

CONFLICT AND THE CITY: HOW NEWSPAPERS DEAL WITH LOCAL
POLITICAL CONFLICT

Adam Sander Chamberlain

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of masters in the Department of Political Science.

Chapel Hill
2007

Approved By:

Thomas Carsey
Virginia Gray
Michael MacKuen

Abstract

ADAM SANDER CHAMBERLAIN: Conflict and the City: How Newspapers Deal
With Local Political Conflict
(Under the direction of Thomas Carsey)

While the study of the media and politics has become important to the discipline, little is known about how local political issues are depicted by newspapers. Building a theory derived from the communications and political science literature, the political and demographic environment of a city should shape the reporting of local political conflict in newspapers. Using an original data set, the results empirically confirm some aspects of the existing literature while offering new insights into the exact mechanisms behind the reporting of local political conflict.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| LIST OF TABLES..... | iv |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | v |
| Thesis | |
| I. Introduction..... | 1 |
| II. Theory..... | 3 |
| III. Dependent Variable..... | 9 |
| IV. Independent Variables..... | 12 |
| V. Hypotheses and Model..... | 15 |
| VI. Results and Discussion..... | 18 |
| VII. Conclusions..... | 24 |
| APPENDIX A: TABLES AND FIGURES..... | 27 |
| APPENDIX B: SUMMARY STATISTICS FOR CASES IN MODEL..... | 33 |
| REFERENCES..... | 35 |

LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Number of Articles by Newspaper Used in Analysis
2. The Impact of Environmental Factors on Conflict, for each Level of Conflict
3. Predicted Probabilities for Population and Percent White on Reported Conflict at Category 1 Level (Baseline Category = 0)
4. Predicted Probabilities for the Interaction between 2004 Kerry Vote and Percent White on Reported Conflict at Category 3 Level (Baseline Category=0), Individualistic Political Culture
5. Predicted Probabilities for the Interaction between 2004 Kerry Vote and Percent White on Reported Conflict at Category 3 Level (Baseline Category=0), Moralistic Political Culture

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. Number of Article by Conflict Category

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A general look into the world of newspapers would reveal that variety is quite large. National circulation dailies (NY Times, USA Today) to daily papers from major urban areas are usually those most noted. As well, small cities and towns can have daily papers, and many rural areas rely on weekly papers to disseminate information. These sources can be valuable; the local media serves as the “central integrative function” of a local community, facilitating the spread of information among various individuals, groups, and institutions (Viswanath et.al. 2000; Friedland and McLeod 1999).

This study seeks to investigate such local media by posing the question: what environmental factors about individual cities impact the reporting of local political conflict? That is, what characteristics increase the prevalence of conflict in a newspaper article about local politics?

This is certainly an area in the media literature that demands attention. There has been some research specifically about *small-town* papers and how they serve to protect local elite interests and the local power structure (Coser 1956; Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien 1980; Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien 1995; Olien, Donohue, and Tichenor 1968), but not much is known about *local* newspaper reporting in *urban* areas, let alone the coverage of politics and policy. This is troubling from a normative standpoint since local politics plays such an integral part in the lives of everyday Americans, dealing with

issues as varied as garbage collection, economic development, education, and public artwork. Since the newspaper is a prime source of information on such topics, it seems natural to investigate the nature of such reporting. Conflict is a good standard for this investigation, as it permits the researcher to evaluate how much debate surrounds political events, which should generate interest in the populace and fuel deliberation and civic interest (see Wyatt et.al. 2000 for a detailed discussion of this topic).

What is more disconcerting is that the political science literature is silent on this topic- state and local scholars, as well as media scholars, have not adequately addressed the topic and therefore do not have a clear understanding of newspaper coverage pertaining to local politics. While the study of newspapers in relation to politics has been more focused at the national level, I argue that finding out how newspapers cover local politics is essential if the discipline wants a broader, more thorough conception of the media's role in politics. By beginning to investigate this neglected area, this study is of value to a variety of scholars that deal with political communication, state and local governance, policy, and (as will become clear later on) race.

Using a categorical measure of conflict as the dependent variable, the results show that certain environmental characteristics of a city (which include demographics) lead to the reporting of political conflict in newspaper articles. However, most of the predictors fall short of statistical significance. Furthermore, the predictors that are significant vary across the levels of conflict. Additionally, results show that there is no systematic underreporting of local conflict in the news based on a paper's ideology and ownership.

CHAPTER 2

Theory

The media literature is quite clear on the reliance of journalists on politicians, or what Cook (1998) labels the “gravitation toward officialdom” (for arguments of media ties to officials see: Gans 1979; Patterson 1980; Cohen 1963; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Wolfsfeld 1991; Coyne 1972; Dye 1986; Novak 1974).¹ This means that, in pursuit of political coverage, journalists need to rely on politicians and other key political actors for their information. So, if environmental factors are an influence on local political conflict being reported in newspapers, it is likely that political actors, being a part of the conflict and the environment in question, transmit this conflict to journalists either directly (as in, through conversations) or indirectly (as in, a reporter sitting in at a local council meeting).

In other words, the environment of a city has specific characteristics that create more or less political conflict. For example, Birmingham, Alabama, is an environment that is distinct from the environment of Brattleboro, Vermont. There are numerous demographic differences between the cities, leading to differing propensities for political conflict; to assume that political conflict does not vary between cities would be incorrect.

Since it is the job of reporters to deal with government officials, concerned citizens, and other political actors, they expose themselves to political conflict. In turn,

¹Thanks to Donohue et.al. (1995) for providing a thorough synthesis of this literature, and the requisite citations.

the conflict will find its way into news articles about local political issues when the journalists write their articles. The environmental factors that affect the conflict generated by a city will influence the reporting of political conflict, and conflict varies from city-to-city. Thus, my argument is that certain characteristics of cities have a systematic effect on the reporting of political conflict in local newspapers.

Scholars still know little about the specific environmental factors that play a role in reporting political conflict in the media, and this is why I focus this paper on the local-level. National-level media studies are problematic in that, while their impact might vary by geographic area or demographics, the reporting is rather consistent due to wire-service stories. We learn nothing about how the demographics of an area impact reporting, and this should be important, as the reporters will reflect the conflict generated by the influence of particular factors.

