Race and Police Brutality: The Importance of Media Framing

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This article explores how the framing of a violent confrontation between a White police officer and an African American woman affects people's perceptions of the incident. First, we conduct a content analysis of every news article published about the encounter over a three-month period. We use the content analysis to identify the major frames employed by the news media when reporting the event. We find that the news media relied on three frames: police brutality, law and order, and race. We embed these frames into an original experiment to determine how the alternative frames affect citizens' attitudes and perceptions of the incident. Exposure to the law and order frame and the police brutality frame significantly influences support for the White police officer and African American woman. Finally, alterations in the framing of the confrontation influence people's beliefs about the problem of racism in law enforcement.

Keywords: race framing, police brutality, media effects

On the evening of May 20, 2014, Ersula Ore, an African American professor at a major southwestern university was "body slammed" to the ground by campus police for jaywalking (Moran, 2014). The event represents one of several incidents in recent years involving a violent interaction between police officers and African American citizens. In this article, we examine how media framing of the confrontation between the police officer and the professor powerfully alters people's impressions of the event.

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Date submitted: 2017–01–23

The confrontation between Professor Ersula Ore and Police Officer Stewart Ferrin occurred on Tuesday, May 20, 2014, at about 8 p.m. The rival framing of the event is evident in documents submitted by the professor's attorney and by the police officer's report. Legal documents filed by Ore's attorney highlight the aggressive actions of the police officer. Attorneys for Professor Ore explain that Officer Ferrin "abruptly snatched Dr. Ore and attempted to force her hands behind her back while Ore questioned the basis for the stop." The officer then said, "Put your hands behind your back right now; I'm going to slam you on this car, put your hands behind your back." In trying to force Ore against the vehicle, the officer "aggressively swung Dr. Ore in a circle by her arm and then tackled her to the asphalt in a 'head-lock' position" (Ortega, 2014, p. 2). Ore was then placed under arrest, booked, and transported to jail, where she was detained for eight hours.

In the police report filed by Officer Ferrin, the details of the incident are similar, but the framing of the event is quite different. The police report highlights the danger of the situation near the construction zone where Ore was walking. Ferrin explains that he was in his patrol car when he observed a female (Ersula Ore) "walking northbound in the middle of the street" (Ferrin, 2014, p. 13). Ferrin stopped his vehicle to ask Ore to walk on the sidewalk. Ore became argumentative and refused to show her identification when asked seven times to do so by Ferrin (Ferrin, 2014). The situation escalated when Ferrin tried to handcuff Ore, who refused to cooperate. When Ferrin tried to lift Ore off the street after she was handcuffed, Ore "turned towards me and kicked me in my left shin. I then stated 'Assault' and she replied 'I did, I did'" (Ferrin, 2014, p. 14). Ore was charged with aggravated assault on a police officer, criminal damage to a police car, refusal to provide a name when detained, and obstructing a public thoroughfare.

The original incident received little press attention. However, after Channel 3 (KTVK-TV, Phoenix) obtained the police video on June 27, the altercation began to make national and international headlines.[2] In this article, we use a content analysis to explore how this incident was covered in the news media; then we rely on the experimental method to understand how alternative framing of the same incident produces changes in how people view the professor and the police officer.

We advance the study of framing in three ways. First, we connect actual frames identified in the news and represent these frames experimentally in the laboratory to show how alternative framing of the same event can affect people's attitudes toward the event. Second, we examine a novel issue for the framing literature: the issue of police violence. Third, we push the framing literature forward by choosing an issue (i.e., police violence) that is (1) highly salient to the public and (2) has been dominated by one particular frame (i.e., police brutality). Because this is a salient issue that has been framed predominantly in one way, it should be more resistant to framing effects.

The results of our original content analysis examining news coverage of the altercation between the professor and the police officer demonstrate that the news media usually emphasized the theme of police brutality in covering the event, but other themes were sometimes used (e.g., a law and order frame). When we manipulate the framing of the event experimentally, we find that exposure to the law

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[2] The raw dash-cam video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXonpyOdS3A

and order frame and the police brutality frame significantly affects evaluations of the police officer and the professor. We also discover that the framing of the event has political consequences, influencing people's perceptions of racism in policing as a problem in the community.

The News Media and Framing

We know from decades of research that the news media can affect the public's understanding of events in a number of ways, including setting the public agenda, priming people to think about certain issues when evaluating political leaders, and persuading people to favor a particular candidate (e.g., Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In addition, the news media can frame how people think about a particular issue or event. As Kinder and Sanders (1996) explain, "frames lead a double life . . . frames are interpretive structures embedded in political discourse. . . . At the same time, frames also live inside the mind; they are cognitive structures that help individual citizens make sense of the issues" (p. 164). When frames in political discourse ("frames in communication") influence the frames accessible in people's minds ("frames in thought"), we have a "framing effect" (Druckman, 2011).

The news media's power to alter how people think about an issue or event occurs by influencing "the importance individuals attach to particular beliefs" (Nelson & Oxley, 1999, p. 1041). For example, if the news media frame the issue of hydraulic fracturing in terms of environmental risks instead of energy independence, and people subsequently become more concerned with the environmental aspects of fracking rather than gains in energy independence, the news media has successfully framed the issue for the public. Numerous scholars have identified media framing effects (e.g., Iyengar, 1990; Jasperson, Shah, Watts, Faber, & Fan, 1998; McLeod & Detenber, 1999).

