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# Media Perception Of Excessive Police Force Based On Unemployment Rate: An Analysis Of Colorado Springs, Denver, And Pueblo

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MEDIA PERCEPTION OF EXCESSIVE POLICE FORCE BASED  
ON UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: AN ANALYSIS OF  
COLORADO SPRINGS, DENVER, AND PUEBLO.

by

Jennifer Meckstroth

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Science in  
Criminology

REGIS UNIVERSITY  
June 2011

MEDIA PERCEPTION OF EXCESSIVE POLICE FORCE BASED  
ON UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: AN ANALYSIS OF  
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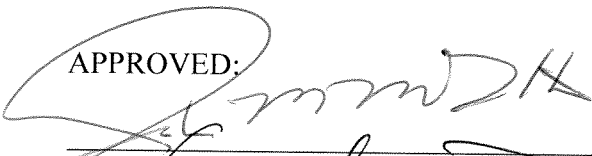
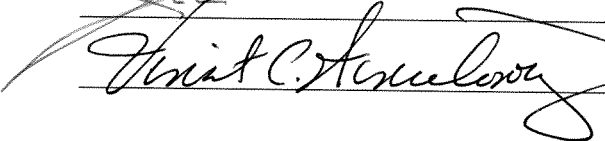
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## **Abstract**

Excessive police force is reported in newspaper articles throughout the country on a regular basis. The purpose of this project was to determine whether the unemployment rate of a city had an effect on how the media perceives excessive police force in local newspapers. A content analysis of articles combined from Colorado Springs, Denver, and Pueblo examined the current perception of police in the media and how the unemployment rate effects how the media portrays excessive police force. The results of this study analyzed how the newspaper articles regarding excessive police force are analyzed. The results determined whether a city with a high unemployment rate has a different perception of excessive police force in comparison to a city with a low unemployment rate as it is written and perceived through local media.

*TABLE OF CONTENTS*

1. INTRODUCTIONS.....	1
a. Statement of the Problem.....	1
b. Research Rationale.....	2
c. Hypothesis.....	3
d. Definitions .....	4
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	5
3. METHOD.....	15
4. RESULTS.....	19
5. DISCUSSION.....	22
6. CONCLUSIONS... ..	31
REFERENCES.....	33
APPENDICES.....	35
A. Coding Factor Rubric.....	35
B. Newspaper Articles Used in Content Analysis.....	36

## **Introduction**

In the last two decades, the news media has reported on excessive police force within communities. Some reports have shown empathy for the citizen parties of excessive police force while others have portrayed the police officers as heroic. Most newspaper articles that draw upon iconic images of police professionals portray victims of police killings as a threat, both socially and physically, to society and therefore legitimize the police officer's actions (Hirschfield, 2010). This project examined newspaper media reports in three Colorado cities to determine whether unemployment rate is a determining factor of perception of excessive police force.

Lawrence (2000) states that studies have shown that on average, as much as twenty-five percent of the daily news is devoted to crime which includes drugs, homicides, etc. The reaction of the public to media reports on police force depends heavily on the group, demands and social values. Police enforce social order through the use of force; however, the amount of force used by police is highly scrutinized and debated in the media and within the civilian community. As legal scholar Paul Chevigny (1995) states,

the power to use force is a defining characteristic of the [police officer's] job,...the line between excessive and justifiable force is difficult to draw. Much of the problem in understanding the work of the police lies in the fact that what they do, and what they should do, when they are 'doing their job,' is always contested (p. 139)

Journalist use legitimate sources to retrieve their information and in most cases this comes from individuals within the police department. The voices within the community are

often ignored and therefore the media has a tendency to side with the police officers contributing to the brutality problems in a community (Lawrence, 2000). Additionally, the lack of character witnesses for these victims can often create a negative perception by default, especially when the media is biased to siding with the police department.

Past research focused mainly on excessive police force against minorities, for example, the beating of Rodney King, a black man in Los Angeles who in 1991. He was beaten while an onlooker videotaped the entire incident, started a public outrage of racism among police officers and has continued to be a heated topic in the media. Statistically, minorities are also more likely than whites to believe police officers are racially biased and believe that police prejudice is a problem. Further research concluded that African Americans are more likely to perceive this racial bias in comparison to Hispanics (Weitzer, 2005).

