounding yourself with like-minded individuals, however, occurs when antagonism and distrust for others are unreasonably heightened. The media that have the highest distrust among Republicans are CNN (58%), MSNBC (47%), New York Times (42%), and NBC (40%; Jurkowitz et al., 2021). The sources that have the highest distrust among Democrats are Fox News (61%), Sean Hannity (28%), and Breitbart (26%), (Jurkowitz et al., 2021).

Mourão, Kilgo, and Sylvie (2021) analyzed advocacy framing and found that while stories were initially focused on protest violence, coverage developed to become more legitimizing. Mourão, Kilgo, and Sylvie (2019) also compared the protest coverage following shootings and found that non-violent protests received overall less coverage than violent protests. They assert that peaceful protests have more difficulty gaining media coverage.

Mourão and Chen (2020) also compared protest coverage from professional journalists’ perspectives and found that reporters viewed social media as a space for personal expression where they could reveal more honest opinions, often challenging patterns of protest coverage identified in the literature. Nevertheless, they usually applied traditional ways of reporting to the online realm,

Mourão and Kilgo (2021) found in their study of the Black Lives Matter movement that news consumers were more likely to read, like, comment on, and share stories that featured a legitimizing frame. A delegitimizing frame consisted of riot and confrontation and placed a higher value on conflict and spectacle, including violence, deviant behavior, looting, and destruction of property, whereas, a legitimizing frame consisted of protest and debate and happened when media presented protesters as legitimate groups with valid grievances and demands.

## **TOWARD A MODEL OF LEGITIMATE CULTURE AND CONFLICT REPORTING**

According to Brown and Paul (2016), media can facilitate incremental progress by replacing malicious ideas, ideologies, and narratives with respect, safety, sharing, and common ground narratives. For news to diminish negative messages, they identify four means: opportunity, messaging, audience, and coordination. Opportunities include challenging misinformation and dissuading violence. Messaging includes discrediting hostile discourse. Audiences include

promoting “anti-bias,” and “anti-defamation” serve to cancel negative ideas. Coordination includes promoting the alternative message of longer-term peace. Inciting peace — just as inciting violence — requires coordination across a diverse group of stakeholders. Their research indicates that words and where they come from matter.

Ersoy and Miller (2020) suggest a journalism strategy for analyzing content. They identified dichotomous categories, including Compatibility and Incompatibility. **Compatibility** is when the media explore commonalities and promote dialogue. History and culture are highlighted. Conflicts are contextualized, and mistakes of both sides are reported. Responsibility for law and order is shared. Negative attributes are avoided. Concerns of aggrieved parties are reported. Violence is explained from a broad range. Mistakes of both sides are reported. **Incompatibility**, on the other hand, is sensational and occurs when media takes sides in protest news, treating one side as alien to our culture and not belonging. Deviant actions such as violence and property destruction are highlighted. Biasness prevails, and protest is told from primarily one perspective. Coverage is focused on disagreements. There are implications that victims belonging to particular political groups are unworthy.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2016) addressed opportunities for nonviolent responses to protest news by presenting stories with a range of voices, including non-elite sources, rather than interviewing a leader of one or more sides of the story. This approach challenges dominant accounts, resists propaganda, and highlights peaceful solutions which are often under way in a protest situation. Galtung and Lynch (2010) addressed the importance of avoiding dehumanization in protest coverage. Instead, they found that exploring the formation of protest news...who were the parties involved; what were their goals; what was the socio-political and cultural context of the protest news; and what were the visible and invisible manifestations of violence...created more balance in reporting. Reporting nonviolent initiatives at the grassroots level and following up stories covering resolutions also contributed to the reconstruction and reconciliation phases.

Harlow, et.al (2020) outlined a topology for analyzing protest news frames that further contextualize Compatible/Incompatible continuums. Frames included the Riot frame, which focuses on the violence of protestors through rioting, looting, or causing damage to public property or society. The Confrontation frame focuses on clashes between protesters and police or authorities, or the arrests of protesters. The Spectacle frame focuses on the emotions, drama, or unusualness of protests. The debate frame focuses on the social critique of the movement, characterized by the presence of protesters’ viewpoints and

demands. Findings indicated fewer conservative articles included the riot frame. Stories about socio-economic and human rights/justice protests had reduced the odds of using the confrontation frame. Stories about protests in Europe had decreased the odds of having a confrontation frame and increased the odds of having a debate frame. Furthermore, Elmasry and el-Nawawy (2017) found that protestors were directly quoted more frequently than police officers and government officials during spikes in protest activity.