However, researchers disagree on whether media framing effects are an automatic process (e.g., Entman, 1993) or a process dependent on a set of conditions, including people's preexisting predispositions, their level of political knowledge, the degree of competition among media frames, and the credibility of the news media source (see Druckman, 2004, 2011). For example, research suggests that people's levels of preexisting information about an issue can influence their susceptibility to media framing (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007b; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sniderman & Theriault, 1999).

Furthermore, scholars have distinguished between equivalency frames and emphasis frames. Equivalency frames examine how the use of logically equivalent phrases (e.g., 5% unemployment or 95% employment) influences people's preferences (e.g., Druckman, 2001). Emphasis frames, in contrast, show that by focusing on a subset of potentially relevant considerations, people think about these considerations when forming opinions (Druckman, 2004). Unlike equivalency framing effects, emphasis frames are not logically identical, but focus on different considerations (Nelson, 2000). As Chong (1993) explains, emphasis framing is central to public opinion formation, with much of politics consisting of a competition over how an issue should be framed (e.g., gun control as public safety or right to bear arms).

Understanding People's Impressions of Police Violence

In this study, we examine how media framing of the use of force by a police officer affects people's attitudes toward the police officer, the suspect, and general impressions of the event. Several scholars, relying on time series public opinion data, have examined the relationship between incidents of police misconduct and attitudes toward law enforcement. These researchers have found that people's confidence in the police decreases significantly following a highly publicized incident of police misconduct (e.g., Kaminski & Jefferis, 1998; Sigelman, Bledsoe, Welch, & Combs, 1996; Weitzer, 2002); however, the attitudes of Whites tend to rebound much more quickly than the attitudes of minorities (Tuch & Weitzer, 1997).

Levin and Thomas (1997) conducted an experiment to examine how exposure to the use of excessive force by police affected people's views of the police. In the experiment, participants viewed a videotape of a violent arrest of an African American suspect by two police officers. The experiment stimulus (i.e., the videotape) remained the same in the experimental conditions, with one exception: the race of the arresting officers. The authors found that participants' assessments of the officers' use of excessive force was linked to the race of the officer. Specifically, both African American and White respondents believed the arresting officers used excessive force when they viewed the videotape with the White police officers.

Finally, Chermak, McGarrell, and Gruenewald (2006) find that media coverage of high-profile instances of police misconduct significantly influence citizens' evaluations of the guilt of the law enforcement officers involved in the incident. Specifically, the researchers conducted a two-wave public opinion survey before and after an incident of police misconduct in Indianapolis, Indiana, and they discovered that people with more exposure to news coverage of the incident were more likely to view the officers involved as guilty.

Exploring the Power and Limits of Framing

This article advances our understanding of media framing of public opinion by exploring an issue that should be resistant to reframing: police violence. The issue of police violence is a conservative case for framing effects for two reasons. First, the issue is a highly salient one. According to a recent national poll, nearly half of the respondents (45%) said they view police violence against the public as a very serious problem (Yokley, 2016). Similarly, in a recent "Rock the Vote" poll of adults between the ages of 18 and 35, seven of 10 respondents said police violence against African Americans is a problem (Page & Crescente, 2016). When asked to identify the most important problems facing the nation, one in four respondents identify law enforcement concerns as one of the most important issues. Only the economy, college affordability, and national security are mentioned more often by millennials.

Since police violence against minorities is viewed as an important problem by a large segment of the public, people are likely to have established attitudes about this issue. Therefore, people's opinions about the issue will be less influenced by new information. Specifically, people with stronger attitudes and people who view an issue as important will be less affected by changing news frames (Chong & Druckman,

2011; Lecheler, de Vreese, & Slothuus, 2009). As a consequence, the issue of police violence is a conservative test for framing. In contrast, many previous studies of framing have examined issues that are far less salient, such as U.S. policy in Bosnia, limiting urban sprawl, support for publicly funded casinos, and campaign finance (e.g., Auerbach & Bloch-Elkon, 2005; Chong & Druckman, 2007a; Grant & Rudolph, 2003; Nicholson & Howard, 2003). Because people are less likely to hold strong attitudes about these topics, they are much more susceptible to framing effects.

A second reason why the issue of police violence involving African Americans is a conservative case for framing effects is because of the dominance of one frame: police brutality. In recent years, the news media have relied heavily on the police brutality frame when covering violent interactions between police and African Americans. To illustrate, in a three-month (January through March 2015), *The New York Times* published 67 articles dealing with "police and "African American," with the vast majority of these articles framed in terms of police brutality, such as "Wisconsin Police Fatally Shoot Black Teen, Prompting Protest" (March 7, 2015) and "Use of Force Questioned in Police Killing of Unarmed Georgia [African American] Man" (March 10, 2015).[3]

The dominance of the police brutality frame prioritizes this frame over alternative frames, making the police brutality frame more accessible to individuals as they process information about violent interactions between police and African Americans. According to cognitive psychologists, when frames are made more accessible by frequent use, these frames are more likely to be utilized to process information (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988). Therefore, when a particular frame dominates media coverage, repeated exposure to the frame will make the frame more accessible, thereby increasing the impact of the frame for information processing (Druckman, 2011).