In downtown Denver in 2009, a Pueblo police officers' son and his friend were ejected from a bar. Denver police officers responded and arrested these individuals. Examination of the video surveillance depicted one of the individuals talking on his cell phone as an officer lunged at him to restrain him. This officer used a metal rod wrapped in leather to strike and subdue this individual. A review of the police reports ascertained that the officers reported that these two men were belligerent requiring the use of physical force. The video surveillance contradicted the officers' claims ultimately resulting in the termination of both officers from the Denver Police Department. One article reference a quote from the Manager of Safety stating, "We cannot and do not tolerate dishonesty in any safety agency which is why it holds the most severe penalty in the discipline matrix" ([www.lgbtqnation.com](http://www.lgbtqnation.com)).

According to the National Police Misconduct Statistics and Reporting Project (2010), between January and June of 2010, Denver police officers had a higher ratio of misconduct per



law enforcement officer than any other city in the United States ([www.injusticeeverywhere.com](http://www.injusticeeverywhere.com)). In 2009 and 2010, there were publicized incidents of excessive police force in Denver in the newspaper, for example, two Denver police officers pulled a driver over for failing to stop at a stop sign. A man who was walking his dogs told the officer's that he had seen the man come to a complete stop and would be willing to give a statement. At that point, a camera allowed viewers to see the two Denver police officers excessively beating this man on the sidewalk. He was charged with interference and resisting arrest, although both charges were dropped due to the officers violating the man's 4<sup>th</sup> amendment rights as they had no reason to stop him, take his identification, or detain him ([www.kdvr.com](http://www.kdvr.com)).

It is important to look at other social factors to determine if a bias exists within the newspapers media perception of excessive police force arises. The unemployment rate of a city can contribute in examining socioeconomic status but also whether General Strain Theory as described by Agnew (2006) applies to the newspaper media perception of excessive police force.

In examining excessive force and unemployment, it is believed that cities with lower unemployment rates have a higher population of individuals with a pro-social behavior and, therefore, would have a positive perception of the police involved in an excessive police force incident. In contrast, it is believed that cities with higher unemployment rates would have more delinquency and fewer pro-social behaviors. This would infer that these cities would have a negative perception of the police involved in an excessive police force incident. By analyzing newspaper media perceptions on excessive police force at different stages of the economic decline, it allowed for a broader analysis of the unemployment rate as it steadily increases. Therefore this project hypothesized that as the unemployment rate increases, the newspaper media's negative perceptions on excessive police force will also increase.

Newspaper media regarding excessive police force incidents within Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo, Colorado was analyzed to determine if socioeconomic conditions of the community and unemployment rates affected media perceptions. For the purpose of this project, excessive force will be defined as incidents where the officer used physical coercion such as striking, kicking, beating, or shooting when not necessary to obtain cooperation from an individual(s) (Lawrence, 2000).

Regina Lawrence (2000) looks at the difference between “use of force”, “unnecessary force” and “brutality.” The “use of force” is a necessary tool in a police officer’s job. “Unnecessary force” is usually a training issue and the officer does not know when to stop. “Brutality”, in contrast, is a conscious act by officers who take steps to conceal their misconduct.

For the purpose of this research, the parties involved in an excessive use of police force incident will be referred to as the citizen party and the police party. The citizen party is the non-police party who was involved in the excessive use of force by police in any particular incident. The police party is the police officer(s) who was involved in the excessive use of force incident.

## Review of Literature

### *History of excessive force by police*

When the question ‘Why do we have the police?’ arises, the answer according to Carl Klockars (1985) is, ‘We have them to deal with all those problems in which coercive force may have to be used’ (p. 17). Police officers are trained to use force in their daily duties. Force is increased as resistance from a suspect is increased. More force should deter suspects from continuing to resist. John Crank (2004) defines force as “anything the police do to have citizens act in a particular way” (p. 99). Skolnick and Fyfe (1993) identify seven levels of force, both acceptable and excessive:

1. Mere presence – There is a notion that the presence of an officer deters criminal behavior.
2. Verbalization – Officers are taught to speak persuasively which is described as an adult-adult interaction. If that is not effective, they move on to more forcible options.
3. Command voice – A more vibrant form and classified as an order.
4. Firm grips – Physical grips on the body directing a suspect where and when to move but not meant to inflict pain.
5. Pain compliance – Meant to inflict short lasting pain in order to get a suspect’s compliance.
6. Impact techniques – May involve physical contact or the use of chemical spray or stunning weapons.
7. Deadly force – Force that is capable of killing a suspect. There are three uses of deadly force: the carotid control hold, the bar arm control hold, and the use of guns (pp. 37-40).