In deciding what factors are important, the first key should be population size of the city that the paper originates from. Donohue et. al. (1974) note the popular notion, from systems-conflict theory, that the smaller the population the paper comes from, the more consensus-building it should be. That is, the editors and journalists will not try to shake up the system; reporting the facts and supporting the community are their goals. Conflict will be at a minimum.

In contrast, Miller et.al. (1979) found that rural papers were more critical of the federal government than urban papers. Though he notes that “the topic areas [federal government issues] do not reflect specifically on small towns,” he cannot account for why this criticism occurs. In other words, if systems-conflict theory was correct, why would the journalists become critical of the federal level?

There are several reasons why both these findings might hold in the political realm. For local issues, consensus-building will be easier as the size of the community the paper serves decreases, all else equal. Conflict (for a definitional debate, see Snyder and Kelly 1977)² should increase with a larger number of possible political actors and, therefore, a larger sphere of political activities. Federal issues are reported differently, often times through wire service reports. Miller's findings should not be found when using local issues, even when the sample used ranges between small cities and large metropolises, as I do in this paper.

This is not to say that there is not significant overlap in the services provided by all communities. However, the police department in a city of 2,000,000 residents will have more points of potential conflict than a city of 40,000: more employees and a larger budget, more politically-active citizens and so on. Thus, conflict in reporting on local news topics should increase as the population increases, in line with Donohue et.al.'s (1974) belief.

The predominant political culture of a city should have relevance. Political culture is used to describe the political norms of behavior in an area, and certain cultures should be more conflict-oriented, which in turn should appear as conflict in newspaper articles. A good measure of this is Elazar's model of political cultures (Elazar 1970). Moralistic areas³ should exhibit higher levels of conflict than individualistic and traditionalistic areas due to the moralistic culture's emphasis on open, public participation. This should be reflected in the conflict reporters mention in their articles.

²Though it will be introduced later, conflict, in this paper, refers to the positions presented in a news article and the amount of debate associated with these positions.

³Area refers to the fact that a state can have multiple cultures- and a city resides in one of these specific areas.

To date, political culture has not been evaluated in the context of the media. The closest approximation is that of region, which an earlier political media study used when dealing with South/non-South reporting of racial conflict (Danzger, 1975).

The homogeneity of the community and recent swings in population could affect the reporting of conflict. According to media research, conflict reporting is more frequent among heterogeneous societies (e.g., Olien, Donohue, and Tichenor 1968; Donohue, Tichenor, and Olien 1995). Communities with very large minority groups have competing group interests, and this diversity leads to conflict. However, there are studies on conflict and consensus in diverse situations that prove otherwise. Whites in heterogeneous neighborhoods have been found to move closer to Blacks on certain policy issues than whites in homogenous neighborhoods (Gilliam Jr. et.al. 2002), and contact between members of different racial groups, which is more likely to occur in diverse cities, can help to reduce negative stereotyping (Crocker, Fiske, and Taylor 1984). This, in turn, should lead to a greater understanding over a range of policy issues so that the more homogenous cities should have more newspaper articles containing conflict.

Extreme growth or decline in the population can impact how the community feels and the number of issues that need to be confronted. Local officials are “driven by the need to foster local growth, [and] operate from a position of relative powerlessness as they compete for private investment and negotiate development policy” (Goetz, 1994). When undergoing extreme growth, city officials, businesses, and community groups will be concerned about what is developed and where, leading to conflict. When there is an extreme population downturn, conflict should occur over what resources the city has at its disposal; that is, who will receive what funding remains? What will be cut from the

budget? Thus, I theorize that large changes in population should increase the reporting of conflict.

All the aspects mentioned above can be summarized as broad environmental factors that help to generate conflict in a city. Each functions as an influence on political actors and the journalists who report the conflict. This theory moves beyond what exists in the literature on local newspaper coverage of politics by combining multiple factors into a socio-political environment that has a strong and relevant impact on the reporting of conflict.

However, it can be argued that the above theory taps the levels of actual conflict in the environment that exist while neglecting how much conflict is reported. To prevent this possibility, certain variables related to the paper itself need to be considered, as well as some measure of the public's possible preference for conflict.

Three such variables are newspapers' partisan leanings, their ownership, and the current ideology of the public. Much has been written about the partisanship of papers and how their ownership can impact reporting (see Page 1996 for a general overview; Gilens and Hertzman 2000; Wackman et. al. 1975). It is theoretically plausible that independently-owned newspapers, with ties to the local community, will apply less pressure on their reporters to make "news that sells" than would a "chain-owned" newspaper, whose interests could be more profit-motivated. I assume that conflict would sell newspapers.

I also assume that paper partisanship might have an impact. Republican-leaning papers, being less prevalent than those with a more Democratic lean, might take it upon themselves to report more (or less) conflict. To my knowledge, there is no literature on

national-level partisanship of a newspaper impacting local reporting. Still, it seems logical that Republican papers, being a minority nationwide, might report stories in a manner that is not entirely consistent with the practices used by Democratic news outlets. The inconsistencies could cause political conflict to be under-reported or over-reported.

In the public, ideological conditions could impact how much conflict is found in local reporting. My argument is that, with a belief in more expanded government activities, liberal cities will be more concerned with how local government operates, thus creating more conflict than would be found in conservative cities. This is not to say that conservatives do not take an interest in local political functions; that statement would be false. Instead, the point that is being made here is that liberal areas might foster a greater sense of local political involvement and, along with this, an ability to stand up to perceived governmental problems (both can generate conflict).⁴

Finally, the officials themselves are politically motivated by ideological and career concerns (see Mayhew 1974 for a classic example of such motivations). However, at this time, there is no simple way of studying systematically how this impacts the relationship between journalist and politician at the local level and how this leads to either more or less conflict in reporting. Are politicians refusing to “go public” when conflict occurs between officials? Are they not informing journalists about confrontations with citizens over policy? These questions cannot be answered in this study, but it would seem high unlikely that there are systematic processes that lead to politicians trying to control conflict.