Based on the literature, the following research questions were addressed on protest coverage of Black Lives Matter in 2020 and 2021:

RQ1: During the height of cultural protests in the streets of major cities in the U.S., how did word usage differ among national newspapers?

RQ2: How did source usage differ among newspapers on coverage of conflict?

RQ3: Comparing compatible and incompatible story coverage, how did word usage differ among stories and newspapers?

## **METHOD**

A computational analysis of news stories was conducted to identify key words and phrases included in stories. Text mining or automatic text classification was used to create systematic analysis of written content (Adeva et al., 2014). Furthermore, text-mining allowed for the analysis and detection of trends and behavior (Adeva & Atxa, 2007). This study utilized the text-mining tool of JMP Pro16, which is part of SAS (see Appendix A). JMP used the document term matrix (DTM) to develop indicator variables in the text (Klimberg & McCullough, 2016). The most frequent terms (words or phrases) in the news stories were identified, leading to an understanding of decision-making in protest news coverage.

In addition to computational analysis, a manual content analysis analyzed source usage and story bias. Ozaydin et al., (2017) indicate that machine learning and text mining can effectively enhance systematic reviews. Ersoy and Miller's (2020) compatible-incompatible continuum was used to measure overall bias in news stories where 1= low compatibility and 5=high compatibility. Examples of high compatibility were stories exploring commonalities and desires with wording such as "making a difference, gathering together, and hoping for change." An example of incompatibility was when a story focused primarily on the sensational and used wording such as "firecrackers, running, plumes of tear gas, and canisters clattering on the pavement." The manual content analysis also identified the number and types of sources used in each story, such as officers, lawyers, protesters, community organizers, business owners, and politicians.

After pretesting, the coder reliability for the manual content analysis was



88%. In total, 256 stories were analyzed from the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal* from May 31-June 6, 2020 and from April 19-April 26, 2021. The timeframe was determined by searching Google Trends for the most frequent words related to Black Lives Matter which indicated when people were most interested in BLM following the death of George Floyd and again the following year during the murder trial of Derek Chauvin, who was found guilty of murder for the death of George Floyd. These newspapers were chosen because they represented different editorial biases, with the *New York Times* leaning left, *USA Today* leaning moderate, and the *Wall Street Journal* leaning right (News Bias, 2022).

### RESULTS

Descriptive statistics indicate the overall mean word count per story was 1366. Analysis of variance indicates significant differences among newspapers in both word count (<.001) and story bias (.023). The mean count for words for the *New York Times* (NYT) was 1498; *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) 1142; and *USA Today* (USA) 1022. Overall, the mean headline bias score for all newspapers was 2.89, indicating a neutral tone, and the overall story bias score was 3.24, indicating a lean toward compatible coverage. There was a total of 157 feature stories and 67 hard news stories analyzed. Figure 1 provides a word cloud visualizing the most prominent words used in stories overall.

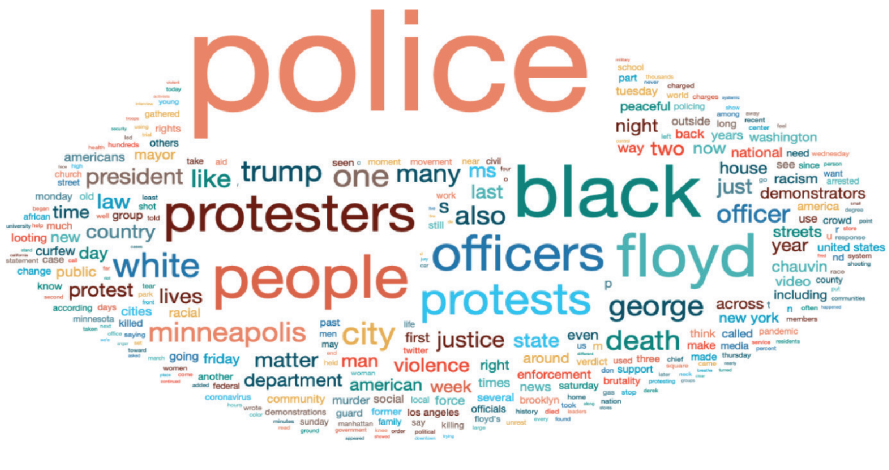
Figure 1: Word Cloud: Overall Words used in Coverage



