Nationwide Newspaper Coverage of Homelessness in America

A Community Structure Approach

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Abstract:

A community structure analysis compared city characteristics and nationwide newspaper coverage of homelessness in newspapers in 21 major U.S. cities, sampling articles published between January 10, 2013 and February 24, 2018 that exceeded 500 words. A total of 313 articles we coded for editorial “prominence” (placement, headline size, article length, presence of graphics) and “direction” (“government responsibility,” “societal responsibility,” or “balanced/neutral: coverage”), then combined into each newspaper’s composite “Media Vector” (range= +.6001 to -.3806, or .9807). Twelve of the 21 newspapers (57%) yielded media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for homelessness.

Overall, community structure theory connecting city demographics and variations in coverage of responsibility for homelessness was confirmed for two demographic clusters: “violated buffer” and “different marginalities.” The “violated buffer hypothesis” was robustly confirmed by the regression analysis. The “violated buffer hypothesis” “explains the link between levels of privilege in a city and reporting on “ominous” issues: (Those that contain biological threats or threats to a cherished way of life)” (Pollock, 2007, p.101). It was hypothesized that cities with the greater number of hospital beds per 100,000 people in a metropolitan area would be linked to more media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for homelessness. The regression analysis revealed that cities with greater percentages of hospital beds (r=-.627, p=.001) accounted for 43% of the variance associated with “less” media emphasis on government responsibility. This can likely be explained by the fact that hospitals are often operated by nonprofit organizations and companies, not the government;
Thus, cities with greater percentages of hospital beds will emphasize “less” government responsibility for homelessness.

Additionally, Mainline Protestants qualify as part of the confirmed “violated buffer hypothesis” because, historically, they are often associated with privilege and progressive ideology. It was hypothesized that cities with greater percentages of Mainline Protestants would be linked to more media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for homelessness. The regression analysis revealed that greater percentages of Mainline Protestants (r=-0.518, p= 0.008) accounted for 9% of the variance connected to “less” media emphasis on government responsibility. In total, hospital beds and Mainline Protestants accounted for 52% of the variance connected to “less” media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness. In past research, Mainline Protestants and Catholics were associated with more liberal, pro-government perspectives. However, our findings suggest that Mainline Protestant beliefs towards homelessness are more in sync with those of Evangelicals who are more likely to stray away from government involvement.

Community structure theory was partially disconfirmed for the “different marginalities” demographic. The “different marginalities” demographic cluster encompasses three city characteristics: “18 to 24 year olds,” “foreign born” individuals, and “single parents”. Historically, these groups have been disadvantaged within their communities, especially within the job market. It was hypothesized that greater percentages of 18 to 24 year olds (r=-.581, p=.003), foreign born individuals (r=0.637 p=0.001), and single parents (r= -.0581, p= .002) would each be linked to more media coverage favoring government responsibility for homelessness. However, the regression analysis showed that the greater percentage of 18 to 24
year olds in a city accounted for 18% of the variance associated with “less” media emphasis on government responsibility. This is likely due to job competition between 18 to 24 year olds and the homeless. Meanwhile, greater percentages of foreign born citizens accounted for 5% of the variance connected to “more” media emphasis on government responsibility. This is likely due to foreign born individuals’ cultural barriers and high unemployment rates. Finally, greater percentages of single parents accounted for 4% of the variance connected to “less” media emphasis on government responsibility. This is likely because single parents are historically poor and marginalized, once again creating more job competition with the homeless.

Methodologically, combining measures of both “prominence” and “direction,” highly sensitive Media Vectors highlighted the capacity of media to reflect community measures of “violated buffer: hospital beds and Mainline Protestants”, “different marginalities: 18-24 year olds, foreign born, and single parent”. Of the five variables included in the regression analysis which comprise 79% of the total variance in media emphasis, four of them (74%) are connected to “less” media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness.

Introduction:

Homelessness is a crisis throughout the United States. From benches in intercity train stations and bus terminals to wooded areas in rural townships to suburban shelters, hundreds of thousands of Americans go to sleep every night in places that they do not rent or own. During the 2016 nationwide Point-in-Time Count, 549,928 people were found to be homeless (Henry, et al., 2016). Since only volunteers were interviewed, the official number is likely higher. Is it the fault of individuals, or are they experiencing homelessness because of failures in the structure of our society? How much of a role should government play to ensure that the homeless are guided
towards affordable permanent housing? With such an epidemic existing for decades, how do newspapers across the country portray this human tragedy? This report will analyze perspectives held by media, specifically newspapers, regarding how homelessness has been covered in recent years.

Exploring coverage of homelessness across the country, two major perspectives, or media “frames,” are anticipated. Specifically, “Framing occurs when [the] media presents some perspectives or narratives as more reasonable than others” (Pollock 2007, p. 24). One frame argues that local, state, or federal governments have a responsibility to care for homeless people. A contrary frame suggests that homelessness should be framed as a society issue to be addressed by families, charities, nonprofits, and local communities. Often, newspapers vary in their coverage of an issue depending on their location and demographics. The way in which homelessness is framed by these publications may impact how readers perceive the issue.

Since homelessness throughout America is such an important issue, newspaper coverage from varying metropolitan areas of the country will be used to analyze the problem. Newspapers are our primary source because they allow for research involving accurate, historical and statistical accounts of current events. A majority of well-educated political and economic opinion leaders rely on newspapers for information. Newspapers are also well-known intermedia agenda setters. Similar to all other mediums that provide information, newspapers serve as a daily source of news for many. Newspapers provide opportunity for communities to interact and debate current events and topics relevant to people’s lives, serving as community forums.

This in-depth analysis of homelessness in America will utilize the Community Structure theory. The community structure approach is best defined as “a form of quantitative content
analysis that focuses on the ways in which key characteristics of communities such as cities are related to the content coverage of newspapers in those communities” (Pollock 2007, p.23). Two key questions will guide this study: How much disparity occurs in news coverage of homelessness in the United States across major metropolitan areas? And, how much does that disparity in coverage correspond to variations in community demographics?

**Literature Review and Community Structure Theory:**

In order to scrutinize newspaper coverage regarding homelessness nationwide, it is useful to analyze scholarly literatures in several fields including communication studies, political science, nursing, and sociology. While several fields cover homelessness in general, little literature is apparent on the relationship between homelessness and media coverage. In particular, the communication studies field lacks substantial research on the topic.

**Coverage of Homelessness in Communication Studies and Other Disciplines**

Employing the communication studies database *Communication & Mass Media Complete*, a search for peer reviewed articles using the term “homeless*” in the abstract yielded 62 results, but when related to “media”, 18 results emerged.