⁴It has been pointed out that the relationship could go in the opposite direction. Republicans, who tend to be more favorable toward local government than they are toward the federal government, might actually be more involved, and more interested, in local politics, thus generating conflict at higher levels than Democrats. Still, I believe that Democrats, being more government oriented in general, will generate more political conflict.

CHAPTER 3

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable used in this study (the level of conflict in an article) was constructed using Lexis-Nexis and the newspapers that they made available. The time used in this project was March 1st-14th, 2006. The reasons this time period was chosen were: a.) it avoided major election cycles, b.) it avoided major holidays, so c.) there was coverage of local political issues. Without issues, there would not be any basis for comparison and no substantive results of interest. This was the only time period studied in the analysis.

The newspapers used were based on what was available on Lexis-Nexis (see Table 1 in Appendix A). Some papers on Lexis-Nexis, unfortunately, submit only six months out of their yearly coverage; thus, some papers could not be coded due to this data problem. As well, only one paper from each city was coded, and specialized newspapers, such as ethnic/religious sources, were not coded. Ownership, which was a dummy variable for either independent or non-independent newspaper, was found through the website for each paper, respectively.

The articles that were chosen for coding were all those within the given time period that discussed a matter that was politically-oriented and strictly applicable to the city from which the paper originated. Evidence in other areas of research has found that urban newspapers often cover suburban and rural areas through a different perceptual

lens (Salsini 1985; Frank 2003). Problems with state policy issues were not coded unless it was clear that the article was focused on the local implementation of that specific policy. The changing of top bureaucrats was not coded unless the article addressed policy in some manner (a three sentence article about how Police Chief X was stepping down due to health issues is an example of what was left out). Election coverage was not coded. Education issues were coded, as education is a crucial function of local governance in general, and some local governments (Berkman and Plutzer 2006). Additionally, editorials and letters to the editor were not included in the analysis, as this paper deals with specifically with conflict in *reporting* on local politics.

The dependent variable for all models is a four-category scale that measures the amount of conflict in each coded article. A summary example for each level is included in Appendix B, and the breakdown of the conflict categories is available as Figure 1 Appendix A for the full sample and in Appendix B as a summary statistic for the sample run in this analysis. A score of 0 was assigned to any article that mentioned local politics and policy, but gave either a.) resounding approval to a measure, b.) just mentioned that a certain policy was being looked at, considered, or implemented, or c.) had one side opposed to an issue, but the “other side” agreed that something needed to be done. A score of 1, which can be thought of as the low level of conflict, was assigned to articles that had conflict, but a minimal amount; at least two opposing viewpoints were presented, but there was a.) not much detail past the two viewpoints or b.) neither side felt the issue, even though they disagreed, was that pressing of a concern. A score of 2, or moderate conflict, was assigned to articles where the opposing viewpoints were being debated, and it was clear that both sides were firmly behind their position; also, each side gave distinct

reasons why their policy option was better than another. A score of 3, or high conflict, was given to those articles where language between the two sides (or multiple sides) was quite heated, tempers flared, and politicians, interest groups, and members of the community were taking action. The coding was carried out by the author, with additional help on a segment of the project by an additional coder. The additional coder's work was checked by the author, and out of the 58 articles coded, three were different than how the author would have coded.⁵

⁵These were altered to the author's scheme. The three were all one-level off; that is, they were differences between 1 and 2, or 0 and 1.

CHAPTER 4

Independent Variables

Population is the first main predictor. In line with Donohue et.al. (1974), the larger the population of a city, the greater the likelihood that an article will contain conflict. The population used was taken from the 2000 U.S. Census. Additionally, recent change in the population (also derived from the U.S. Census, change from 2000 to 2003) was added to the model to control for economic growth or decline. Cities whose populations are rising or declining rapidly should cause politicians to debate about how to best deal with the new influx (or exodus) of people. In turn, the journalists should become aware of this and report on these debates, leading to local political conflict in the newspaper.

Staying true to Elazar's model of political culture (1970), moralistic areas should exhibit higher levels of conflict than individualistic and traditionalistic areas due to that culture's emphasis on political participation (see Johnson 1976 for further research in this vein) However, this final distinction between individualistic and traditionalistic cultures is not clear. Individualistic societies can have low participation, much like traditionalistic societies, because of cynicism about the corruption of officials and the general feeling that government is more of a "business" left to particular elites. This type of situation would not generate as much conflict, and it would not show up in the articles. Earlier

analyses were not clear as to how individualistic cities should act. To gauge these, a series of dummy variables will be compared for the three cultures.⁶

Racial homogeneity of the city should increase reported conflict; people will be more willing to confront political differences and policy options when the other people in their group are similar to them. However, no city in the sample had such a large Black/Hispanic population as to constitute a clear Black/Hispanic majority. Therefore, homogeneity refers only to white homogeneity, or the percent white in the city proper in 2000 (US Census 2000).

While the above variables tap the overall level of conflict, other variables are needed to get at how much conflict is reported. That is, to see if aspects of the newspapers themselves impact reporting systematically. The best way to uncover this is through an ownership dummy variable (independent or corporate) and variables that code for the city's general political ideology/partisanship and the paper's political partisanship. As noted earlier, independent papers should report less conflict than corporate papers due to less economic pressure and closer ties to the city itself. The partisanship of a newspaper was coded based on their Presidential endorsement in 2004; it is possible that Republican and Democratic papers report in systematically different ways, and this should be controlled for. General political ideology was coded using, as a proxy, the overall vote percentage for John Kerry in the 2004 election in the county the city derived from.⁷ Areas that are more Democratic might take a greater interest in the local

⁶Only the results from the individualistic and moralistic dummy variables will be shown.

⁷There were a few exceptions. The data, derived from www.cnn.com, typically broke it down by county, and the size of county varies from state to state. Cities in multiple counties were averaged across the counties they resided in (so long as a significant portion of the city was in the county- the only exception being the removal of Cass County from the City of St. Louis). As well, several of the New England

government's civic activities, thus leading to conflict in reporting. Democrats tend to support an active government role; Republicans do not. This is not to say that Republicans do not want to foster a good civic culture, but areas that are more Republican might be less critical of their local government, focusing instead on private community initiatives. These would not be political issues, and would not generate political conflict.