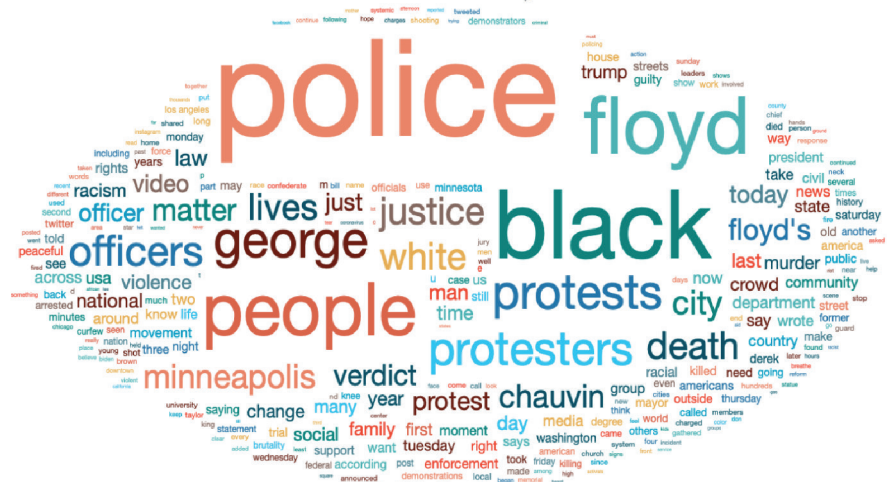
RQ1 addressed how words and phrases in stories differed among newspapers. The computational analysis provided differences in word usage and phrases used among newspapers. Word clouds in Figure 2 identified prominent words comparing the three newspapers' coverage of the conflict.

Figure 2: Comparison of Word Clouds among Newspapers

Prominent Words Used in *New York Times* Stories



Prominent Words Used in *USA Today* Stories



Prominent Words Used in *Wallstreet Journal* Stories

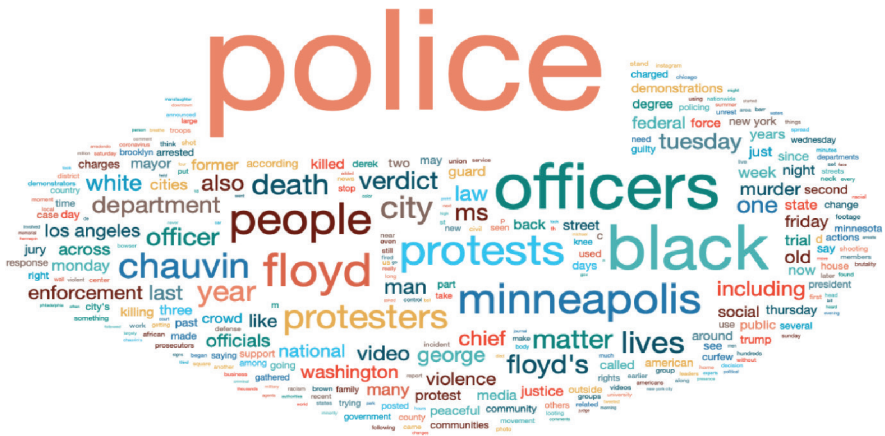


Table 1 identified the words most frequently used in each newspaper. For comparison purposes, raw scores were converted into percentages for each newspaper. For example, Police Officer(s) was the most frequently-used word(s) for all newspapers. It made up 29.45 % of NYT most frequently-used words; 24.92 % for USA, and 35.74 % for WSJ. The word Violence made up 3.17% of the most frequently used words for the NYT, 2.85% for USA and 1.10% for WSJ. Other differences included the use of the word Peaceful making up 2.25% of WSJ coverage; 1.91% for NYT; and 1.80% for USA (see Table 1 for more comparisons).

Table 1: Comparison of Word Usage Among Newspapers

WORD USAGE BY NEWSPAPER						
Word	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Police (officers)	2112	29.45%	1207	24.92%	682	35.74%
Black/White	1198	16.70%	907	18.72%	286	14.99%

WORD USAGE BY NEWSPAPER						
Word	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Protest/ Protester	584	8.14%	328	6.77%	115	6.03%
Floyd	675	9.41%	542	11.19%	154	8.07%
Chauvin	168	2.34%	217	4.48%	120	6.29%
Trump	323	4.50%	128	2.64%	40	2.10%
Justice	260	3.63%	260	2.00%	46	2.41%
Death	307	4.28%	259	5.35%	95	4.98%
Violence	227	3.17%	138	2.85%	21	1.10%
Demonstrators	172	2.40%	64	1.32%	25	1.31%
Racism	162	2.26%	128	2.64%	22	1.15%
Racial	142	1.98%	93	1.92%	19	1.00%
Killed/Killing	120	1.67%	92	1.90%	47	2.46%
Peaceful	137	1.91%	87	1.80%	43	2.25%
Brutality	106	1.48%	50	1.03%	19	1.00%
Looting	123	1.72%	50	1.03%	19	1.00%
Shooting	68	0.95%	61	1.26%	24	1.26%
Murder	125	1.74%	126	2.60%	59	3.09%