One article discussed homeless youth’s relationship to mobile phones in order to help mHealth promote public health issues through digital media (Jennings et al., 2016). Researchers found that homeless youth “most preferred mHealth content relating to sexual, reproductive, and mental health” as long as it was “confidential, empowering, and integrated with other media” (Jennings et al., 2016). Four more articles investigated relationships between the homeless and social/digital media. Three other articles delved into homeless people’s portrayal in popular television culture, while three more articles covered a variety of crisis situations in countries like
Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, and Italy. Meanwhile, two articles focused on religion and the media with minor attention given to homelessness. One article discussed activism for the homeless in Sacramento, while another focused on differing newspaper perspectives towards Melbourne’s Homeless World Cup (HWC). Finally, one article discussed the struggles of homelessness for journalists in the US, Japan, and Finland.

“Homelessness Coverage in Major Canadian Newspapers” studied trends in Canada’s media coverage of homelessness from 1987-2007 (Solina et al., 2011). They analyzed newspapers’ coverage of various topics relating to homelessness, ultimately finding that 85.3% of newspapers covered housing issues, profiling issues, economic factors, and community support (Solina et al., 2011). Another article investigated the tendency for newspapers to depict homelessness as a social problem or not depending on three types of events: events promoted to media by their actors and high- and low-profile events not promoted by their actors (Best, 2010). Analyzing 475 newspaper articles and using a binomial aggression, researcher Rachel Best of Berkeley University found that actor-promoted events were more likely to receive media attention that showed homelessness as a social problem (Best, 2010). Despite some attention to media relations and homelessness, there is still a lack of recent research on the potential biases of media coverage towards homelessness in America.

Compared to the 18 relevant articles in communications studies, the political science field contained fewer articles on media and homelessness. A search for peer reviewed articles in the political science database PAIS Index using the terms “homeless*” and “media” returned eight results. One article examined the lack of mobility of the homeless population and how that immobility should influence healthcare policy in the future (Parker & Dykema, 2013). Another
article examined the community/media backlash after the Homeless Youth Alliance (HYA) attempted to move its needle exchange service out of the San Francisco area in 2007 (Davidson & Howe, 2014). While the PAIS Index offered a few more scholarly pieces on homelessness, none of these articles pertained to the media’s potential variance in covering homelessness across America.

Compared to the political science field, nursing returned more articles. A search for peer reviewed articles in the nursing database CINAHL with the search term “homeless*” and “media” in the abstract yielded 11 results. The articles varied in their analyses, but generally looked at homelessness through the lens of health issues. One piece examined the feasibility of a 15-week nutrition education, physical activity, and media literacy program for children living in urban homeless shelters (Rodriguez et al., 2013). In another article, a pilot study analyzed the roles of popular culture, media, and the arts in the health and self-esteem of homeless youth (Mutere et al., 2014).

Finally, compared to political science and nursing, the sociology field contained the most research on homelessness and media. A search for peer reviewed articles conducted in Sociological Abstracts utilizing the terms “homeless*” and “media” yielded 36 results. These focused on a variety of issues relating to homelessness. One article analyzed “how social media is used over time by a community network” to help implement federal homeless policy in the U.S. (Jung & Valero, 2016). Another article discussed acts of kindness towards the homeless that went digitally viral and how that affects public perception of homelessness (Lancione, 2014).

After conducting research on homelessness and the media in a number of fields including communication studies, political science, nursing, and sociology, it is clear that communication
studies lacks substantial research on homelessness and media coverage in comparison to other fields of study. Further research is needed in communication studies, and this paper expects to make a contribution.

Community Structure Theory

Funk and McCombs (2017) have identified Community Structure Theory as the ‘conceptual inverse’ of agenda-setting, “focusing on demographic characteristics of communities shaping news instead of news as a driver of public perception.” As noted by Cook (2017, p. 1), “Community structure theory provides a powerful framework for analyzing society’s influence on media coverage.” The community structure approach was first employed in the early twentieth century by Robert Park at the University of Chicago, and over the years this theory has been further established and refined (Park, 1992). Park supported the idea that scholars should examine how society influences media as opposed to only examining how media influence society. Incorporating Park’s approach, Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien—three scholars from the University of Minnesota—furthered the development and study of “structural pluralism” (1973, 1980), finding that newspapers in larger cities were more pluralistic and progressive due to socially diverse populations. However, there were apparent limitations in their studies since they examined media coverage in different Minnesota cities, as opposed to exploring nationwide coverage. After their studies, the three scholars crafted a “guard dog” hypothesis (Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien 1995), which emphasizes media’s reinforcement and protection of the interests of the political and economic elites, as opposed to reflecting the interests of the public (Pollock 2007, p.24). By contrast, Hindman (1999) found that media in a few cities would actually reflect the interests not of the elites, but rather the interests of dominant ethnic groups.
Likewise, McLeod and Hertog (1992, 1999) found that favorable media coverage in cities can reflect the size of its protest groups. Similarly, Viswanath and Demers concluded that “mainstream mass media are agents both of social control for dominant institutions and value systems” (1999, p.34). Most recently, Pollock and colleagues introduced three additional steps to the structural approach. First, through nationwide and cross-national studies, they collected data from numerous critical events that associated multiple city or national level structural characteristics with variations in newspaper coverage. In addition, they created a “Media Vector” which is a composite score that combined the measurements of article “content” and article “prominence.” Finally, despite Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien (1995) and their “guard dogs” hypothesis, Pollock et al.’s studies in Tilted Mirrors: Media Alignment with Political and Social Change- A Community Structure Approach (2007), Media and Social Inequality: Innovations in Community Structure Research (2013) and Journalism and Human Rights: How Demographics Drive Media Coverage (2015) often concludes that media reflects the interests of society’s “vulnerable” citizens. It is informative that agenda-setting scholars using a systematic study have deduced that community structure predictions compare favorably with those made by agenda-setting theory (Funk & McCombs 2017).

**Hypotheses:**

To analyze media coverage of homelessness in America, three umbrella hypotheses were constructed based on previous Community Structure Theory studies (Pollock, 2007): buffer, vulnerability, and stakeholder.

**Buffer Hypothesis**
The “buffer” hypothesis expects that the higher the percentage of privileged groups in a city, the more likely a city's newspaper is to cover human rights issues favorably (Pollock 2007, p. 52). Pollock’s 2007 book, *Tilted Mirrors*, explains that “the more individuals in a city who are ‘buffered’ from scarcity or uncertainty, the more likely they are to accord legitimacy to those who articulate their concerns in human rights frames” (Pollock 2007, p. 62). At the city level, measures of privilege are categorized by the following criteria: percentage of college-educated, percentage of families with annual incomes of $100,000 or more, and percentage with professional/technical occupational status in a city. The buffer hypothesis asserts that the security these privileged groups experience is linked to generosity toward less privileged groups, which are less “buffered” from danger and economic insecurity (Pollock and Haake 2010; Pollock, Shier, and Slattery 1995).