To summarize, since the issue of police violence against minorities is viewed as an important issue to a large segment of the population, people are likely to have crystallized attitudes about this issue, making it less susceptible to framing effects. Furthermore, the news media preference for framing violent police interactions with African Americans in terms of a police brutality frame priorities this frame, making it more accessible and more likely to be used when processing information than alternative frames. Therefore, we contend that the issue of police violence provides a conservative test for assessing the impact of framing.

This article begins by examining how the news media covered the altercation between a college professor and a campus police officer in May 2014. Second, we examine how different media frames of the event, derived from the content analysis of news coverage, affect people's perceptions of the incident and their views of the police officer and professor. In particular, we look at whether the frame used to introduce the altercation between the police officer and the professor affects people's impressions of these two actors as well as influences people's general views about policing.

We have developed four hypotheses. First, we hypothesize that when the video of the incident is framed in terms of law and order, public safety considerations will be more salient, leading people to

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[3] We look at *New York Times* coverage in 2015 because our experiment is conducted in 2015.

develop more positive views of the police officer and blame the professor for the escalation of the altercation. Second, when the police brutality frame is used, aspects of the situation related to use of excessive force will be more likely to be noticed, making it more likely that people will develop more hostile views of the police officer and will be more likely to blame the officer for the acceleration of violence at the scene of the incident. Third, when a race frame is presented, we expect people to pay more attention to the race of the police officer and the professor, and we expect the salience of race to influence people's interpretation of the event. Finally, people exposed to the race frame and the police brutality frame will be more likely than people exposed to the law and order frame to view racism in law enforcement as an important community issue.

Content Analysis

We rely on a multimethodological approach to examine how media framing of an incident of possible police misconduct affects people's views of the event and the participating actors. We start with a content analysis of news coverage of Ersula Ore's jaywalking arrest over a four-month period to evaluate how the news media covered the event. Then we conduct an experiment, using the findings from the content analysis, to determine how the news media framing of the event influences people's evaluations of the incident.

Design of the Content Analysis

We analyzed every story mentioning the incident between the university professor and the campus police officer that appeared in Access World News (NewsBank), LexisNexis Academic, and Google News between May 20 and August 29, 2014.[4] We identified and coded 53 original articles from newspapers, blogs and feeds, Internet news sites, television news, wire services, and radio.[5] We examined

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[4] Access World News, LexisNexis Academic, and Google provide the most comprehensive list of archived information from newspapers, newswires, public records, government documents, and other information. We are confident that the use of these three search engines provides the most reliable record of all news about the Ersula Ore incident. We concluded the content analysis on August 29, 2014, because coverage became more sporadic after this date. For instance, if we continue coding through September 30, 2014, we would pick up three additional articles, each article mentioning the Ersula Ore incident in one sentence in each of these stories.

[5] We coded every story that mentioned Ersula Ore during this time period. News stories came from disparate newspapers, such as *The Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *The Times* (London), as well as smaller newspapers such as the *East Valley Tribune* (Phoenix, Arizona), the *Atlanta Daily World*, and the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*. News stories from national television news programs such as CNN and MSNBC and local television news such as Oregon, Fox2 Now St. Louis, and CBS 5 Phoenix were also coded. Finally, articles posted on news sites online (e.g., PoliceOne, Daily Kos, The Root, and Vice.com) were also included in the content analysis.

a number of features of the coverage, including the source of the news stories, the timing of the news, the tone of coverage given to the police officer and the professor, and the way the news stories were framed.[6]

Results of the Content Analysis

The arrest of Ersula Ore on May 20, 2014, generated one story in the aftermath of the incident. Coverage did not accelerate until June 28, the day after the dashboard camera footage of Ore's arrest became public. On the day after the police dashboard video was released, 13 stories were published about the incident, and attention to the incident continued for several days. On August 1, Ore accepted a plea deal, and the press began to cover the story again, briefly. Then, on August 9, an unarmed young African American man named Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The shooting highlighted racially based abuses among the Ferguson Police Department. Consequently, several stories published after this date tie Ore's arrest to the Ferguson incident, highlighting the problem of police brutality for African Americans.

Most of the stories covering the incident (41%) came from newspaper coverage, with about a quarter of the stories emanating from Internet news sites, and less than 5% of the stories coming from television news coverage. In addition, almost two-thirds of the stories (64%) covering the incident included a link to the dashboard footage of the arrest. Coverage of the altercation between the professor and the campus police officer received local, national, and international press attention after the police dashboard video was made public. Local Arizona news sources accounted for about one-fifth of the total coverage. The bulk of coverage emanated from local sources outside of Arizona, such as Fox 12 Oregon, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The incident did receive some national attention, with 15% of the stories published in national news outlets. Finally, international news sources, including *The Times* (London), accounted for 6% of the stories.

Consistent with the findings reported in Lawrence (2000), most of the coverage was episodic in nature, focusing on the specific incident between the professor and the police officer. While 70% of the coverage was purely episodic, another 9% reported a mixture of episodic and thematic coverage. The remaining 21% of news coverage was thematic, placing the Ore story in a broader context of racism in policing and police brutality, more generally.