WORD USAGE BY NEWSPAPER						
Word	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Charged/ Charges	163	2.27%	107	2.21%	72	3.77%
<b>Total</b>	7172	100.00%	4844	100.00%	1908	100.00%

Similarly, Table 2 identified the phrases most frequently used in each newspaper. For example, Black Lives Matter was the most frequently-used phrase for all newspapers, accounting for 16.24% of NYT most frequently-used phrases, 22.39% for USA, and 19.55% for the WSJ. The phrase White House made up 13.84% of NYT most frequently-used phrases, 8.05% of USA most frequently-used phrases, and only 5.59% of WSJ most frequently-used words. Other notable differences included Law Enforcement (16.48 WSJ, 12.16 NYT, 11.57 USA), National Guard (WSJ 12.57%, NYT 7.99%, USA 5.53%), and Guilty verdict (WSJ 4.47%, USA 4.15%, NYT 0.80%).

**Table 2: Comparison of Phrase Usage Among Newspapers**

PHRASE USAGE BY NEWSPAPER						
Phrase	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Black Lives Matter	183	16.24%	178	22.39%	70	19.55%
Law enforcement	137	12.16%	92	11.57%	59	16.48%
White House	156	13.84%	64	8.05%	20	5.59%

PHRASE USAGE BY NEWSPAPER						
Phrase	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Police brutality	98	8.70%	63	7.92%	16	4.47%
National Guard	90	7.99%	44	5.53%	45	12.57%
Tear gas	77	6.83%	33	4.15%	9	2.51%
Black people	27	2.40%	21	2.00%	6	1.68%
Black men	33	2.93%	18	2.26%	30	8.38%
African American	41	3.64%	23	2.89%	7	1.96%
Civil rights	56	4.97%	58	7.30%	18	5.03%
Guilty verdict	9	0.80%	33	4.15%	16	4.47%
Systemic racism	34	3.02%	28	3.52%	5	1.40%
Racial justice	33	2.93%	26	3.27%	3	0.84%
Black community	16	1.42%	22	2.77%	3	0.84%
White police	26	2.31%	29	3.65%	13	3.63%
Use of force	31	2.75%	21	2.64%	10	2.79%
Public safety	29	2.57%	16	2.01%	5	1.40%

PHRASE USAGE BY NEWSPAPER						
Phrase	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Peaceful protestors	26	2.31%	10	1.26%	7	1.96%
Justice system	25	2.22%	16	2.01%	16	4.47%
<b>Total</b>	1127	100.00%	795	100.00%	358	100.00%

RQ2 addressed source usage among newspapers. All three newspapers interviewed unofficial sources, usually at the protest scene. Table 3 indicates the average scores of source usage per type for all newspapers. For example, all newspapers used, on average, about 1.25 Unofficial sources per story. Unofficial sources included protesters, citizens, etc. Newspapers used, on average, about .79 Organizational sources, including activists, council members, etc., per story. About 1.89 Professionals including doctors, lawyers, professors, actors and athletes were included per story. While Police, Democrats and Republicans were, on average, included most as sources in news stories, there were differences among newspapers. WSJ used Police as sources significantly more often; USA used Professionals more often; NYT used Unofficial sources more often.

**Table 3: Average Source Usage Per Story in all Newspapers**

Police	Republican	Business	Democrat	Professionals	Organizations	Unofficial	Media
.65*	.28*	0.33	.65*	1.89	0.79	1.25	0.32

