

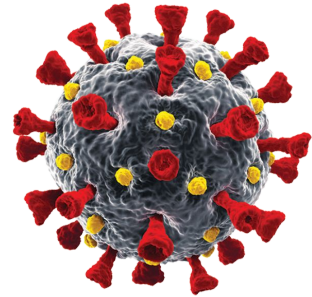
Nationwide Newspaper Coverage of State and Local Responses to COVID-19

Community Structure Theory and Political Partisanship



Presented By:

Deanna Amarosa, Dylan Lembo, Kieran Nashad, Brandon Yacovacci,
John C. Pollock, Breeda Bennett-Jones
The College of New Jersey

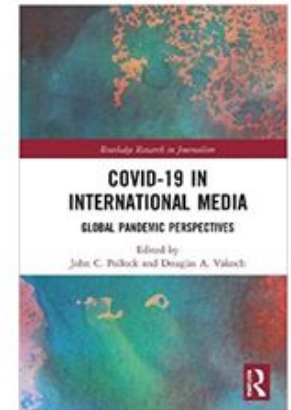
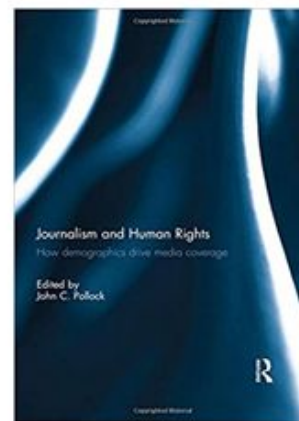
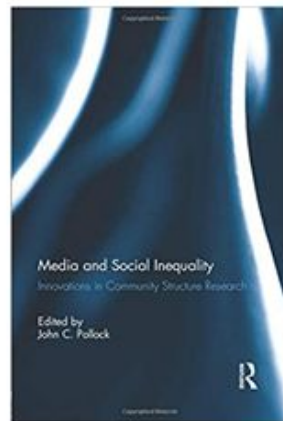
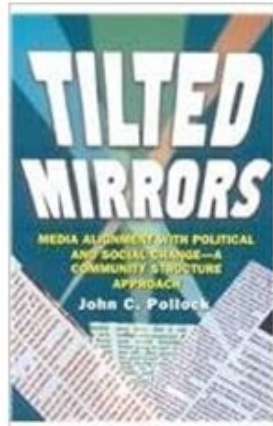


Community Structure Approach

- Focuses on relationship between key characteristics of communities (i.e. cities) and the content coverage of newspapers in those communities
- Observed links between demographic differences and variations in news framing of critical issues
- An innovative analysis of media projection combining measures of **article prominence** and **content direction** into a single **media vector**

Community Structure Resources

- Pollock and colleagues (Pollock, 2007; 2013; 2015; Pollock & Vakoch, 2021) conducted the first nationwide multi-city and cross-national studies, combined measures of both “direction” and editorial “prominence,” and challenged the “guard dog” hypothesis.



The Issue

- **State and Local Responses to COVID-19**
 - On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 is characterized as a pandemic
 - Since then, many state and local governments have responded with varying degrees of urgency to attempt to limit the spread of COVID-19
- **The Debate**
 - Unfavorable or favorable coverage on the state and local response to COVID-19

Literature Review

- **Very little information in the field of Communication Studies**
- **Other fields**
 - **Sociology:** Article regarding the increase of domestic violence (Bowman & Gallupe, 2020)
 - **International Affairs:** Results include articles discussing state and local measures in Florida (Rivkees & Shamarial, 2020), and spread of COVID-19 among older adults (Angel & Mudrazija, 2020)
 - **Nursing:** Results include an article about the role of the media in China during the pandemic (Liu et al. 2020)

Research Questions

Research Question 1

How much variation is there in press coverage of state and local responses to COVID-19?

Research Question 2

Is any variation that occurs linked to differences in community and demographics?

Hypotheses

- **Buffer Hypothesis**
 - Higher proportions of privileged groups in a community or nation state who are “relatively buffered” from conditions of poverty and economic uncertainty are linked to media coverage relatively supportive of human rights claims.
- **Vulnerability Hypothesis**
 - The larger the proportion of disadvantaged groups, the more media coverage reflects their group concerns/interests
- **Stakeholder Hypothesis**
 - Connections are expected between stakeholder size and favorable coverage of stakeholder concerns.

Methodology

- A nationwide sample of **25** major metropolitan newspapers was chosen from the NewsBank database.
 - The study excluded newspapers such as *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, because they target **nationwide** rather than local readers.
- The starting point of the seven month sample period was **March 11, 2020**, the date The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.
- The end point of the sample was **October 2, 2020**, the date that President Trump tested positive for COVID-19

Methodology

- At least **18** articles were taken from each newspaper
- **495** articles were coded
- 212 articles were double coded, resulting in Scott's Pi coefficient of inter-coder reliability of **0.7829**

Prominence Score

- The articles were individually assessed with the use of two measures.
- The first measure measures “**prominence**,” which is based on what the editor of the article believes its significance is.
- Each article was allotted a score from 3 to 16 based on four factors: **placement, headline size, article length, and photographs/graphics** if available.
- Greater prominence points were given to articles that earned more points.