According to press reports, responsibility for the escalation of the Ore incident fell on the police officer 48% of the time. In contrast, 10% of the coverage placed the blame for the escalation on the professor, and 16% placed equal blame on both parties involved. In addition, the use of force by the officer was often portrayed as inappropriate. Specifically, 51% of the news stories described the use of force as aggressive, while 27% of the stories described the use of force as excessive. Conversely, only 14% of the coverage viewed the use of force by the officer as appropriate, and another 8% of the stories described the use of force as somewhat aggressive. Finally, we examined whether the professor was

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[6] We conducted a series of intercoder reliability checks between each of five coders (three graduate students and two undergraduate students) and the senior author. Intercoder reliability averaged 84% across the various code categories. The content analysis code sheet is available upon request.

portrayed as a victim in news coverage; 48% of the stories presented the professor as a victim, 32% of the stories did not portray the professor as a victim, and the remaining 17% of the stories presented a mixed portrayal of the professor as victim.

Police brutality was coded as the theme in 46% of the stories, with news stories using phrases such as the professor was "pushed and slammed to the ground by a police officer." In contrast, about one-third of the stories focused on the theme of race, identifying the race of the professor and the police officer, along with race of the students who had been accompanying the professor. Another 21% of the stories emphasized law and order as a theme, explaining that the police officer was trying to ensure public safety, describing Ore's jaywalking offense as potentially dangerous. We turn next to a discussion of the experimental design.

Experimental Method

We conducted an experiment where we developed emphasis frames based on the results of the content analysis, and we examined how these different frames affected people's attitudes and perceptions. We represented three frames in the experiment: a police brutality frame, a race frame, and a law and order frame.[7] Subjects were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions or to a control condition (with no frame).[8] In each of the conditions, subjects read a brief introductory paragraph representing the experimental stimulus before viewing the dash-cam video of the altercation between the professor and the police officer.

Experimental Stimulus

We relied on the findings from the content analysis to develop the three frames used in the experiment. The law and order frame begins with the phrase, "In a dangerous construction zone . . ." This specific phrase occurred in 32% of the stories examined in the content analysis. Similarly, the last substantive sentence of the law and order frame says, "The police officer involved in the incident has been cleared of any wrongdoing while the professor has been sentenced for resisting arrest." In the content analysis, 65% of the articles mentioned that the police officer was cleared of wrongdoing, whereas 54% of these stories reported that the professor was sentenced for resisting arrest. Finally, as discussed earlier, almost one-third (31%) of the news articles about the Ersula Ore incident do not portray her as a victim.

The police brutality frame includes the phrase, "the situation quickly escalated with the police officer slamming the professor to the ground," which was mentioned in 35% of the all the articles coded.

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[7] The experiment took place between March 18 and March 20, 2015, and from April 8 to April 9, 2015. Institutional Review Board human subject approval #STUDY00002287 was granted February 24, 2015. We tested for a history effect between the two time periods, but we found no difference between subjects based on the date of the experiment.

[8] Randomization was effective. There was no difference between the four conditions in terms of political characteristics (i.e., party identification and ideology) or demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, major, year in school, or race).

The frame continues with the sentence, "In the ensuing struggle, the professor's skirt was hiked up, leaving her exposed and vulnerable." According to the content analysis, 35% of the news stories mentioned that the professor's skirt was hiked up, leaving the professor exposed. Finally, the professor is portrayed as a victim in this frame, similar to almost half (48%) of the news articles examined in the content analysis.

Finally, we developed a race frame that specifically identified the race of the professor and police officer.[9] According to the content analysis, the race of the professor was mentioned in 39% of the stories, while 17% of the stories identified the race of the police officer. We conclude the race frame by mentioning that the "FBI is currently investigating the arrest for civil rights violations," which was mentioned in 5% of the news stories about the incident (see Table 1).

Table 1. Framing of the Altercation Between the Professor and the Police Officer.

Law and order frame (*n* = 57)

"Good evening. An arrest of a [university name] professor is creating quite a stir. In a dangerous construction zone near campus, a police officer enforcing a no-jaywalking zone was forced into an altercation with a [university name] professor who refused to cooperate. The situation quickly escalated, and the officers worked to create a safe environment for bystanders, while dealing with the professor's violent outburst. The police officer involved in the incident has been cleared of any wrongdoing while the professor has been sentenced for resisting arrest. Take a look at the video footage."

Police brutality frame (*n* = 59)

"Good evening. An arrest of [university name] professor is creating quite a stir. The professor was crossing the street to avoid construction when a police officer stopped her for jaywalking. When the professor questioned the police officer, the situation quickly escalated with the police officer slamming the professor to the ground in order to handcuff her. In the ensuing struggle, the [university name] professor's skirt was hiked up, leaving her exposed and vulnerable. The professor is pressing charges against the police office for using excessive force. Take a look at the video footage."

Race frame (*n* = 53)

"Good evening. An arrest of a [university name] professor is creating quite a stir. After an evening class, an African American professor, along with several of her Anglo students were walking by a construction zone near campus. The African American professor was the only person who was stopped by an Anglo police office for jaywalking. The professor was asked to show her identification and when she questioned the police officer, an altercation erupted, leading to her arrest. The FBI is currently investigating the arrest for civil rights violations. Take a look at the video footage."

Control (*n* = 54)

"Good evening. An arrest of a [university name] professor is creating quite a stir. Take a look at the video footage."

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[9] Caliendo and McIIwain's (2006) work on campaigns and racial framing in the media identifies mentioning of the candidates' race (as well as photographs of the candidates) as central aspects of racial framing.