Additionally, it is theoretically important to see if there is an interaction between homogeneity of the population and the vote percentage for John Kerry in the 2004 election. Why is this so? Cities that are predominantly Democratic should take a greater interest in civic culture and political participation than those that are more conservative. For homogeneity, my argument is that homogenous areas (white in this study) should generate more conflict than heterogeneous cities. This would gauge whether race and ideology matter together at an aggregate level. Black Democrats and white Democrats differ, and how both groups differ from Republicans is an interesting question. Since I project that homogenous cities and Democratic cities should increase conflict in reporting, an interaction between the two would show if it is the combination of being a white and liberal city that leads to conflict-based articles in newspapers. This interaction would be of interest to race and local politics scholars.

newspapers were based on township voting data. However, due to the localized nature, and often times small size/limited geographic range of these papers, that data was left as such and not converted to county-level data.

CHAPTER 5

Hypotheses and Model

In generating hypotheses, there are two concerns: the fact that there will be conflict, and then at what level (1-3). I have no clear expectations for how each level will react differently to the predictors. Thus, these hypotheses are general in that they specify only that more conflict is expected in an article; “more conflict” could be at any of the categories of conflict.

From the theory given above, the following hypotheses can be generated using the predictors that are of most interest:

H1: As the population of a city increases, the greater the likelihood that there will be conflict in an article.

H2: As the absolute change in population increases, the greater the likelihood that there will be conflict in an article.

H3: Articles derived from a newspaper in a moralistic political culture should exhibit more conflict than those from an individualistic (and traditionalistic) political culture.

H4: As the percentage of the population that is white increases, the greater the likelihood that there will be conflict in an article.

Alternate H4: As the percentage of the population that is white decreases, the greater the likelihood that there will be conflict in an article.

H5: As the percentage vote for Kerry in 2004 increases, the greater the likelihood that there will be conflict in an article.

H6: Articles from newspapers that are independently operated should have less conflict than articles from newspapers that are owned by major corporations.

For the interaction effect between the percentage of the city that is white and the vote for Kerry in 2004, the prediction depends on whether H4 or Alternate H4 is correct. If H4 holds, then the expected direction of the interaction is positive. As noted earlier, there are no clear expectations for the direction of the relationship between a newspaper's political ideology variable and the amount of conflict in an article. The only real control variable added in this study was a dummy for whether a newspaper was from a state capital, as those papers could carry over conflict from the state level to local politics, or give local politics short shrift in coverage while dealing mainly with state issues (thus underreporting local conflict).

To test these hypotheses accurately, multinomial logistic regression is used. The standard errors are clustered around each newspaper (or city, which is the same in this

analysis) due to the fact that the cases should not be considered independent within the papers.⁸

⁸The model was originally run, in two versions, as an ordered logit- one with the interaction term, and one without. Two Brant tests were then run, one for each model. They showed that the parallel regression assumption was violated for two of the key predictors in the model without the interaction (population and percent Kerry vote in 2004), but that the parallel regression assumption was not violated when the interaction term was in the model. Due to these findings, and the fact that multinomial logit has fewer restrictions on the data, a multinomial logit model seemed particularly relevant.

CHAPTER 6

Results and Discussion

Table 2 in Appendix A shows⁹ the results of the multinomial logit regression with the columns representing the levels of conflict and Category 0 as the baseline for the analysis. The first predictor that came up as significant at the Category 1 level of low conflict was population ($p=.001$). Since the Category 1 level of conflict contained the most cases of conflict, this seems to empirically confirm Donohue et.al.'s (1974) findings: Newspapers in larger cities tend to report more political conflict. Thus, Hypothesis 1 seems to be supported, at the Category 1 level of conflict, in this analysis.

The percent white in the population was also significant at the Category 1 level of conflict ($p=.017$). This lends support to my theory that cities with higher white populations (i.e., more homogenous) are more likely to report conflict. As noted in the theory, whites living in heterogeneous neighborhoods move their policy stances closer to those of minorities in the community, which should reduce conflict. This is in opposition to earlier findings by Donohue et.al. (1995). Still, the exact mechanism behind the increases in conflict in the white, homogenous communities is not clear. For one, it could be that a predominantly white population feels less restricted in dealing with governmental matters, and this is reflected in the reporting. It could also be that whites

⁹A variety of models were run where the conflict categories were collapsed altogether (1-3) and where 2 was either lumped in as a 1 or 3. None of these models performed as well as the one reported, and the reported model provides clearer meaning. Either way, Category 2 articles appear to be statistically different; adding them to any other category washes away the significance of the predictors that did matter.

are more interested in their communities when the population is homogenous and people feel closer to one another.¹⁰ Of course, this is just speculation; to truly get to the heart of this matter, much more research is necessary on how homogenous cities deal with civic issues compared to heterogeneous ones. Either way, Hypothesis 4 is supported at the Category 1 level of conflict.

Since logit results cannot be easily interpreted beyond significance and direction, predicted probabilities were utilized using Gary King's CLARIFY program (King et.al. 2000). Table 3 in Appendix A shows the results for conflict Category 1 when: a.) population is manipulated, b.) percent white in the population is manipulated, c.) both are manipulated at the same time at their minimum and maximum values. The probability that an article will contain conflict at Category 1 when population goes from its minimum value to its maximum value increases by 34 percentage points, all other variables held at their means or medians. The probability that an article will contain conflict at Category 1 when the percent white goes from its minimum value to its maximum value increases by 11 percentage points, all other variables held to their means or medians as well. When both are manipulated simultaneously, the probability of conflict at Category 1 in an article increases by 39 percentage points. As well, the vast majority of this change is in the decreased probability of the article having no conflict.