According to the buffer hypothesis, some people in cities are “buffered” from economic uncertainty due to their higher incomes and privilege, and some cities have higher populations of “buffered” individuals than others (Pollock, 2007, p. 61). In *Tilted Mirrors*, Pollock states that “cities with relatively large proportions of privileged groups may be linked to relatively sympathetic media coverage of groups or group representatives making rights claims” (Pollock, 2007, p. 61). In other words, privileged individuals who are “buffered” from economic and social hardship will be more receptive and open-minded to the struggles of those who are less privileged. Privileged, or “buffered” individuals would be those who are college educated, have an annual income of $100,000 or more, and have professional/technical occupational status. Supporters of this hypothesis link the security these privilege people feel to their generosity
towards oppressed and marginalized groups, who are less “buffered” from danger and insecurity (Pollock & Haake, 2010; Pollock, Shier, & Slattery, 1995).

Several existing studies confirm the buffer hypothesis. Vales, et al. (2014, 2015) found that higher percentages of college educated residents, families with incomes of $100,000 or more, and people in professional or technical occupations in a city were all linked to more favorable coverage of same-sex marriage. Meanwhile, another study linked a higher percent of college educated people and more families with incomes over $100,000 with more favorable coverage of accepting gays in the Boy Scouts (Pollock, 2007, p. 243) and yet another study linked those characteristics to favorable coverage of physician assisted suicide (Pollock, 2007, p.86).

In one study, Pollock, Gratale, Anas, et al. (2014, 2015) found that the more the proportion of privileged city residents, the less media emphasis on government responsibility for posttraumatic stress. By contrast, a more recent study found that a greater number of professional residents in a city was linked to greater media emphasis on government responsibility for PTSD (Goldman, et al., 2016). Consistently, in relation to the Thomas-Hill judicial hearings, the larger percent of privileged individuals in a city was connected to more favorable coverage of Anita Hill’s sexual harassment charges (Pollock, 2007, p.66-75). Based on this literature, buffered groups are more likely to be linked to more favorable coverage on human rights issues. Since homelessness remains a major humans rights issue in the 21st century, it can be assumed that privileged groups will be linked to greater media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness.
**H1a:** The greater the percent of college educated in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness (Claritas Segmentation & Market Solutions, 2017).

**H1b:** The greater the percent of families with incomes of $100,000 or more, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness (Claritas Segmentation & Market Solutions, 2017).

**H1c:** The greater the percent with professional/technical occupational status, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness (Claritas Segmentation & Market Solutions, 2017).

**Healthcare access:** An essential addition to the buffer hypothesis is health care access, which refers to “the proportion of the municipal budget that a city spends on healthcare, in addition to the availability of hospital beds and physicians” (Pollock, 2007, p. 99). According to the health care access hypothesis, greater media support for government responsibility for human rights claims, should be encountered where there is substantial access to healthcare. Multiple studies confirm these links.

One study found that newspaper coverage of stem cell research was more favorable where the number of physicians per 100,000 residents was higher (Pollock, 2007, p.97). Another study showed that the higher the number of physicians per 100,000 residents, newspaper coverage of physician-assisted suicide (Pollock & Yulis, 2004,) and pediatric immunization
(Trotochaud et al., 2015) were more favorable, while the coverage of solitary confinement was less favorable (Pollock, Street, et al., 2017). In addition, other studies found that the greater the proportions of physicians were linked to more media emphasis on government responsibility for gun safety (Patel, et al., 2017) and government responsibility for campus rape and rape culture (Pollock, Richardella, et al., 2018).

Further, Pereira et al. (2015) confirmed that when the number of hospital beds per 100,000 in a city is larger, the more media support for military rape adjudication outside the chain of command, and the less media support for solitary confinement (Pollock, Street, et al., 2017), the more media support government responsibility for gun safety (Patel, et al., 2017), all considered more progressive perspectives.

Homelessness is connected to healthcare because many homeless individuals lack access to insurance, while some rely on hospital emergency rooms for care and shelter. Based on these studies, it is expected that cities, with substantial interests in healthcare access will display more media emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness. Therefore, it can be assumed:

**H2a:** The greater the number of physicians per 100,000 people, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness (State and Metropolitan Area Data Book, 2010).

**H2b:** The greater number of hospital beds per 100,000 people, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).
**H2c:** The greater the percentage of municipal spending on healthcare, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**Vulnerability Hypothesis**

The vulnerability hypothesis predicts connections between economically disadvantaged groups such as the poor, unemployed, or those in high-crime areas and media coverage paralleling their interests (Pollock, 2007, p. 101). The vulnerability hypothesis states that cities with greater percentages of individuals who are disadvantaged will display more media coverage directed toward “vulnerable groups’ concerns” (Pollock, 2007, p. 137). The vulnerability hypothesis challenges the “guard dog” hypothesis created by Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien (1995), which states that the interests of political and economic elites are usually reflected in media and newspaper reporting. In multiple Pollock et al. studies, by contrast, confirms that media coverage “mirrors” the interests of poor or unemployed groups (Pollock, 2007, p. 101, 137).

Different levels of poverty were examined in a variety of different studies, several finding correlations between high poverty levels and more positive coverage, whether it was legislation supporting a Patient’s Bill of Rights, immigration reform, or the legalization of abortion (Roe v.
Wade 1973), as well as coverage supporting government responsibility for suicide prevention (respectively, Pollock, 2007, p.151; Pollock, Gratale and Teta, et al 2014, 2015; Pollock, Robinson and Murray, 1978; Swartz, et al., 2016). Other studies found that the higher the unemployment levels in a city, the more media support for genetically-modified food (Pollock, Maltese-Nehrbass, Corbin, & Fascanella 2010, p. 51–75), universal healthcare (Kiernicki, Pollock, & Lavery, 2013), security surveillance (Moran, et al., 2017), and military rape adjudication “outside the chain of command” (Marr, et al., 2016). Strong links were found between high homicide rates in a city and more favorable coverage of military rape adjudication “outside of the chain of command” (Peraria, et al., 2015), transgender rights (Pollock, Buonaro, et al. 2017), and increased media emphasis on government responsibility for campus suicide prevention (Swartz, et al., 2016). Communities with high rates of hate crime were additionally associated with media support for immigration reform (Borowski et al., 2017).