Subject Recruitment

Two hundred and twenty-five students were recruited from political science courses in spring 2015 at a major southwestern university. Students received course credit for their participation. Overall, 48.4% of the subjects are political science majors. The sample is 62.8% male, 59.2% White, and 84.8% of respondents are between the ages of 18 and 24. The subjects are fairly evenly distributed by year in school. The sample is similar to a nationally representative population in terms of partisan identification, but subjects in the experiment are more liberal than a nationally representative sample. See Table 2 for the demographic and political characteristics of the student sample.

Table 2. Comparison of Student Sample Demographic Characteristics and Political Characteristics With 2010 Census and 2012 American National Election Studies.

	Student sample (%)	2010 census (%)
Age		
18–24	84.8	13
25–44	11.4	35
45–64	0.8	35
65 and older	0.0	17
Gender		
Male	62.8	49
Female	35	51
Major		
Political science	48.4	
Other	51.6	
Year in school		
Freshman	27.8	
Sophomore	25.6	
Junior	26	
Senior	19.3	
Race/ethnicity		
White	59.2	63.3
Hispanic or Latino	14.3	16.6
Black or African American	3.6	12.2
Asian or Pacific Islander	7.2	5
Other	15.2	2.9

	Student sample (%)	2012 American National Election Studies (%)
Party identification		
Democratic	50.2	52.7
Independent	13	13.4
Republican	31	33.9
Don't know/missing	5.8	
Ideology		
Extremely liberal	6.7	3.7
Liberal	21.5	12.0
Somewhat liberal	16.1	12.1
Moderate	22.9	34.5
Somewhat conservative	14.3	14.9
Conservative	7.2	18.9
Very conservative	5.4	3.9
Don't know/missing	5.8	14.3

Experimental Method

When the study participants arrived at the social science research facility, they each took a seat in front of a tablet and keyboard and filled out a pretest questionnaire. After the pretest questionnaire, each participant was instructed to put on a pair of headphones attached to his or her tablet and to read a short ABC News article and then click on the embedded video—the police dash-cam video of the Ersula Ore incident. Each participant was randomly assigned to read one of four paragraphs, representing the four different conditions. After watching the video, participants completed the posttest questionnaire. The posttest questionnaire includes questions assessing people's views of Ersula Ore and the campus police officer as well as general political and demographic questions.[10]

Experimental Results

We begin by examining whether the framing of the video clip influences people's support for the actions of the professor and the police officer. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate their support for the police officer's (or professor's) actions in the video on a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 = *strongly support the officer's (professor's) actions*, and 1 = *strongly oppose the officer's (professor's) actions*. We hypothesized that people would be more supportive of the police officer's actions when they

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[10] The pretest and posttest questionnaires are available upon request.

receive the law and order frame and more empathetic toward the professor when they receive the police brutality frame.

According to the results presented in Figure 1, the framing of the video produces important differences in people's support for the actions of the professor and the actions of the police officer. We find that the law and order frame and police brutality frame lead to significantly different levels of support for the police officer's actions in the video. In particular, when people read the brief paragraph containing the law and order frame before viewing the video, they rated the police officer actions positively, with an average of more than 5 on the 10-point scale. In contrast, people who read the paragraph representing the police brutality frame before watching the video rated the police officer's actions significantly more negatively, with an average score of 3.68 on the 10-point scale.
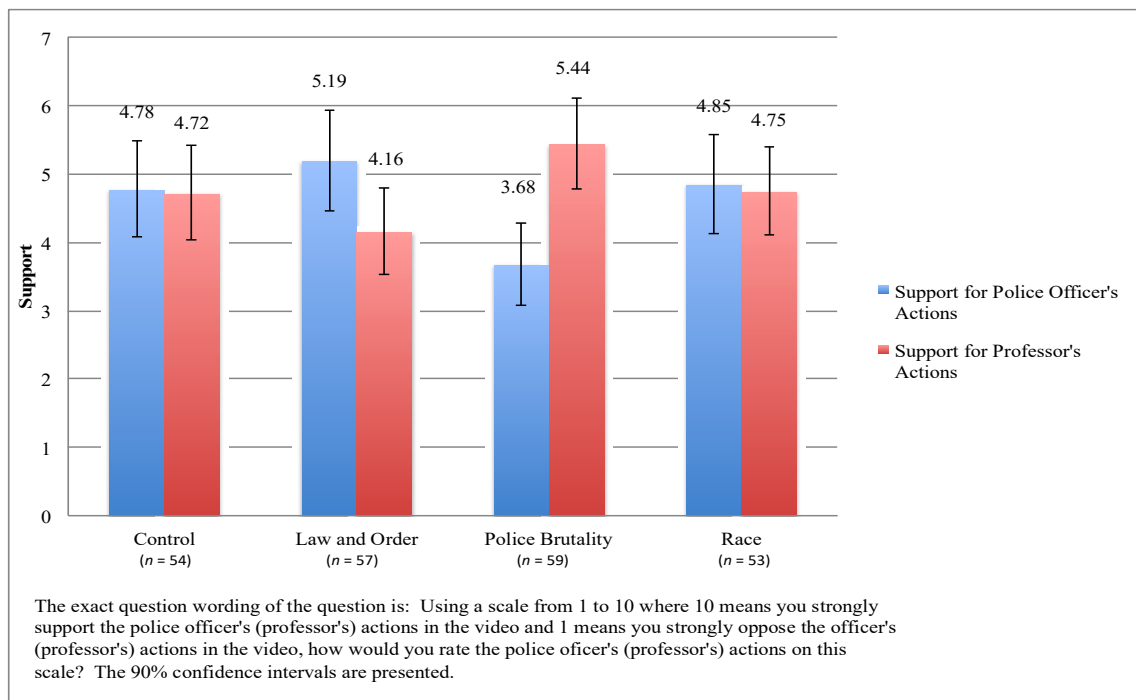

The exact question wording of the question is: Using a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 means you strongly support the police officer's (professor's) actions in the video and 1 means you strongly oppose the officer's (professor's) actions in the video, how would you rate the police oficer's (professor's) actions on this scale? The 90% confidence intervals are presented.