As for the Category 2 level of moderate conflict, the only predictor that is significant is that of an individualistic political culture, which goes against H4. The moralistic dummy variable, while appropriately signed at Category 2, was not significant. While I had sided theoretically with a moralistic culture being more conflict-oriented, it is

¹⁰There are not enough cities with decidedly large Black majorities in the sample to test the theory that it also works when whites are absent. The lowest obtained was 24.1% white; the most white cities all ranked above 90%, and a few above 95%.

not surprising that the individualistic dummy was significant. This culture can exhibit conflict, since it is based on a viewpoint of politics as a business (Elazar 1970). This may help explain why it predicted the Category 2 level on conflict: articles had to have two or more sides to an issue with a “give-and-take” debate. If politics is a business, you need to sell yourself against the competition- merely stating your case (Category 1) is not good enough and generating too much conflict is probably not the best case scenario if you want to “make a sale” (Category 3). Predicted probabilities confirm this: going from a baseline of no political culture to an individualistic political culture increases the probability of an article being in Category 2 from 10.3 percentage points to 20.1 percentage points.¹¹

At the Category 3 level of high conflict, the deciding factor was an interaction between percent white in the population and the vote for Kerry, in that area, in 2004 ($p=.009$). The direction of the interaction is of interest, as it appears that the more homogenous the area, and the higher the percentage vote for Kerry, the more likely one is to find a newspaper article of high conflict. This confirms expectations about the nature of the interaction. That is, white Democrats in more homogenous areas are generating more conflict than their white Republican brethren in more homogenous areas. Ideologically, white Republicans in these homogenous environments are less interested in building a strong civic culture through governmental means. Thus, expectations about the interaction term, at the Category 3 level of conflict, appear to be confirmed.

However, the significance level of an interaction term in a logit model does not tell us much about the true relationship between the two variables. Is percent white

¹¹When traditionalistic replaces the individualistic culture, traditionalistic is significant and in the negative direction at Category 2, which is in line with my theoretical expectations.

driving the results, or is percent of the Kerry vote in 2004, or are both working together? The predicted probabilities for the Category 3 level of high conflict are shown in Tables 4 and 5 for the interaction term between percent white and the percent of the Kerry vote for President in 2004. Since the hypothesis stated that mixed communities should see less conflict than homogenous communities, these two tables show the results from the mid-range of values at the 50th percentile (mixed communities) to the 100th percentile (most homogenous communities). Table 4 shows the results when set to an individualistic political culture (which was almost significant at $p=.112$) and Table 5 does the same for a moralistic political culture. Looking at the bold numbers in the diagonal, going from both variables at their minimum values to both at their maximum values, we see that the percentage points increase in both cases. As well, a more detailed inspection shows that it is the combination of the two that matters. Based on Tables 4 and 5, it appears that there is a real interactive effect (no one variable driving the results), and that this effect makes a significant difference in predicting when an article will go from Category 0 to Category 3 (no conflict to high conflict).

These results, as noted earlier, only describe what leads to the amount of conflict in the environment, not to the question of how much is reported. The factors that were hypothesized to effect reporting that pertained to the newspapers themselves, the ownership and paper partisanship variables, never came out as significant. As well, only one category of conflict was impacted by the 2004 Kerry vote (and that was through the interaction of that variable with percent white). It appears, then, that who owns

newspaper, and how it views itself ideologically, does not significantly impact the reporting of local political conflict.¹²

These findings reveal that the move from reporting no conflict to reporting the low category of conflict is heavily dependent on population and homogeneity of the populace. This is quite an important finding- it bridges the gap between no conflict whatsoever and the reporting of conflict in the category that contained the most examples of conflict reporting. From these findings, it appears that the environment plays an important role in predicting how much local political conflict finds its way into newspapers.

The move from no conflict to reporting the moderate level of conflict is predicated on a city having an individualistic political culture. The “politics as business” mentality of these cities is leading reporters to create articles that serve as marketplaces for various competing interests. Though I miscalculated how the political cultures would act, is it still clear that political culture mattered, as I hypothesized.

Additionally, the fact that the percent white in the population had some impact on both Category 1, and Category 3 via the interaction term with percent of the Kerry vote in 2004, brings forth a host of issues that this paper cannot address, especially for the high level of conflict. For instance, could it be that racially heterogeneous cities resolve their differences outside the public eye? Or could it be that politicians in these areas step cautiously when the media is around so as not to expose fissures in the community? In any case, future research is necessary in this area to discern why racially heterogeneous cities are generating less local political conflict than ones that are racially homogenous.

¹²Interestingly, there were no references that I recall to partisanship or ideology in the coverage of local politics. At least when reporting on actual issues, labels such as liberal and conservative did not come up.

As well, finding out why this creates conflict in cities with more Democrats needs to be investigated further.

Hypotheses 2, 3, 5, and 6 can be rejected. Recent change in population (absolute value), vote for Kerry in 2004, ownership of the newspaper, and paper partisanship did not significantly impact conflict reporting at any level. While the reasons for these results are not clear, it should be of interest to media scholars that reported conflict at the local level is not influenced by paper ownership and partisanship. These two variables, which have been proven predictors in other media studies, appear to be inappropriate at the local level, and more research into why this is so would be a valuable contribution to the existing literature.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions

The research conducted here asks: what environmental factors influence the reporting of conflict over local political issues in newspapers? After compiling and analyzing a unique data set, the results appear to vary over the different conflict categories, though most of the predictors fall short of statistical significance. Category 1 conflict was based on the population of the area and the percentage of the population that was white, Category 2 conflict was based on a dummy variable for an individualistic political culture, and Category 3 conflict was predicted to be more prevalent in overly homogenous (white), Democratic areas.

The argument that these variables are only discerning the amount of conflict, and not the reporting of conflict, seems to be unfounded due to several factors: the known reliance of journalists on important politicians/officials/activists¹³ and the fact that the variables of ownership, paper partisanship, and percent vote for Kerry in 2004 performed quite poorly in the model. Thus, systematic underreporting of the newspapers themselves, based on these specific characteristics, is not occurring. Furthermore, state-level factors play no apparent role in my analysis.