In this current study, homelessness can be viewed as an indicator of vulnerability, particularly in urban centers. Individuals experiencing homelessness are clearly disadvantaged and newspaper coverage in disadvantaged metropolitan areas are predicted to place significant emphasis on government responsibility regarding homelessness. Thus:
**H2a:** The greater the percentage below the poverty level in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H2b:** The greater the percentage of unemployed, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H2c:** The higher the homicide rate, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H2d:** The higher the hate crime rate, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H2e:** The greater the percent of unmarried births, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H2f:** The greater the percentage of single-parent households, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H2g:** The higher the suicide rate, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H2h:** The higher the percent uninsured, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).
**H2i: The greater the percentage of female heads of households, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).**

**Stakeholder Hypothesis**

The third umbrella hypothesis in this study is the stakeholder hypothesis, which expects a connection between stakeholder size and favorable coverage of stakeholder concerns (Pollock 2007, p. 172; McLeod and Hertog 1999). Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1980) discovered that the larger the city size, the greater the plurality of viewpoints presented by media (Pollock, 2007, p.171). When focusing on homelessness, several stakeholder categories can be employed, including: women’s empowerment, ethnic identity political partisanship, belief system, generation, and position in life cycle.

**Women’s empowerment:** Women face gender inequality daily; therefore, women may be more sympathetic to human rights actions. One measure of stakeholder empowerment is women’s employment levels. Three recent studies suggest that the higher percent of women in the workforce, the more favorable the coverage of immigration reform (Borowski et al., 2017), human cloning (Pollock & Dudzak et.al., 2000, p. 107), and transgender rights (Pollock, Buonauro et al., 2017). Similarly, greater percentages of women in the workforce are linked to
favorable coverage of the two wage-earner Eappens family, whose child was killed by the family’s “British nanny” (Pollock, Citarella Ryan, & Yulis, 1999).

Homelessness has become a major public issue, especially in the United States, and reporting on the topic can generate substantial emotion and sympathy from women. Like the buffer hypothesis, greater proportions of privileged women, defined as either working or college educated, are likely associated with media emphasizing government responsibility for homelessness. Accordingly:

**H3a:** The greater the percentage of women in the workforce, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2012).

**H3b:** The greater the percentage of college educated women in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**Ethnic Identity:** Coverage of government responsibility for various issues may vary across different ethnic identities, but this is not expected to be the case for homelessness. Relevant ethnic groups for this study include: Hispanics, African Americans, and foreign-born. Each one of these groups may have different connections to coverage of homelessness.

A study by Kiernicki, Pollock, and Lavery concluded that the more Hispanics in a
community, the more favorable the coverage of universal health care (Kiernicki, Pollock, & Lavery, 2013). Another study showed that greater percentages of Hispanics in communities were connected to more media emphasis on the government responsibility for clean water (Pollock & Branca, 2011). During the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court Case in 1973 more favorable coverage of legalizing abortion was found in cities with large proportions of African American demographics (Pollock, Robinson & Murray, 1978). Similarly, a study conducted by Soya et al. (2015) concluded that higher percentages of African Americans in a community were linked to greater media emphasis on government responsibility for eliminating rape/rape culture on college campuses (Soya, et al, 2015), and the more favorable the coverage of military rape adjudication “outside” the chain of command, (Peraria, et al., 2015).

Other studies came to similar conclusions as they found that higher proportions of African Americans in a city were linked with greater media emphasis on government responsibility for PTS (Goldman, et al., 2016) and for campus suicide prevention (Swartz, et al., 2016), as well as favorable coverage of transgender rights (Buonauro, et al, 2017). Unlike prior Studies, nationwide newspaper coverage of Islam after- 9/11 showed that the higher proportion of foreign-born, Farsi, or Arabic communicators in a city, the less favorable coverage of Islam in

Homelessness affects all people regardless of ethnic identity. Some current political climates might invite less media support for government involvement in addressing homelessness in areas with greater percents of foreign-born individuals, specifically immigrants risking deportation. However, based on the previous studies mentioned above, the following hypotheses are articulated:

**H3e:** The greater the percent of Hispanics in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H3f:** The greater the percent of African Americans in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**H3g:** The greater the percentage of foreign-born individuals in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (County and City Extra, 2010).

**Belief system:** Different religious beliefs and values may contribute to varied coverage of critical issues in newspapers. Pollock, Robinson, and Murray (1978) found that cities with higher percentages of Catholics were associated with less favorable coverage of the 1973 Supreme Court case, Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortion. Additionally, cities with higher proportions
of devotional readers, defined as those relying on literal interpretations of the Bible, were associated with less favorable coverage of embryonic stem cell research (Pollock, 2007), gays in the Boy Scouts (Pollock, 2007, p. 232), transgender rights (Pollock, Buonauro et al., 2017), and immigration reform (Borowski, et al., 2017). Furthermore, less favorable coverage of same-sex marriage (Vales et al., 2014, 2015) and transgender rights (Buonauro et al., 2017), and more favorable coverage of security surveillance (Moran et al., 2017) were encountered in cities with greater percentages of Evangelicals.

More recent research, however, has encountered some modifications. Cities with greater percentages of Catholics were associated with more favorable coverage of same-sex marriage and same-sex adoptions (Pollock & Haake, 2010), transgender rights (Pollock, Buonauro et al., 2017), gays in the Boy Scouts (Pollock, 2007, p. 243), and immigration reform (Borowski, et al., 2017). Similarly, cities with greater percentages of Catholics were connected with more media coverage supporting military rape adjudication claims “outside” the chain of command, a progressive perspective, (Peraria et al., 2015) and more media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for reducing rape and rape culture on college campuses (Soya et al. 2015).

Similarly, Pollock (2013, p. 1-30) found that the greater the percentage of Mainline
Protestants in a city, the more favorable coverage of the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York (Pollock, 2013, p. 1-30) and of detainee rights at Guantanamo Bay (Zinck et al., 2014, 2015), and the less favorable the coverage of solitary confinement (Pollock & Street et al., 2017), as well as more media emphasis on government responsibility for animal cruelty (Machado et al., 2016).

Accordingly, analyzing relationships between proportions of people belonging to specific belief systems and the coverage of homelessness generated several hypotheses. It is expected that Evangelicals and Devotional Readers will be associated with less media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness because they are generally associated with more conservative positions, and Catholics and Mainline Protestants will be associated with more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness because they tend to be associated with more progressive positions. Thus:

**H3h:** The greater the percentage of Evangelicals in a city, the less media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Association of Religion Data Archives, 2006).

**H3i:** The greater the percentage of devotional readers in a city, the less media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).
**H3j**: The greater the percentage of Catholics in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**H3k**: The greater the percentage of Mainline Protestants in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Association of Religion Data Archives, 2006).

**Political identity**: Political affiliation can be an influential stakeholder. Studies have confirmed that higher percentages of Democratic voters have been associated with less favorable coverage of trying juveniles as adults (Pollock, 2007, p. 204) and with more favorable coverage of same-sex marriage (Vales et al., 2014, 2015). The opposite pattern was found for Republican voters.