Figure 1. The impact of framing on support for the actions of the police officer and professor.

Similarly, support for the professor's actions are dramatically affected by the framing of the video. As hypothesized, evaluations of the professor are significantly lower when the video is framed in terms of maintaining law and order, whereas people are much more supportive of the professor's behavior when the video is introduced with the police brutality frame. In fact, the professor's actions are viewed negatively by all the groups (i.e., an average less than 5), with the exception of the group that was exposed to the police brutality frame.

Figure 1 also illustrates differences in evaluations of the professor and police officer within each experimental group. Respondents' view the professor and police officer actions almost identically in the race condition and in the control condition. However, in the police brutality condition, the professor's actions are perceived much more positively than the police officer's behavior (i.e., 5.44 vs. 3.68). Similarly, the police officer's actions are viewed more favorably than the professor's behavior when subjects are presented with the law and order frame.[11] These results indicate that relatively modest alterations in the framing of the video produce important differences in people's support of the professor's and police officer's actions.

In addition to asking study participants to assess their support for the professor's and police officer's actions, we also ask them to rate—on a 10-point scale—how favorable they felt toward the professor and the police officer. As before, the framing of the police video significantly affects how people view the two actors. In particular, favorability toward the police officer is contingent on whether the video is framed in terms of law and order versus police brutality. Participants who were presented with the police brutality frame rate the police officer more than a full point lower on the 10-point scale than did participants who were presented with the law and order frame—a drop from 5.12 to 3.83 (see Figure 2).
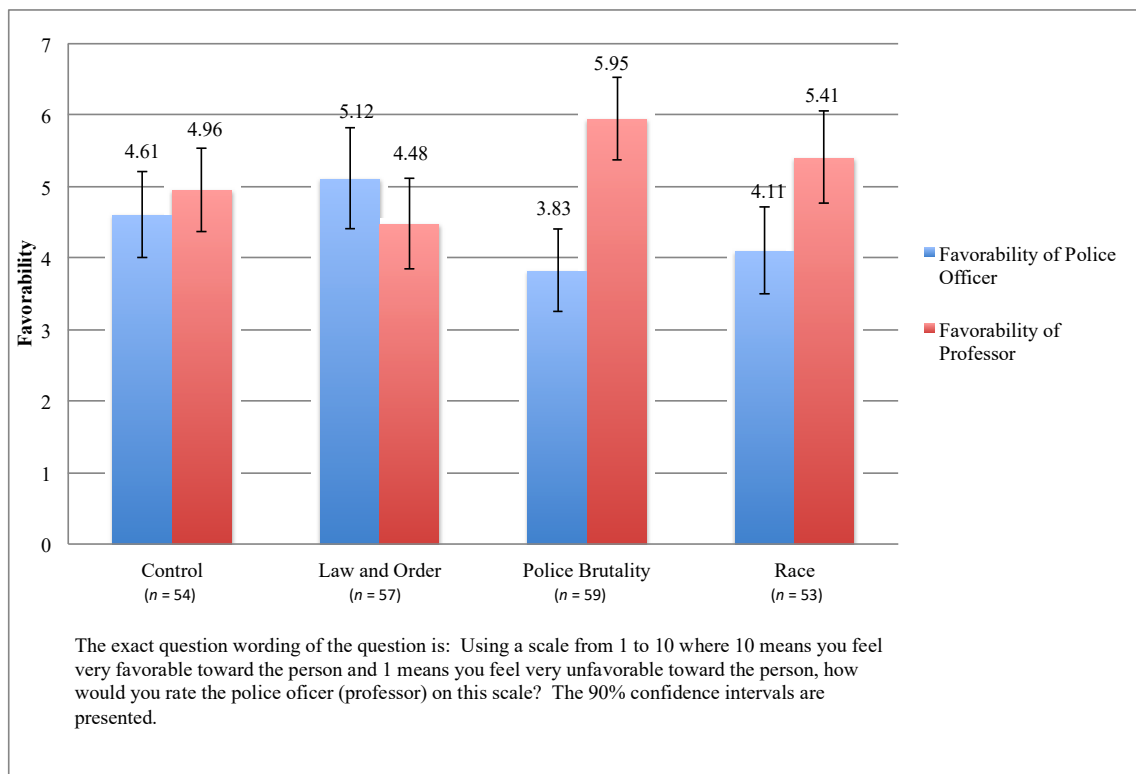

The exact question wording of the question is: Using a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 means you feel very favorable toward the person and 1 means you feel very unfavorable toward the person, how would you rate the police oficer (professor) on this scale? The 90% confidence intervals are presented.

Figure 2. The impact of framing on favorability ratings for the police officer and professor.