¹³If conflict was going unreported, it would mean that the newspaper was completely disregarding a major political player (and I argue that complete negligence in this area would not be tolerated by the readers who, in general, are more politically aware). Conflict occurs when there are two sides opposed to something- if people are opposed to an area, but it is not salient enough for them to rise up, then obviously, the issue would generate no conflict. Bias might be a problem in some cases, but bias would not stop a journalist from reporting the side they do not agree with- this is especially so since all the newspapers chosen in this analysis were major daily newspapers with reputable backgrounds.

Though these results are of interest, there are areas that need further study to get a full grasp of the local newspaper's relationship to political/policy issues and bureaucratic activities. First, the types of issues being discussed need to be studied. Since a large number of these articles were on developmental issues, it would be interesting to analyze these separately and study whether or not interest groups play a role (for interest groups and the possibility of capture, see Gray and Lowery 1988; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2000). Second, there might be state-level factors that dictate some of the reporting of conflict. For example, if a city is experiencing rapid decline while the entire state is growing in population and economic strength, this might exacerbate the amount of conflict as the city is perceived as an "outsider."¹⁴ Third, a longitudinal analysis of a select number of papers might be necessary to truly understand the reporting of local policy issues and the amount of conflict attached to each issue. Perhaps important articles go through a conflict-cycle, whereby they start out as being merely reported, over time generate conflict in the public and the media, but then slowly recede, leading to consensus. Environmental factors might dictate how high that conflict is allowed to go, and on what issues.

Additionally, the data set needs to be expanded. More dates should be coded beyond the two week period of this study, and the sample should expand into the Western and Southwestern states. Amending these problems will lend greater support to my findings.

Thus, the results give us an exploratory empirical look into the factors that can lead to local conflict reporting in newspapers. While most of the predictors fell short of

¹⁴Preliminary analysis of the impact of state-level factors on conflict in local reporting has not shown any significant results to date.

statistical significance, the results show that environmental factors do impact reporting. Still, the city's environment is only one group of factors that can affect reporting, but it is a crucial one. If the reporting of local political conflict was solely based on a set journalistic formula, none of the environmental factors would have been significant; if environment was the main player, then the variables all would have been significant. Such a clean picture is rare in the social sciences, and this research is no exception. However, this paper does begin to investigate an area that has been drastically overlooked by political scientists and adds to our knowledge of the media, local/state politics, public policy, and race

Appendix A: Tables and Figures

Table 1: Number of Articles by Newspaper Used in Analysis

| Paper | Number of Articles |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Boston Globe | 18 |
| Berkshire Eagle | 8 |
| Lowell Sun | 4 |
| NY Times | 32 |
| Bangor Daily News | 13 |
| Syracuse Post-Standard | 9 |
| Brattleboro Reformer | 2 |
| Manchester Union Leader | 16 |
| Albany Times-Union | 5 |
| Buffalo News | 13 |
| Portland Press-Herald | 3 |
| The Providence Journal | 15 |
| Pittsburgh Post-Gazette | 18 |
| Capital Times- Madison | 12 |
| St. Louis Post-Dispatch | 5 |
| Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel | 8 |
| Lincoln Journal-Star | 11 |
| Kansas City Star | 7 |
| Chicago Sun-Times | 17 |
| Intelligencer Journal- Lancaster | 6 |
| Sentinel and Enterprise- Fitchburg | 5 |
| Telegram and Gazer- Worcester | 17 |
| Columbus Dispatch | 11 |
| Dayton Daily News | 5 |
| Omaha World-Herald | 18 |
| The Pantagraph- Bloomington, Illinois | 2 |
| Minneapolis Star-Tribune | 12 |
| State Journal-Register Springfield) | 6 |
| Atlanta Journal-Constitution | 20 |
| Raleigh News and Observer | 16 |
| Augusta Chronicle | 9 |
| Birmingham News | 15 |
| Chattanooga Times Free Press | 15 |
| The Commercial Appeal- Memphis | 11 |
| Florida Times-Union - Jacksonville | 20 |
| The Herald- Rock Hill | 6 |
| Knoxville News-Sentinel | 7 |
| The Ledger- Lakeland | 9 |

| | |
|---|----|
| News & Record- Greensboro | 6 |
| Richmond Times Dispatch | 12 |
| The Roanoke Times | 5 |
| Sarasota Herald-Tribune | 3 |
| St. Petersburg Times | 4 |
| Star-News - Wilmington | 6 |
| The Virginian-Pilot - Norfolk | 7 |
| Arkansas Democrat-Gazette - Little Rock | 7 |

Table 2: The Impact of Environmental Factors on Conflict, for each Level of Conflict

| | Category 1 | Category 2 | Category 3 |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Population | .34 (.11)*** | -.03 (.13) | -.01 (.27) |
| Change in Population | .49 (3.77) | 5.93 (7.72) | 13.24 (11.24) |
| Percent White | 1.81 (.76)* | .11 (1.19) | .25 (2.52) |
| Ownership | -.20 (.22) | .14 (.40) | .51 (.81) |
| Paper Partisanship | .32 (.23) | .01 (.34) | .24 (.53) |
| 2004 Kerry % Vote | -.76 (1.39) | .32 (1.66) | 2.95 (3.60) |
| Kerry*White | 2.30 (6.06) | -.79 (8.48) | 26.47 (10.20)** |
| Individualistic Culture | -.24 (.27) | .87 (.49)^ | 1.28 (.81) |
| Moralistic Culture | -.26 (.31) | .51 (.63) | .40 (.97) |
| Pseudo R-Sq.= | .0362 | | |
| Wald Chi-Sq= | 174.14 | | |

N=476. Multinomial logit model with baseline category of 0 (no conflict). Category 1 is low conflict; Category 2 is moderate conflict; Category 3 is high conflict. Coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05; ^p<.10. Control variable for state capital not shown (was not significant)

Table 3: Predicted Probabilities for Population and Percent White on Reported Conflict at Category 1 Level (Baseline Category = 0)

| | Population | Diversity | Both |
|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| Population at min. | 7.7 percentage points (.03-.15) | | |
| Population at max. | 43.1 percentage points (.23 - .65) | | |
| DIFFERENCE | +35.4 increase in percentage points | | |
| Percent white at min. | | 11.7 percentage points (.06-.20) | |
| Percent white at max. | | 30.7 percentage points (.13-.50) | |
| DIFFERENCE | | +19 increase in percentage points | |
| Both at min. | | | 4.2 percentage points (.01-.12) |
| Both at max. | | | 53.4 percentage points (.16-.83) |
| DIFFERENCE | | | +49.2 increase in percentage points |

Based on predictions generated from the model in Table 2. All other predictors held at either mean or median value. Confidence intervals in parantheses. The results were generated using Gary King's CLARIFY program in STATA (King et.al 2000).