Other studies found similar results, with the higher percent voting Democratic, the more favorable the coverage of pediatric immunization and transgender rights, and more media emphasis on government responsibility for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (respectively, Trotochaud et al., 2015; Pollock et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2017), in which a higher percentage of Republican voters produced opposite results. Traditionally Democratic voters are affiliated with more progressive viewpoints, believing that health-care and other welfare programs can be
universalized with less focus on financial considerations. Meanwhile, Republicans often tend to oppose programs that involve government spending on “entitlements” or “vulnerable” groups. Since homelessness in America is such a prevalent progressive issue, it can be assumed through prior studies that Democrats will connect the homelessness to be primarily the responsibility of government rather than society. The following claims are expected:

**H3c:** The higher the percentage voting Democratic in the last presidential election, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness. (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**H3d:** The higher the percentage voting Republican in the last presidential election, the less media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness. (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**Generation:** Age group can be extremely influential for a person’s perspective and perhaps for media coverage of certain critical topics. Borowski et al. concluded that the higher the percentage of those 18-24 in a city, the more favorable the coverage of immigration reform (2017). Another study by Vales et al. (2014, 2015) found that higher percentages of 25 to 44 and 45 to 66 year olds in a city were associated with more favorable coverage of same sex marriage,
while the higher the percentage aged 65 and older in a city, the less favorable the coverage.

Another study by Marr et al (2016) found more media emphasis on military rape adjudication “outside” the chain of command, a progressive position in cities with higher percentages of middle-aged (45-64 year-old) people.

Focusing more specifically on older generations, a study conducted by Zinck et al. (2014, 2015) concluded that coverage of detainee rights at Guantanamo Bay was less favorable in cities with higher percentages aged 65 and older. A study by Pollack and Yulis (2004) confirmed that higher percentages of citizens above age 75 in cities were connected with less favorable coverage of legalizing physician-assisted suicide. Younger generations take a more liberal approach to controversial issues, while older generations are typically more conservative. Based on the aforementioned studies, these hypotheses specific to homelessness are predicted:

**H3l:** The greater the percentage of 18 to 24 year-olds in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**H3m:** The greater the percentage of 24 to 44 year-olds in a city, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**H3n:** The greater the percentage of 45 to 64 year-olds in a city, the more media
emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**H3o:** The greater the percentage of 65 year-olds and older in a city, the less media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**Position in life-cycle:** Another element affecting newspaper coverage is the mixture of families with children of different ages living in a specific community. Mink, Puma, and Pollock (2002) explored coverage of the return of Elian Gonzalez and his father in Cuba, finding the higher the percentage of families with children ages 5 to 7 (Elian’s age range) in a US city, the more favorable the coverage of the young boy’s return to Cuba. Similarly, the higher the percent of families with young children 5-10, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for campus suicide prevention (Swartz et al., 2016), and higher percentages of families with children under five corresponded with more media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for animal rights (Machado et al., 2016).

Regarding families with teenagers, a study by Pollock (2007, pp. 172-183) found that the higher the percentage of families with children ages 13 to 15, and 16 to 18, the less favorable the coverage of gun control. The findings of Pollock’s studies suggested that families with teen children are less likely to look to formal authorities such as the government or police to provide
regulations on perceived danger or threats. However, media coverage of rape may view younger children as being less at risk than older, teenage children. A recent study found higher percentages of families with children 11-15 in a city connected to media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for rape and PTSD, suggesting that proximity of children to risk may be connected to responsive media content (Kim et al., 2017).

Families with teens and young adults may be less likely to support government help for the homeless because older children are more likely to visit a wide range of locations and be more exposed to the behavioral uncertainty association with homeless people. Thus:

**H3p:** The greater the percentage of families with children under 5 years old in a population, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**H3q:** The greater the percentage of families with children aged 5 to 12 years old in a population, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

**H3r:** The greater the percentage of families with children aged 11 to 15 years old in a population, the more media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).
Market Analyst, 2008).

H3s: The greater the percentage of families with children aged 13 to 18 years old in a population, the less media emphasis on government responsibility for homelessness (Lifestyle Market Analyst, 2008).

Methodology

The inception point of our data collection was January 10, 2013, two weeks before the 2013 Point-in-Time Count, when volunteers and officials searched the United States to count how many people were not living in permanent housing. The sample period ended February 24, 2018, a month after the 2018 Point-in-Time Count. During this roughly five year time period, homelessness generated substantial coverage in media throughout the United States.

Article Prominence

Each article was assigned two assessments. The first score evaluated “prominence.” Prominence depends on the significance of the article to the editor. Each article was evaluated with a number between 3 to 16 based on four elements: placement, headline size, article length, and the photos/graphics if any were included. The articles with a higher number of points received a greater prominence score. Below, Table 1 demonstrated the scoring in more detail.

Table 1: Prominence Score*

For coding databases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headline size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Article Direction

In addition to prominence, articles were analyzed for direction, representing how articles were framed. Articles were assigned categories according to whether media emphasized “government” or “societal” responsibility coverage of homelessness. A “balanced/neutral” direction was also awarded to articles that presented coverage emphasizing neither government responsibility nor societal responsibility. “Balanced/neutral” articles that simply stated facts or statistics unrelated to perspective on the subject were also deemed balanced/neutral.

**Government responsibility:** Articles emphasizing the importance of government responsibility for homelessness were coded “government responsibility.” “Government responsibility” coverage was assigned to articles that covered legislation regarding homelessness.
For example, the article, “Philadelphia Forms Task Force on Homeless” in The Philadelphia Inquirer, highlighted Mayor Kenney’s plans to minimize the increase in panhandling and homelessness on the streets of Philadelphia. Elizabeth Hersh, director of the Office of Homeless Services, explained that there have been more and more homeless people panhandling recently due to the ongoing construction in places such as the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, in LOVE Park and the Gallery at Market East. Not only did this construction activity rid homeless people of their usual campsites, but it also forced them directly into the streets of Center City. Hersh continued by mentioning, “I think the problem has become more visible, and in a way, I think that’s a good thing, because you can’t turn a blind eye to it” (Terruso, 2016, p.1). Due to this form of rhetoric by the Philadelphia government and their effort to aid the homeless population within their own city, this article’s direction was clearly characterized as “government” responsibility.

Another example is “City plans to offer ID cards, Goal: Aid those facing barriers” in the Hartford Courant highlights how city officials are implementing a new system that would allow homeless citizens easier access to basic needs. The article clearly states that “All city agencies and employees, including Hartford Police officers, would have to accept the Hartford city I.D. as proof of identity and residency” (Carlesso, 2015, p.1). For these reasons, it is obvious that the article direction is in favor of governmental responsibility for homelessness.

**Societal responsibility:** Articles that stressed the importance of the role of society over the role of the government in regards to homelessness were coded as “societal responsibility”.
“Society” encapsulates charities, non-profits, individuals, and families within its collective category.