Prominence Table

| Dimension | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------|
| Placement | Front page first section | Front page inside section | Inside page first section | Other |
| Headline size (# of words) | 10+ | 9-8 | 7-6 | 5 or fewer |
| Article length (# of words) | 1000+ | 750-999 | 500-749 | 250-499 |
| Photos/Graphics | 2 or more | 1 | | |

Article Direction

- **Favorable:** If the article emphasized positive aspects of state and local responses to COVID-19
- **Unfavorable:** If the article stressed negative aspects of state and local responses to COVID-19
- **Balanced/Neutral:** If the article emphasized neither positive nor negative aspects of state and local responses to COVID-19, or if the article did not state a position but still offered useful facts or statistics about COVID-19

Calculating a Media Vector

f = sum of the prominence scores coded “favorable”

u = sum of the prominence scores coded “unfavorable”

n = sum of the prominence scores coded “balanced/neutral”

$r = f + u + n$

If $f > u$ (the sum of the supportive prominence scores is greater than the sum of the opposition prominence scores), the following formula is used:

Favorable Media Vector:

$$FMV = \frac{(f^2 - fu)}{r^2} \quad (\text{Answer lies between 0 and +1.00})$$

If $f < u$ (the sum of the supportive prominence scores is greater than the sum of the opposition prominence scores), the following formula is used:

$$UMV = \frac{(fu - u^2)}{r^2} \quad (\text{Answer lies between 0 and -1.00})$$

Media Vectors

- **495** total articles were coded for “direction” (favorable/unfavorable coverage) and “prominence,” (placement, headline size, article length, and the presence of graphics) then combined into composite “Media Vector” scores for each newspaper (range +0.0502 to -0.1792, range 0.2294).
- **20 out of 25** newspapers were unfavorable (**80%**) for coverage of state and local response to COVID-19

Media Vectors

| CITY | NEWSPAPER | MEDIA VECTOR |
|---------------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Chicago, IL | <i>The Chicago Sun-Times</i> | 0.0502 |
| Denver, CO | <i>The Denver Post</i> | 0.0386 |
| Madison, WI | <i>The Wisconsin State Journal</i> | 0.0059 |
| Cleveland, OH | <i>The Plain Dealer</i> | 0.0038 |
| Mobile, AL | <i>The Press Register</i> | 0.0026 |
| Hartford, CT | <i>The Hartford-Courant</i> | -0.0028 |
| Albany, NY | <i>The Albany Times-Union</i> | -0.0031 |
| Seattle, WA | <i>Seattle Post Intelligencer</i> | -0.0088 |
| Buffalo, NY | <i>The Buffalo Times</i> | -0.0222 |
| Portland, OR | <i>The Oregonian</i> | -0.0242 |
| Detroit, MI | <i>The Detroit News</i> | -0.0248 |

Media Vectors

| CITY | NEWSPAPER | MEDIA VECTOR |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Memphis, TN | <i>The Commercial Appeal</i> | -0.0307 |
| Biloxi, MS | <i>The Sun-Herald</i> | -0.0352 |
| Albuquerque, NM | <i>The Albuquerque Journal</i> | -0.0435 |
| Boston, MA | <i>The Boston Herald</i> | -0.044 |
| San Diego, CA | <i>The San Diego Union Tribune</i> | -0.0516 |
| Lexington, KY | <i>The Lexington Herald-Leader</i> | -0.0559 |
| St. Louis, MO | <i>The St. Louis Post-Dispatch</i> | -0.0569 |
| Salt Lake City, UT | <i>The Deseret News</i> | -0.0624 |
| Houston, TX | <i>The Houston Chronicle</i> | -0.0905 |
| Wichita, KS | <i>The Wichita Eagle</i> | -0.0918 |

Media Vectors

| CITY | NEWSPAPER | MEDIA VECTOR |
|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| Philadelphia, PA | <i>The Philadelphia Inquirer</i> | -0.094 |
| Charlotte, NC | <i>The Charlotte Observer</i> | -0.1227 |
| Pittsburgh, PA | <i>The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</i> | -0.1537 |
| Atlanta, GA | <i>The Atlanta Journal-Constitution</i> | -0.1792 |

Media Vectors: Regional



| Region | Media Vector | COVID-19 Cases by Region* | COVID-19 Cases by Percentage* |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Midwest | -0.0189 | 1,315,439 | 18.25% |
| West | -0.032 | 1,493,431 | 20.72% |
| Northeast | -0.0533 | 1,066,091 | 14.79% |
| South | -0.073 | 3,331,808 | 46.23% |

*(CDC COVID Data Tracker, Retrieved November 4 2020)