Table 4: Predicted Probabilities for the Interaction between 2004 Kerry Vote and Percent White on Reported Conflict at Category 3 Level (Baseline Category = 0), Individualistic Political Culture

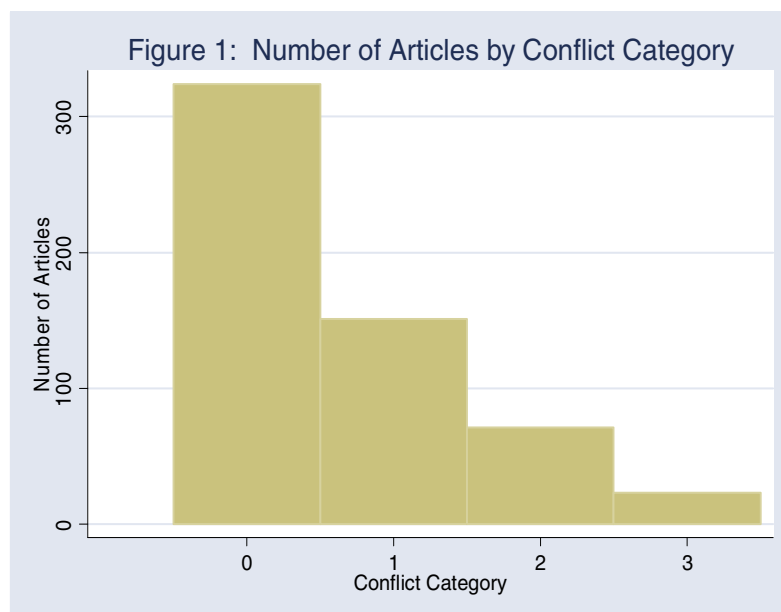
| | | Kerry Vote % | | |
|------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | <i>50 Percentile</i> | <i>75 Percentile</i> | <i>100 Percentile</i> |
| % White | <i>50 Percentile</i> | 11.09 | 13.96 | 18.82 |
| | <i>75 Percentile</i> | 11.90 | 21.39 | 36.68 |
| | <i>100 Percentile</i> | 13.55 | 30.74 | 54.96 |

Numbers represent percentage points generated using Gary King's CLARIFY program in STATA (King et.al. 2000). Percentiles represent the range of each variable, from minimum (0) to maximum (100), with points at 25, 50, and 75, at which predicted probabilities were run. 0/0 represents both variables at their minimums, 100/100 represents both variables at their maximums, etc.

Table 5: Predicted Probabilities for the Interaction between 2004 Kerry Vote and Percent White on Reported Conflict at Category 3 Level (Baseline Category = 0), Moralistic Political Culture

| | | Kerry Vote % | | |
|------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | | 50 Percentile | 75 Percentile | 100 Percentile |
| % White | 50 Percentile | 5.53 | 7.24 | 10.45 |
| | 75 Percentile | 5.24 | 10.41 | 21.43 |
| | 100 Percentile | 5.64 | 16.21 | 39.66 |

Numbers represent percentage points generated using Gary King’s CLARIFY program in STATA (King et.al. 2000). Percentiles represent the range of each variable, from minimum (0) to maximum (100), with points at 25, 50, and 75, at which predicted probabilities were run. 0/0 represents both variables at their minimums, 100/100 represents both variables at their maximums, etc.



Appendix B: Summary Statistics for Cases in Model

Conflict Categories:

| | | |
|----|-----|--------|
| 0- | 264 | 55.46% |
| 1- | 125 | 26.26% |
| 2- | 64 | 13.45% |
| 3- | 23 | 4.83% |

* First numbers: category; second: number of instances of that category; third: percent of total

Paper Partisanship:

| | | |
|-----------------|-----|--------|
| 0 (Republican)- | 182 | 38.24% |
| 1 (Democrat)- | 294 | 61.76% |

*First numbers: category; second: number of instances of that category; third: percent of total

**Two papers specifically chose not to endorse. These papers were coded as missing values.

Political Culture Variable:

| | | |
|-----------------------|-----|-------|
| 1 (Traditionalistic)- | 183 | 38.45 |
| 2 (Individualistic)- | 116 | 24.37 |
| 3 (Moralistic)- | 177 | 37.18 |

*First numbers: category; second: number of instances of that category; third: percent of total

Ownership:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|--------|
| 0 (Independent/Independent Owners)- | 137 | 28.78% |
| 1 (Major Corporate Ownership)- | 339 | 71.22% |

Diversity (centered)::

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| Observations- | 476 |
| Mean- | -1.83e-08 |
| Range- | -.37 to .33 |

Population (logged):

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Observations- | 476 |
| Mean- | 12.61 |
| Range- | 9.39 to 15.90 |

Change in Population (absolute value):

Observations- 476
Mean- .025
Range- .00 to .13

Vote for Kerry in 2004 (by percent):

Observations- 476
Mean- .00
Range- -.22 to .22

Conflict summary examples (papers/names withheld):

Category 0: A city discussing development policy. City council members are asking for a larger role in forming future development plans. The mayor agrees with this, and they plan on working together to create formal discussions between the council and the mayor. (Agreement on what to do)

Category 1: City commissioners and city staff are discussing ways of purchasing natural gas. The staff is not of like mind on whether they should go ahead and purchase at cheaper prices, so they appeal to the commissioners for advice, who are also not on the same page on how to approach the matter. There are two different sides to the issue, but the given quotes/differences between sides are not overly conflictual.