For example, the article “Church Groups Propose Homeless Shelter” from *The Oregonian*, discussed how a group of 40 religious individuals gathered together from Forest Grove and Cornelius with the hope of organizing a rehabilitation center for homeless people nearby. Pastor Dale Phipps of Real Life Church in Cornelius led the conversation by emphasizing that partnerships between churches, services agencies and faith-based organizations must be strong if the issue of homelessness were to be taken care of. Sonrise Church director of youth ministry, Mike Kay, believed that the creation of a rehabilitation center in Forest Grove would certainly assist the city’s homeless population. “It would provide hope to them,” Kay said. “Not only can they be safe, not only can they out of the weather, not only can they be fed, but they can be taking classes, getting job skills, and having opportunities to give them some hope” (Rios, 2014, p.1). This religious group’s proposal to reintegrate the homeless back into society clearly removed all government responsibility out of the equation, justifying classifying this article’s direction as “societal”.

Another example of societal responsibility for homelessness can be noticed in “Shen graduates music right tune for homeless” in the *Times Union in Albany*. This article, written by Steve Barnes, emphasizes how one Shenendehowa High School graduate will be donating all the money he’s earned from performing with his guitar to the homeless population surrounding him. By performing in the streets of New York City, Will Boyajian is going to be able to donate upward up $2,000 to the homeless people he sees every day, “Accompanying himself on guitar,
he sings old rock 'n' roll, country and bluegrass tunes behind a sign that invites the homeless or others in desperate circumstances to take as much as they need,” (Barnes, 2017, p.1). This form of non-profit donation from another citizen clearly emphasizes the societal responsibility of the article.

**Balanced/Neutral:** Articles that emphasized neither government responsibility nor societal responsibility for homelessness were coded as “balanced/neutral.” Additionally, articles that neglected to state a position on the issue of homelessness, but still offered relevant facts or statistics, were coded as “balanced/neutral.”

A balanced or neutral responsibility was best exemplified in “Interstate Bridge Collapse,” an article from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. The article provided details on a homeless man being charged in the I-85 bridge fire incident that occurred in 2017. Many advocates believed he was unfairly treated throughout the entirety of the situation and attempted to blame the state’s decision to store tons of plastic underneath the highway. This would mean that the government is attempting to blame a homeless individual in order to cover its own tracks. Basil Eleby, the homeless man charged, quickly emerged as the face of homelessness in Atlanta. Gerald Griggs, vice president of the Georgia NAACP stated, “Every night, 2,000 Atlantans sleep under the bridges. They are going unaddressed and unheard and this situation addresses a massive problem,” (CookStaff, 2017, p.1). While this article does contain relevant information that pertains to the subject of homelessness, it does not necessarily have a specific direction in terms of government or societal responsibility. Due to this, we are using this article as an example of a “balanced or neutral” direction.
Another example of balanced or neutral responsibility for homelessness is from “Upping fight for homeless vets; USAA giving $2.1M to assure ex-military have places to live” in the *San Antonio Express-News*. This article leans towards the balanced/neutral side of the spectrum due to the fact that both government and society responsibility are equally represented. USAA and the mayor of San Antonio, Ivy Taylor, are working together to dismiss homelessness as quickly as possible, “Since joining the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, more than 800 homeless vets in San Antonio have moved or are in the process of moving into permanent housing,” (Fletcher, 2016, p.1). Since this type of aid for the homeless is a collaborative effort from both USAA (a financial services company) and the local government, it is unclear the direction of the article. Thus, the article has been coded for balanced or neutral direction.

A total of 156 of the 313 articles collected were read by two coders, resulting in a Scott’s Pi coefficient of inter-coder reliability of 0.897.

**Calculating a Media Vector**

Examining 21 newspapers from cities across the country, a “Media Vector” was calculated using the Janis-Fadner Coefficient of Imbalance. Each newspaper’s article prominence was combined with its directional scores into a single composite measure of article “projection” onto audiences (Pollock, 2007, p. 49). Scores lie on a spectrum from -1.00 to +1.00. A score between 0 and +1.00 reflected coverage that emphasized government responsibility for homelessness. A score between 0 and -1.00 represented coverage that emphasized societal responsibility. Table 2 is a depiction of this Media Vector formula.
Table 2: Media Vector Formula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formula</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>g = sum of the prominence scores coded “government responsibility”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s = sum of the prominence scores coded “societal responsibility”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = sum of the prominence scores coded “balanced/neutral”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r = g + s + n</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If \( g > s \) (the sum of the government prominence scores is greater than the sum of the societal prominence scores), the following formula is used:

**Government Media Vector:**
\[
GMV = \frac{(g^2 - gs)}{r^2} \quad \text{(Answer lies between 0 and +1.00)}
\]

If \( g < s \) (the sum of the societal prominence scores is greater than the sum of the government scores), the following formula is used:

**Societal Media Vector:**
\[
SMV = \frac{(gs - s^2)}{r^2} \quad \text{(Answer lies between 0 and -1.00)}
\]

* Media Vector copyright John C. Pollock, 2000–2018

**Procedures**

When examining the relationship between Media Vectors and demographics, Pearson correlations and regression analysis were useful. Pearson correlations identified city population demographics that had the strongest relationships with Media Vectors, while regression analysis
compared the importance of each independent variable’s relative strength. These two analytical methods were utilized to determine relationships between city population demographics and newspaper coverage emphasizing government or societal responsibility regarding homelessness.

**Results**

This study examined newspaper coverage of homelessness, comparing Media Vectors from 21 major metropolitan newspapers within a sample period of January 10, 2013 to February 24, 2018. The highest Media Vector calculated was San Francisco, California with +.6001, while the lowest Media Vector was Charlotte, North Carolina with -.3806, for a range of .9807 with 12 of 21 newspapers (57 percent) emphasizing government responsibility for the homelessness crisis. A complete list of Media Vector scores can be found, listed from positive to negative in table 3.

Media Vector scores per newspaper region were averaged and rank-ordered from highest to lowest. The results presented in table 4, emphasize government responsibility for homelessness. The West (+.4081) had the highest regional Media Vector score emphasizing governmental responsibility for homelessness, with the four highest Media Vectors belonging to western newspapers. This could possibly be attributed to the idea of residents from further eastern parts of the country traveling west to look for opportunity, like as in the Gold Rush of the 19th century, but ending up in poverty upon reaching the West Coast. The South (-.0022) had the second highest Media Vector and was very close to zero or “balanced/neutral” coverage, though this region leaned slightly towards societal responsibility for homelessness and is home to the
Charlotte Observer, which had the lowest Media Vector of any newspaper. Strikingly, the Northeast (-.0265) had the second lowest Media Vector, but was also close to zero or “balanced/neutral” reporting, and the Midwest (-.1053) had the lowest. The only region in support of government responsibility for homelessness was the West.