**\*Indicates Significant difference among Newspapers at <.05 level.**

RQ3 addressed story bias and how words and phrases differed among compatible and incompatible stories published by newspapers. The 5-point bias scale on Compatible/Incompatible coverage was combined into three

categories where 1 and 2 was Incompatible, 3 was Neutral, and 4 and 5 was Compatible. Percentages did not total 100% because they were limited to word/phrase usage within stories among newspapers. There were 55 stories in the Incompatible category; 61 stories in the Neutral category; and 108 in the Compatible category. Table 4 provides counts for words and phrases in stories that fell into the Compatible bias category among newspapers. For example, of stories in the Compatible category, USA included the word Justice (4.07%) more often than either the NYT (2.93%) or WSJ (1.74%). Family was also used more often by USA (2.02%, WSJ 1.17%, NYT 1.15%). Newspapers were similar in their use of other compatible words. However, the WSJ was more likely to use Peaceful (1.63%) than the NYT (1.54%) or USA (1.36%). Of Compatible Phrases in Table 4, Racial Justice made up 1.46% of NYT most used phrases, while it made up 1.58% for USA, and only .46% for WSJ. The phrase Police Reform was used similarly by both NYT (1.11%) and USA (1.10%) but was never used in WSJ (0%).

**Table 4: Compatible Bias of Words and Phrases by Newspaper**

COMPATIBLE WORDS AND PHRASES BY NEWSPAPER						
Word	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Justice	260	2.93%	260	4.07%	46	1.74%
Community	67	0.75%	113	1.77%	34	1.29%
Peaceful	137	1.54%	87	1.36%	43	1.63%
Family	102	1.15%	129	2.02%	31	1.17%
Rights	109	1.23%	97	1.52%	28	1.06%
Movement	105	1.18%	101	1.58%	27	1.02%
Civil	91	1.02%	95	1.49%	27	1.02%



COMPATIBLE WORDS AND PHRASES BY NEWSPAPER						
Word	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Trial	69	0.78%	89	1.39%	51	1.93%
History	90	1.01%	65	1.02%	6	0.23%
<b>Word Total</b>	1030	11.60%	1036	16.24%	293	11.08%
Phrase	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Social media	67	2.97%	72	4.38%	36	5.46%
Civil rights	56	2.48%	58	3.53%	18	2.73%
Breonna Taylor	28	1.24%	28	1.70%	6	0.91%
Racial justice	33	1.46%	26	1.58%	3	0.46%
Police reform	25	1.11%	18	1.10%	0	0.00%
Peaceful protestors	26	1.15%	10	0.61%	7	1.06%
<b>Phrase Total</b>	235	10.43%	212	12.90%	70	10.62%

Table 5 provides counts for words and phrases in stories that fell into the Incompatible bias category among newspapers. For example, of Incompatible words, the NYT included the word "Violent" (2.56%) more often than did USA (2.16%) and the WSJ (.79%). NYT had the highest level of incompatible word usage (17.30%) and incompatible phrasing totals (16.99%). Of incompatible phrases, "Police brutality" was the most commonly used phrase for NYT 4.35%, USA 3.83%, WSJ 2.43%. However, "National Guard" was used by WSJ

most (6.83%), NYT 3.99% and USA 2.68%.

**Table 5: Incompatible Words and Phrases by Newspaper**

INCOMPATIBLE WORDS AND PHRASES BY NEWSPAPER						
Word	New York Times		USA Today		Wall Street Journal	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Death	307	3.46%	259	4.06%	95	3.59%
Trump	323	3.64%	128	2.01%	40	1.51%
Violence/ Violent	227	2.56%	138	2.16%	21	0.79%
Murder	125	1.41%	126	1.97%	59	2.23%
Force	137	1.54%	63	0.99%	45	1.70%
Brutality	106	1.19%	69	1.08%	20	0.76%
Looting	123	1.39%	50	0.78%	19	0.72%
Killed/ Killing	120	1.35%	92	1.44%	47	1.78%
Shooting	68	0.77%	61	0.96%	24	0.91%
<b>Word Total</b>	1536	17.31%	986	15.45%	370	13.99%
Phrase	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Tear gas	77	3.42%	33	2.01%	9	1.37%

Police brutality	98	4.35%	63	3.83%	16	2.43%
<b>INCOMPATIBLE WORDS AND PHRASES BY NEWSPAPER</b>						
	<b>New York Times</b>		<b>USA Today</b>		<b>Wall Street Journal</b>	
<b>Phrase</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Use of force	31	1.38%	21	1.28%	10	1.52%
Shot and killed	20	0.89%	14	0.85%	12	1.82%
Police violence	67	2.97%	25	1.52%	7	1.06%
National Guard	90	3.99%	44	2.68%	45	6.83%
<b>Phrase Total</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>16.99%</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>12.17%</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>15.02%</b>