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[11] This difference does not reach statistical significance at $p < .10$.

Similarly, people are much more sympathetic toward the professor when the video is framed in terms of police brutality rather than law and order. When participants are encouraged to think about the campus police officer's efforts to maintain law and order near a potentially dangerous intersection, they view the professor negatively, giving her a rating of 4.48 on the 10-point favorability scale. However, when the introduction to the video highlights the violent nature of the altercation, people's views of the professor are significantly more positive, climbing almost a point and a half on the favorability scale (i.e., from 4.48 to 5.95).

As before, we can compare favorability ratings for the professor and the police officer in each of the experimental conditions. Impressions of these actors differ significantly only in the police brutality condition and the race condition. In both of these conditions, people view the professor more favorably than the police officer. The difference is most dramatic in the police brutality condition, where the professor is rated, on average, more than two points higher on the favorability scale, compared with the police officer (i.e., 5.95 vs. 3.83). Overall, these findings illustrate how modest modifications in the framing of the police dash-cam video significantly alter people's support and favorability for the professor's and the police officer's actions.[12]

Finally, we examine the political consequences of framing by exploring the connection between the framing of the police video and people's perceptions of the problem of racism in law enforcement. To explore this question, we develop a multivariate model where we predict the salience of racism in law enforcement as an important issue.[13] First, we look at whether people's placement in the experimental conditions affects their views about the problem of racism among law enforcement. People who see the police video framed in terms of race, for example, may be more likely to view racism among police officers as an important problem when asked after the experimental session.

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[12] When asked at the end of the postelection survey, 61% of the participants responded that they had never seen the Ersula Ore video prior to the experiment. We looked at whether people who viewed the video before the experimental session reacted differently to the experimental stimuli. We ran a series of two-way analyses of variance (condition, previous exposure to video) to predict the dependent variables examined in Figures 1 and 2. People who viewed the video previously did not assess the professor and the police officer differently than people who saw the video for the first time during the experiment. Furthermore, the interaction between previous viewing of the video and experimental condition was significant for only one of the four dependent variables (i.e., support for actions of the police officer). Even in this case, we see the same pattern displayed in Figure 1. For example, people who view the video for the first time are more supportive of the police officer in the law and order condition than those in the police brutality condition (i.e., 5.03 vs. 4.06), and people who have viewed the video before are also more supportive of the police officer in the law and order condition than those in the police brutality condition (i.e., 5.38 vs. 3.22).

[13] The question assessing racism in law enforcement is asked during the posttest questionnaire. The exact question wording is: "How important a problem is racism among law enforcement in your community?" (1 = *not important at all*, 2 = *not very important*, 3 = *somewhat important*, 4 = *very important*).

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        We also include favorability ratings for the professor and the police officer as well as support for the actions of the police officer and the professor. We know from the previous analysis that the framing of the video significantly affects attitudes toward the two actors as well as support for their behavior during the confrontation. Therefore, if people's favorability and support of the police officer and professor influence their evaluations of racism in law enforcement as an important problem, then we can conclude that the framing of the police-cam video indirectly affects people's issue priorities.

        In addition, we control for the respondents' ideology, since people's assessments of racism in law enforcement may be affected by more general political attitudes.[14] We also look at whether people's views about African Americans (i.e., symbolic racism) affect their impressions of racism as a problem in law enforcement. We expect that people who score higher on the symbolic racism scale will be less likely to see racism as a problem in policing.[15] Finally, we expect people's race may affect their views of policing, with minority respondents more likely to see racism in police departments as an important issue.[16]

        The results of our multivariate analysis are presented in Table 3.[17] We find that people's placement in the experimental conditions does not significantly alter their ranking of racism in law enforcement as an important issue. However, we do see some indirect effects of the framing of the police video. First, support for the police officer actions significantly affect people's ranking of the importance of racism in law enforcement. In particular, as people's support for the police officer's actions become more positive, people become significantly less likely to see racism in law enforcement as an important issue. Similarly, the data presented in Table 3 show that, as people's favorability toward the professor increases, they are significantly more likely to view racism in law enforcement as a significant problem.

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[14] We measure ideology with the standard 7-point scale ranging from *extremely liberal* to *extremely conservative*. In our sample, ideology has a mean 3.6 and a standard deviation of 1.6.

[15] Symbolic racism is measured with an eight-item index that assesses a coherent political belief system that includes the following beliefs: African Americans no longer face prejudice or discrimination, African Americans' failure to progress is because of an unwillingness to work, African Americans demand too much, and African Americans have gotten more than they deserve (e.g., Sears & Henry, 2003). In our sample, symbolic racism has a mean of 17.9 and a standard deviation of 5.5.

[16] We distinguish between Whites and non-Whites in the analysis, with 59% of the sample identifying as White. We included gender as an independent variable in the analysis reported in Table 3, but gender failed to reach statistical significance. Finally, we included a variable representing whether respondents had seen the police video prior to the experiment. This variable failed to reach statistical significance in the model shown in Table 3. For the sake of parsimony, we drop gender and seeing the video prior to the experiment from the final model shown in Table 3. Excluding these two variables does not change the findings.

[17] We use ordinal regression because the dependent variable ranges from 1 to 4 (see Harrell, 2015, for more information.).

Table 3. Ordinal Logistic Regression Explaining the Importance of Racism in Law Enforcement.