SPSS was used to calculate Pearson Correlations; therefore, find connections between city characteristics and variations in newspaper coverage. The results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 3: Media Vector Scores**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Media Vector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td><em>The San Francisco Chronicle</em></td>
<td>.6001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td><em>The Seattle Post-Intelligencer</em></td>
<td>.5609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td><em>The Denver Post</em></td>
<td>.5006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td><em>The Oregonian</em></td>
<td>.2958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td><em>The Houston Chronicle</em></td>
<td>.2614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orlando, FL</td>
<td><em>The Orlando Sentinel</em></td>
<td>.2204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford, CT</td>
<td><em>The Hartford Courant</em></td>
<td>.2069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
<td><em>The Times-Picayune</em></td>
<td>.1548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td><em>The San Diego Union-Tribune</em></td>
<td>.0832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis, MN</td>
<td><em>The Star Tribune</em></td>
<td>.0617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
<td><em>The Express-News</em></td>
<td>.0384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td><em>The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette</em></td>
<td>.0197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo, NY</td>
<td><em>The Buffalo News</em></td>
<td>-.0341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td><em>The Atlanta Journal-Constitution</em></td>
<td>-.0362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Media Vector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>.4801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>-.0022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>-.0265</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>-.1053</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Media Vector Scores Regional Averages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City Characteristic</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>0.637</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Income</td>
<td>0.629</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital Beds</td>
<td>-0.627</td>
<td>.001**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 25-44</td>
<td>0.601</td>
<td>.002**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td>-0.581</td>
<td>.002**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6: Pearson Correlations**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18-24</td>
<td>-0.581</td>
<td>.003**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.531</td>
<td>.007**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainline Protestant</td>
<td>-0.518</td>
<td>.008**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female College</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>.014*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Status</td>
<td>0.482</td>
<td>.013*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-0.446</td>
<td>.021*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>-0.428</td>
<td>.027*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Head of Household</td>
<td>-0.425</td>
<td>.027*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>-0.418</td>
<td>.030*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Workforce</td>
<td>-0.381</td>
<td>.044*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0.371</td>
<td>.049*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>-0.363</td>
<td>.053*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physicians</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting Republican</td>
<td>-0.316</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting Democratic</td>
<td>0.285</td>
<td>.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicide</td>
<td>-0.279</td>
<td>.117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crimes</td>
<td>-0.190</td>
<td>.204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families w/ Children 6-12</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>.235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families w/ Children 13-17</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td>.302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninsured</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td>.312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Rate</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>.314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 65 and over</td>
<td>-0.101</td>
<td>.332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families w/ Children Under 6</td>
<td>-0.065</td>
<td>.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 45 to 64</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>.411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>.493</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Significant Findings

Buffer Hypotheses:

The greater the percentage of families making $100,000 per year or more in a metropolitan area (confirmed). It was hypothesized that the more families with incomes of $100,000 annually or higher in a city, the more media coverage would emphasize government responsibility for addressing homelessness ($r=\.637, p=.001$). Despite being at the opposite ends of the economic spectrum, the wealthiest citizens are associated with wanting their government to assist people experiencing poverty who are homeless. This hypothesis, which falls under the Buffer Hypotheses, was confirmed.

The greater the number of hospital beds per 100,000 people in a metropolitan area (disconfirmed). It was hypothesized that if a metropolitan area had more hospital beds to serve its residents, there would be more media coverage in support of government responsibility for addressing homelessness. However, this hypothesis, which is one of the buffer hypotheses, was disconfirmed and was the third most significant finding ($r=\.627, p=.001$). Of all of the city characteristics associated with favoring societal support for addressing homelessness in a region, the number of hospital beds was the most significant finding. This can likely be attributed to the fact that hospitals tend to be operated by non-profit organizations and companies, not the government, and individuals experiencing homelessness frequently turn to hospital emergency
rooms for shelter and care. In these cases, society is becoming involved in addressing the homelessness crisis, not the government.

The greater the percent of college educated people in a region (confirmed). We hypothesized that the greater the percent of a population graduating from a college or university, the more newspaper coverage would emphasize government responsibility for homelessness. This buffer hypothesis was confirmed ($r=.531, p=.007$). College education is a measure of privilege, and this finding confirms the Community Structure Theory that more privileged groups can actually empathize with those who are less fortunate, unlike the Guard Dog hypothesis.

The greater the percent of people with with professional/technical occupational status in a region (confirmed). It was hypothesized that regions with a higher proportion of residents with professional or technical occupational status would be associated with coverage favoring government responsibility for addressing homelessness. Expectedly, this hypothesis ended up being confirmed in the research ($r=.482, p=.013$)

Vulnerability Hypotheses:

The greater the percentage of single parent households (disconfirmed). We hypothesized that cities with a higher percentage of households led by single parents would be associated with more media coverage emphasizing government responsibility for addressing homelessness. However, this hypothesis, which falls under the vulnerability hypotheses, ended up being disconfirmed ($r=-0.581, p=.002$).
The greater the percentage of people who are unemployed (disconfirmed). It was suggested that since most people experiencing homelessness are currently unemployed, higher percentages of people lacking employment would be associated with more media coverage in support of government responsibility addressing homelessness. This hypothesis, however, was disconfirmed significantly, since more unemployed people were associated with coverage favoring societal responsibility for homelessness \((r = -0.428, p = 0.027)\). Like in similar research, it could be the case that there is a fear of increased competition in the job market or for benefits.

The greater the percentage of female headed households (disconfirmed). It was hypothesized that the greater the percentage of female headed households, the more media coverage emphasizes government responsibility for addressing homelessness. However, the research showed that this was not the case, causing the hypothesis to be disproved \((r = -0.425, p = 0.027)\). Higher numbers of female headed households were actually associated with societal responsibility for homelessness.

The greater the percentage of people living below the poverty line (disconfirmed). While it was expected that more people in a region who are themselves below the poverty line would be associated with media coverage that emphasizes government responsibility in addressing the similar issue of homelessness, this vulnerability hypothesis was disproved \((r = -0.418, p = 0.030)\). In fact, it was found that areas with more people below the poverty line had more coverage favoring societal responsibility for addressing the crisis. This unique finding came as a surprise to the researchers. It is possible that people who are impoverished but not
experiencing homelessness would like the government to focus more resources on them through assistance programs and do not want to risk losing such funding to people lacking housing.

**Stakeholder Hypotheses:**

**Ethnic Identity**

**The greater the percentage of foreign born residents of a metropolitan area** (confirmed). It was hypothesized that the greater the percentage of foreign born individuals living in the metropolitan area, the more support for government responsibility for addressing homelessness. This hypothesis, which is within the stakeholder hypotheses, was confirmed and was the most significant finding of the study ($r=.637, p=.001$).