## DISCUSSION

This study provided a glimpse of how words and phrases are used by newspapers of different political orientations in the U.S. national newspaper market. The *New York Times* used language that was more often Incompatible, emphasizing the sensationalism of looting and fires. While the right-leaning and moderate newspapers more often avoided the use of incompatible words and phrases. According to Mauro and Kilgo (2021), too much focus on violence and deviant behavior, such as looting and destruction, in news coverage may turn off readers and make them less likely to read and share information. These findings are important in that the three national newspapers chosen for this research play a pivotal role in influencing journalism throughout the U.S. the *New York Times*, in particular, sets the agenda for news media throughout the country as the most influential and relied upon source of print and online news. The prestige press, however, according to Sydnor

(2018), may be partially to blame for the rise in incivility (Sydnor, 2018) and for “playing up” protest news (Bennett, 2011), inspiring individuals or groups seeking coverage toward outrageousness.

Results also indicated that despite compatible or incompatible approaches to covering cultural news, newspapers interviewed a wide range of sources, including professionals, unofficial sources, police and organizational sources. This finding supports Lynch and McGoldrick (2016), who emphasize the importance of a range of voices in telling of cultural news. However, where the *Wall Street Journal* used police and democrats more often as sources; the *New York Times* used Republicans, and *USA Today* interviewed professionals more often. This also indicates a difference in how the bias of a story is shaped through source usage and how newspapers differentiate their products.

Studying compatible and incompatible language used by newspapers was informative in understanding possible economic motives. The moderate newspaper, *USA Today*, often used compatible approaches and phrases exploring socio-political and cultural context that would indicate purposeful appeal to a general audience (Galtung and Lynch, 2010). Coverage from the politically liberal newspaper, *New York Times*, was found to be the least compatible on the overall bias score and language analysis that indicates an appeal to consumers of a more left-leaning orientation advocating for change. The *Wall Street Journal*, the politically conservative newspaper, had the most compatible overall bias score indicating support for the status quo, which makes sense because it is a premier publication for business news.

This research underscores the importance of how language analysis can provide insights into story bias in coverage of cultural news and suggests further research is necessary into the interaction between word/source usage and compatibility continuums. Findings also suggest the need for replacing incompatible narratives of violence and destruction with compatible narratives of compromise and context among protagonists and stakeholders, which may more accurately inform and promote more peaceful understanding. As indicated earlier, differences in perspectives are better understood when history, culture and other interests are covered and reported in stories on cultural issues. Contextualizing actions or mistakes promotes compromise and understanding.

Future research is needed using larger samples and sampling over time on how the media environment facilitates the deployment of compatible v. incompatible word usage and how such language encourages political polarity in our culture. As cultural binary coverage grows, this study indicates computational analysis compliments manual analysis. It is useful in identifying differences and possible deficiencies in news coverage that exist when news

media appeal to distinct and large audiences. Word clouds are also useful in visualizing those differences. History indicates sensational news and immediate and graphic stories will always take precedence; however, there is more that can be done to avoid flaming the fires when telling stories on culture and society. News media must also move beyond placing violent actions above peaceful ones when making news judgments on story content that profoundly impacts culture and conflict.

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## **APPENDIX A: JMP INSTRUCTIONS**

### **Steps used in JMP for ANOVA**

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is a common statistical method for researchers to test for differences in the means of three or more groups. We have conducted the ANOVA when we were investigating the Headline Bias and Story Bias (factor) that had a measurable effect on the newspapers.

A One-way ANOVA can be done using the Fit Y by X in JMP. The response variable is the continuous three different newspapers: the independent variable is the Headline Bias and Story Bias (we did it separately). The instruction was conducted in JMP as the following steps:

1. Select Fit Y by X from the Analyze menu.
2. Select the X, Factor (Newspaper) in the list of columns.
3. Select the Y, Response (Headline Bias) in the list of columns.
4. Click OK to run the test.

### **Steps used in JMP for Word Clouds**

Word Clouds can be an easy way to review survey responses and free text, quickly and easily by using the Text Explorer function from JMP. The instructions were conducted in JMP as the following steps:

1. Select Text Explorer from the Analyze menu.
2. Select Story to Text Columns in the list of columns.
3. Click OK to analyze the free text.
4. Term and Phrase lists show up, but they still need to be cleaned by using Add Stop Word.
5. Choose the word that was not relevant, such as “said”, “mr”, “one”, “e”, “like”, etc. Add these words as the Stop Word. Only leave the words that are meaningful to present the story.
6. Select Display Option then show the Word Cloud.
7. Change the layout of the Word Cloud to Centered and Arbitrary Colors.