	Unstandardized logit coefficient (*SE*)
Law and order frame	.55 (.40)
Police brutality frame	.12 (.40)
Racism frame	.17 (.41)
Support police officer's actions	−.18 (.09)**
Support professor's actions	−.08 (.09)
Favorability toward police officer	.01 (.08)
Favorability toward professor	.20 (.10)**
Political ideology	−.15 (.11)
Symbolic racism	−.10 (.03)***
Race of respondent	−.07(.30)
Threshold 1	−5.93 (1.28)***
Threshold 2	−4.28 (1.23)***
Threshold 3	−2.61 (1.21)**
Model χ^2	76.65***
−2 log-likelihood	401.09
df	10
Pseudo R^2 (Cox and Snell)	.33
N	223

Note. The exact working of the dependent variable is: "How important a problem is racism among law enforcement in your community?" (1 = *not important at all*, 2 = *not very important*, 3 = *somewhat important*, 4 = *very important*). Given the ordinal nature of the dependent variable, we use ordinal regression. Political ideology is measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 7 (*extremely conservative*). Symbolic racism ranges from 8 (*low in symbolic racism*) to 32 (*high in symbolic racism*). Race of respondent is coded 1 for Whites and 0 for non-Whites.
** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

In addition, the results shown in Table 3 indicate that people's level of symbolic racism strongly influences whether people view racism in law enforcement as an important issue. More specifically, people who score higher on the symbolic racism scale (e.g., people who think African Americans no longer face much prejudice or discrimination) are much less likely to consider racism in law enforcement an important problem.

These results suggest that the framing of the police video of the altercation between the professor and the police officer indirectly affects people's ranking of the problem of racism among law enforcement. Even controlling for important political variables, such as political ideology and symbolic racism, people's support for the actions of the police officer and their favorability toward the professor significantly influence their ranking of racism in law enforcement as an important problem. This final

analysis demonstrates that the framing of the police video has important political consequences, influencing people's views about racism in law enforcement as an important problem.

Conclusion

This article explores how the framing of a violent confrontation between a police officer and an African American woman affects people's perceptions. We use a unique design to explore emphasis framing of a specific violent police altercation. We conduct a content analysis to assess how the news media covered the specific encounter and developed three frames based on how the news media reported the event. We find that the news media emphasized the theme of police brutality most frequently, but additional themes, such as law and order, were also discussed in news coverage of the incident. Using an experimental design, we constructed emphasis frames based on the content analysis results, experimentally manipulated these frames, and find that exposure to the law and order frame and the police brutality frame significantly affects evaluations of the police officer and the professor. We also find indirect evidence that the framing of the event influences people's perceptions of racism in policing as a problem in their community.

This experiment, although a snapshot of one event, demonstrates the power of framing. Modifying the introduction of the dash-cam video powerfully influences people's views of the event. Given the high salience of the issue of race and policing during this time period as well as the dominance of the police brutality frame, we believe the evidence for framing in our experiment is impressive. For this particular issue, people are likely to have crystallized attitudes, making framing effects more difficult to uncover. Furthermore, the news media's preference for the police brutality frame during this period prioritizes this frame for the public. The fact that relatively modest changes in the framing of the police video produced important changes in people's interpretation of the event attests to the power of framing.

The power of framing has important policy implications. If the news media adopt certain frames over others, these preferred frames can influence the public's policy priorities and drive policy actions by political actors. The prevalence of the police brutality frame in news coverage may lead the public to clamor for police reform, including additional antiracism training, de-escalation training, and more collaboration between local police departments and the community. In contrast, if the law and order frame is more pervasive in news coverage of police violence, then public opinion might move in a different direction—toward demands for additional police resources (e.g., an increase in the number of police officers or an increase in the militarization of police forces) for combatting violence and ensuring public safety.

Finally, our findings are particularly poignant in our contemporary media environment, where many people get news incidentally when they visit social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of Facebook users (66%) and almost six of 10 Twitter users (59%) get some news from these

sites (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016).[18] News dissemination on social networking sites occurs when users share content, with headlines of these shared stories likely to frame news content. As an example, on July 17, 2017, the *New York Daily News* published an article titled "Police Brutality Jumped a Racial Fence With Minneapolis Cop Shooting of Justine Damond." This story was shared more than 25,000 times in less than four hours (King, 2017). Given the viral nature of many news stories on social networking sites, framing effects may be especially powerful on these platforms.

This study represents the first experimental examination of media framing of police violence. In this case, an African American woman was involved in an altercation with a White male police officer. We encourage researchers to continue to examine the framing of police violence and to investigate how varying both the gender and race of the police officer and the citizen involved in the violent confrontation affects the impact of various frames. For example, given common gender conceptions of appropriate behavior (Eagly, 2013), a police brutality frame may be more powerful when a woman is the subject of aggressive actions by a male police officer than when a man is the recipient of the same actions by a woman police officer. Additionally, we believe that further research should explore the dissemination of these emphasis frames via social media sites. Our study represents a first step in exploring how framing of police violence influences people's understanding of the event as well as their political views regarding police violence. Framing is a powerful tool used by the news media, and the framing of an event can shape people's views about policy, serving as a catalyst for important political changes.

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[18] Given that 67% of U.S. population use Facebook as a social networking platform and 16% use Twitter, 44% of the U.S. population receive some of their news via Facebook, and 9% of U.S. residents receive news from Twitter.

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