**The greater the percentage of African-American residents of a metropolitan area** (disconfirmed). It was hypothesized that a higher percentage of African-American residents would be associated with more emphasis towards government responsibility for addressing homelessness. However, this hypothesis was unexpectedly disconfirmed ($r=-.446, p=.021$), even though African-Americans disproportionately experience homelessness. It can be speculated that a lack of trust in the government in addressing other crises could be associated with a lack of desire for the government to take responsibility for addressing homelessness.

**The greater the percentage of Hispanic residents of a metropolitan area** (confirmed). Like with African-Americans, it was hypothesized that regions with higher populations of Hispanic residents would be associated with more media coverage favoring
government responsibility for homelessness. Yet unlike African Americans, this ethnic identity hypothesis ended up being confirmed ($r=.371, \ p=.049$).

**Generation**

The greater the percentage of 25-44 year olds in a metropolitan area (confirmed). It was hypothesized that more people between the ages of 25 and 44 would be associated with media coverage favoring government responsibility for homelessness. This stakeholder hypothesis was confirmed ($r=.601, \ p=.002$).

The greater the percentage of 18-24 year olds in a metropolitan area (disconfirmed). It was hypothesized that more people between the ages of 18 and 24 would be associated with media coverage favoring government responsibility for homelessness. This stakeholder hypothesis was disconfirmed ($r=-.581, \ p=.003$). People in this age are often looking for employment and educational opportunities and might not want their payment being used to assist others who could possibly compete with them for careers.

**Belief System:**

The greater the percentage of Mainline Protestants in a region (disconfirmed). It was expected that a higher percentage of Mainline Protestants in a region would be associated with more coverage that favored government responsibility for addressing homelessness, since Mainline Protestants along with Catholics tend to be associated with more liberal/pro-government perspectives, while Evangelicals and Devotional Readers tend to support less government involvement. However, our hypothesis was disconfirmed, and it was found that
Mainline Protestants were associated with coverage favoring societal responsibility for addressing the homelessness crisis ($r=-.518$, $p=008$).

**Female Empowerment:**

The greater the percentage of college educated women in a region (confirmed). It was hypothesized that metropolitan areas with higher percentages of college educated women would be associated with more news coverage favoring government responsibility for homelessness. This measure of female empowerment was confirmed in our research, since the more the education rate among women in regions, the higher the media vector scores in the newspapers studied ($r=.489$, $p=.014$).

The greater the percentage of females in the workforce (disconfirmed). It was also hypothesized that higher numbers of females employed in the workforce would be associated with more media coverage favoring government, not society, as the stakeholder responsible to addressing homelessness. However, unlike the previous hypothesis, this measure of female empowerment was disconfirmed in our research, since regions with more working women correlated with coverage favoring societal responsibility for taking care of people experiencing homelessness ($r=-.381$, $p=.044$).

**Table 4: Regression Analysis:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>$R^2$ Cumulative</th>
<th>$R^2$ Change</th>
<th>F Change</th>
<th>Significant F Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospital Beds</td>
<td>.659</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>13.803</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

From Philadelphia to Pittsburgh and San Antonio to San Diego, homelessness continues to remain a crisis across the United States of America. The issue continues to be regularly covered in newspapers in metropolitan areas. However, the way in which the crisis that impacts at least hundreds of thousands of Americans on a daily basis is portrayed in the media varies greatly depending on the characteristics of each metropolitan area. Our research from 21 major metropolitan newspapers over a five-year period resulted in a number of significant findings, many of which were contrary to our initial hypotheses.
The Pearson correlations produced 17 significant variables, eight of which are considered to be very significant. However, a regression analysis found that some of these factors were more significant than others, specifically the number of hospital beds, which is a buffer hypothesis, the percentage of 18-24 years olds, which is a generation stakeholder hypothesis, the percentage of Mainline Protestants, which is a belief system stakeholder hypothesis, the percentage of foreign born residents, which is an ethnic identity stakeholder hypothesis, and the percentage of single parent households, which is a vulnerability hypothesis.

This shows that the issue of government versus societal responsibility for homelessness is an issue that affects a wide variety of groups, including many that are unexpected. It is striking, for instance, that higher percentages of Mainline Protestants in a region are associated with support for societal responsibility for addressing homelessness, since Mainline Protestant views are traditionally associated with progressive positions like same sex marriage (Pollock & Vales, et al., 2014, 2015) and detainee rights at Guantanamo Bay (Pollock & Zinck, et al., 2014, 2015).

However, while more progressive and left-leaning groups tend to want more government involvement, and our research found that Democrats lean towards government responsibility while Republicans lean towards societal responsibility for homelessness, political identity was not found to be anywhere near as significant as some of the other factors.

One of these factors that proved to be unexpectedly significant in favoring societal responsibility for addressing homelessness was the number of hospital beds per 100,000 residents in a region. Our hypothesis was disconfirmed in this case. Although we were not expecting this result, the correlation between hospital beds and societal support for addressing
homelessness is actually logical. With the exception of mental hospitals and hospitals operated by the Veterans Administration, healthcare in the United States is almost always in the hands of non-profit organizations or, increasingly, for-profit hospital holding companies. More hospital beds in a region shows that these non-government organizations have a greater presence in a region. Thus, residents and newspapers are more inclined to believe that these non-government organizations would be equipped to address homelessness.

In addition to the regression analysis, another noteworthy finding in this research is how newspapers in different regions of the United States covered the same issue of homelessness differently. The cities with the four highest Media Vectors, San Francisco (.6001), Seattle (.5609), Denver (.5006), and Portland (.2958) are all in the West. Although the Media Vector for our final Western city, San Diego (.0832) was not as high, the media coverage of all five Western cities studied was in favor of government responsibility for addressing homelessness. There was quite a variety in coverage among Southern newspapers, with Houston (.2614) being the fifth highest Media Vector and Charlotte (-.3806) being the most in favor of societal responsibility for addressing homelessness, which is why the South’s regional average (-.0022) was close to Balanced/Neutral. It was also striking that the Northeast, which is traditionally viewed as a more progressive part of the United States, leaned (-.0265) slightly towards societal responsibility though it was not unexpected that the Midwest (-.1053) would have the lowest Media Vector.

We believe that it would be beneficial to conduct a cross-national study of how homelessness is portrayed in newspapers in order to learn more about how this crisis is covered
differently across the globe. Especially considering how much variation in coverage there is across the United States, it would be quite impactful to know which countries have media coverage that tends to place more of an emphasis on government responsibility for addressing homelessness versus those that favor societal responsibility. Just like in our research, it is vital that this information be compared to the demographics of each countries in order to make comparisons between nations.
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