Pearson Correlations

- Pearson correlations revealed four significant indicators associated with a “**stakeholder hypothesis**” (expects a connection between stakeholder size and favorable coverage of stakeholder concerns).
- Two measures of “**political partisanship**”, voting Republican and voting Democratic, were strongly connected to coverage of state and local responses to COVID-19, with **Republicans** disapproving of these responses ($r = -0.419$, $p = 0.019$) and **Democrats** approving ($r = 0.403$, $p = 0.023$).
- Two “**belief system**” reporting patterns emerged with strong unfavorable coverage: **Mainline Protestant** ($r = -0.401$, $p = 0.024$); **Evangelicals** was “directionally” confirmed ($r = -0.266$, $p = 0.099$).
- One “**buffer hypothesis**”, the greater the number of **physicians per 100,000** people, was somewhat associated with favorable coverage of state and local responses to COVID-19 ($r = 0.398$, $p = 0.051^*$).

Pearson Correlations

| City Characteristic | Pearson Correlation R | Significance P |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Republican | -0.419 | 0.019* |
| Democratic | 0.403 | 0.023* |
| Mainline Protestant | -0.401 | 0.024* |
| Physician | 0.398 | 0.051* |
| Evangelical | -0.266 | 0.099 |
| Uninsured | -0.25 | 0.115 |
| Catholic | 0.187 | 0.185 |
| Unemployed | 0.187 | 0.186 |

Pearson Correlations

| City Characteristic | Pearson Correlation R | Significance P |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Hispanic | 0.184 | 0.19 |
| Homicide | 0.161 | 0.227 |
| Families w/ Children Under Six | -0.15 | 0.237 |
| Ages 45-65 | 0.141 | 0.251 |
| Below Poverty | -0.135 | 0.261 |
| Ages 18-24 | -0.125 | 0.275 |
| Ages 65 and up | 0.12 | 0.284 |
| Crime Rate | 0.118 | 0.288 |

Pearson Correlations

| City Characteristic | Pearson Correlation R | Significance P |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Municipal Spending for Health Care | 0.109 | 0.301 |
| Families with Children 6-12 | -0.101 | 0.315 |
| College Educated | 0.098 | 0.321 |
| Hospital Beds | 0.095 | 0.329 |
| Family Income | 0.074 | 0.363 |
| Female Workforce | -0.067 | 0.377 |
| Foreign | 0.065 | 0.379 |
| Professional Status | 0.051 | 0.405 |

Pearson Correlations

| City Characteristic | Pearson Correlation R | Significance P |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Violent Crime | -0.05 | 0.412 |
| Families with Children 13-17 | 0.042 | 0.423 |
| Female Head of Household | -0.023 | 0.457 |
| College Educated Female | -0.022 | 0.458 |
| Single Parent | 0.01 | 0.482 |
| African American | -0.006 | 0.489 |
| Ages 25-44 | 0.003 | 0.494 |
| Hate Crime | <u>.a</u> | n/a |

Regression Analysis: Top 2 Significant Findings

| Model | R | R ² Cumulative | R ² Change | F Change | Sig. F Change |
|-----------------------------------|------|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Voting Republican | .456 | .207 | .207 | 4.189 | .057 |
| Voting Republican, Evangelical | .538 | .289 | .082 | 1.724 | .209 |

Overall Findings

- **Political Partisanship hypothesis confirmed:** Percentage of Democrats and Republicans in a city → favorable and unfavorable coverage
- Mainline Protestant and Evangelical **belief systems strongly linked** to negative coverage
- Healthcare access was somewhat associated with favorable coverage
- Measures of vulnerability were not significant
- The South was the region with the most COVID-19 cases & the most unfavorable coverage

Thank You!

Any questions?

Buffer

- Percentage of college educated in a city
 - Percent of families with incomes of \$200,000 or more
 - Percent with professional/technical occupational status
-
- Greater the number of physicians per 100,000 people
 - Greater the number of hospital beds per 100,000 people
 - Percentage of municipal spending on healthcare

Vulnerability

- Percent living below the poverty line
- Percent unemployed
- Homicide rate
- Hate crime rate
- Percentage of single-parent households
- Higher the suicide rate
- Higher the percent uninsured
- Number of female heads of households in a city
- Percent of unmarried births in a city

Stakeholder

Women's Empowerment

- Percentage of women in the workforce
- Percentage of college educated women in a city

Ethnic Identity

- Percent of African Americans in a city
- Percent of Hispanics in a city
- Percentage of foreign-born individuals in a city

Stakeholder

Belief System

- Percentage of Evangelicals in a city
- Percentage of Catholics in a city
- Percentage of Mainline Protestants in a city

Political Partisanship

- Percentage voting Democrat in the last election
- Percentage voting Republican in the last election

Stakeholder

Generation

- Percentage of 18-24 year-olds in a city
- Percentage of 24-44 year-olds in a city
- Percentage 45-64 year-olds in a city
- Percentage of 65+ year olds in a city

Life Cycle

- Percentage families with children under 6 years-old in a city
- Percentage families with children between the ages of 6-12 years-old in a city
- Percentage families with children between the ages of 13-17 years-old in a city