Category 2: The conflict is over development in Black sections of a particular city. A certain project/developer is taking quite awhile to complete their task, and different sides within the Black community are either in support of the progress made or opposed, claiming that the city just chose any developer who would build in a Black neighborhood. While both sides clearly stand by their position, the arguments are kept within accepted standards of debate.

Category 3: City refuses to accept a piece of free public art, in line with their city's policy. However, some residents see this as a grave mistake, as it would add to the city's landscape (the work is geared toward the city's minor league baseball team). A government official fires back that accepting any free art would require them to accept a swastika if it was given, and that part of the artwork supports a commercial operation (free advertising for baseball team- this is not allowed by city). A good number of citizens feel these restrictions on art are absurd. Outrage is quite clear from quotes and the tone of the article.

References

- Bardhan, Pranab and Dilip Mookherjee. 2000. "Capture and Governance at Local and National Levels." *The American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings of the One Hundred Twelfth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association*, 90(2): 135-139.
- Berkman, Michael and Eric Plutzer. 2006. *Ten Thousand Democracies: Politics and Public Opinion in America's School Districts*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Cohen, B.C. 1963. *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Cook, Timothy E. 1998. *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.
- Coser, L. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. New York: Macmillan.
- Coyne, J.R., Jr. 1972. *The Impudent Snobs: Agnew v. the Intellectual Establishment*. New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House.
- Crocker, J., S.T. Fiske, and S.E. Taylor. 1984. "Schematic Bases of Belief Change." In R. Eiser (Ed.), *Attitudinal Judgment*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Danzger, Herbert M. 1975. "Validating Conflict Data." *American Sociological Review*, 40: 570-84.
- Donohue, George A., Phillip J. Tichenor, and Clarice N. Olien. 1972. "Gatekeeping: Mass Media Systems and Information Control." In *Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research*, eds. F. Gerald Kline and Phillip J. Tichenor. Sage Publications: Beverly Hills. 41-69.
- Donohue, George A., Phillip J. Tichenor, and Clarice N. Olien. 1995. "A Guard Dog Perspective on the Role of the Media." *Journal of Communication*, 45(2): 115-132.
- Dye, T.R. 1986. *American Politics in the Media Age*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Elazar, Daniel. 1970. *Cities of the Prairie*. New York: Basic Books.
- Frank, Russell. 2003. "When Bad Things Happen in Good Places: Pastoralism in Big-City Newspaper Coverage of Small-Town Violence." *Rural Sociology*, 68(2): 207-230.

- Friedland, L.A., and J.M. McLeod. 1999. "Community Integration and Mass Media: A Reconsideration." In *Mass Media, Social Control, and Social Change*, eds. D. Demers and K. Viswanath. Ames: Iowa State University Press. 187-226.
- Gans, H.J. 1979. *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Pantheon.
- Gilens, Martin and Craig Hertzman. 2000 "Corporate Ownership and News Bias: Newspaper Coverage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act." *The Journal of Politics*, 62(2): 369-386.
- Gilliam, Jr., Franklin D., Nicholas A. Valentino, and Matthew N. Beckmann. 2002. "Where You Live and What You Watch: The Impact of Racial Proximity and Local Television News on Attitudes about Race and Crime." *Political Research Quarterly*, 55(4): 755-780.
- Goetz, Edward. 1994. "Expanding Possibilities in Local Development Policy: An Examination of U.S. Cities." *Political Research Quarterly*, 47(1): 85-109.
- Gray, Virginia and David Lowery. 1988. "Interest Group Politics and Economic Growth in the U.S. States." *The American Political Science Review*, 82(1): 109-131.
- Hilgartner, S. and C. Bosk. 1988. *The Rise and Fall of Social Problems: A Public Arenas Model*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94: 53-78.
- Johnson, Charles A. 1976. "Political Culture in American States: Elazar's Formulation Examined." *American Journal of Political Science*, 20(3): 491-509.
- King, Gary, Michael Tomz, and Jason Wittenberg. 2000. "Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation." *American Journal of Political Science*, 44(2): 347-61.
- Mayhew, David. 1974. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Miller, Arthur H., Edie N. Goldenberg, and Lutz Erbring. "Type-Set Politics: Impact of Newspapers on Public Confidence." *American Political Science Review*, 73(1): 67-84.
- Novak, R.D. 1974. *The Gap Between the Liberal Voters and the Masses*. In H.M. Clor (ed.), *The Mass Media and Modern Democracy*. Chicago: Rand McNally. 1-14.
- Olien, Clarice N., George A. Donohue, and Phillip J. Tichenor. 1968. "The Community Editor's Power and the Reporting of Conflict." *Journalism Quarterly*, 47: 472-478.

- Patterson, T.E. 1980. *The Mass Media Election: How Americans Choose Their President*. New York: Praeger.
- Page, Benjamin I. 1996. "The Mass Media as Political Actors." *PS: Political Science and Politics*. March, 20-24.
- Salsini, Paul. 1985. "Conflict and Consensus in Zoned and Suburban Newspapers." Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (Memphis, TN). (Also on file at Marquette University as a master's thesis)
- Snyder, David and William R. Kelly. 1977. "Conflict Intensity, Media Sensitivity and the Validity of Newspaper Data." *American Sociological Review*, 42(1): 105-123.
- Tichenor, Philip J., George A. Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien. 1980. *Community Conflict and the Press*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Viswanath, Kasisomayajula, Gerald M. Kosicki, Eric S. Fredin, and Eunkyung Park. 2000. "Local Community Ties, Community-Boundedness, and Local Public Affairs Knowledge Gaps." *Communication Research*, 27(1): 27-50.
- Wackman, Daniel B., Donald M. Gillmor, Cecile Gaziano, and Everette E. Dennis. 1975. "Chain Newspaper Autonomy as Reflected in Presidential Campaign Endorsements." *Journalism Quarterly*, 52: 411-420.
- Wolsfeld, G. 1991. "Media, Protest, and Political Violence." *Journalism Monographs*: 127.
- Wyatt, Robert O., Elihu Katz, and Joohan Kim. 2000. "Bridging the Spheres: Political and Personal Conversation in Public and Private Spaces." *Journal of Communication*, Winter 2000: 71-92.