In some circumstances, wearing a uniform and carrying a weapon can be enough to control the actions of society. An individual can find this intimidating and changes the way

individuals' act, such as slowing down a vehicle if a police car is spotted. Police officers who are unable to put themselves in the way of force are shunned by their fellow officers because they expect every officer to be prepared to use force in a situation. "A man who is unwilling to use force is viewed as a danger to everyone who works with him, and he cannot be allowed to persist in his way" (Rubinstein, 1973, p. 319). John Crank (2004) displays the dilemma police face in society, "We complain bitterly when police do not quickly resolve problem we ourselves cannot handle. It is a contradictory and impossible responsibility. When cops show too much passion or do their work too well, display too much aggression, or exceed some bureaucratic guideline, we seek their punishment" (p. 97).

The use of force is captured through the statements of police and victims, or photographs, and force rarely photographs well. Police officers can run into individuals whose actions are influenced by drugs, alcohol, or mental illness and these instances can cause these individuals to fight back. Officers can feel backed into a corner and obligated to use force to handle the situation (Skolnick, 1993).

The original method of nonlethal force was a chemical spray such as mace or baton which was used in the 1960's. As technology has progressed, officers now use hand-held electronic "stun guns" that inflict a shock on a person when triggered. These two items inflict pain and can help to cause the individual to cooperate. The intention of the mace or baton and the electronic device was to allow officers to have something to use in order to prevent the use of firearms in a confrontation (Skolnick, 1993). While officers are not trained in martial arts, they are also trained to use neck holds to subdue someone if necessary.

While guns are a deadly weapon, there are times that officers draw their weapon without firing. Drawing a firearm is used to get quick compliance of a suspect by intimidation. Skolnick

argued often the officers have no intention of firing at that point. Training teaches officers to keep a fair distance between themselves and the suspects if they do have a drawn weapon. Each year, a quarter of officers are shot in the line of duty with their own weapons because a suspect has turned the gun against the officer or was able to disarm it (Skolnick, 1993).

Patrick Murphy (1977), who served as chief police executive in Syracuse, Washington D.C., Detroit and New York and as a president of the Police Foundation, wrote an autobiography in 1977 which compared police officers to soldiers in a war. Officers are seen as the soldiers against the war on crime. Instead of determining whether the streets are safer and more civil because of their actions, they are counting bodies, bodies arrested, convicted, etc. (p. 270). When soldiers go to war, they look for their enemies just as when officers go to the streets, they look for their enemies in the form of criminals. The military view observed by Murphy influences the use of excessive force.

While officer training includes the breakdown of appropriate force, Egon Bittner (1970) argued that it is necessary to conceal the actions of the police. Surrounding society with peaceful ideas while concealing any violence from police will allow society to remain calm and have a positive outlook. Carl Klockars (1991) expanded on Bittner's argument by arguing that community policing is another way to distract society from the violence and to remain as powerful, professional individuals within the community (pp. 258-267).

Community policing has become increasingly popular in recent years. This approach focuses on involving the community in an equal partnership to solve crime and works with stakeholders in the community to help achieve community participation (Morabito, 2010). Community policing is meant to be a proactive approach instead of a reactive approach to crime.

Law enforcement agencies who are adopted this approach are required to change all facets of their policing methods including patrol tactics, supervision, etc.

Different factors contribute to the success of a community policing agency, one of them being income. Income level is a key indicator of the environment and whether this type of community would be open to a community policing structure (Morabito, 2010). Income, therefore, can hinder the success of a community policing structure and cause less collaboration between the community and the law enforcement agency.

#### *The relationship between the media and the police*

The newsprint media and the police have always had a reporting relationship. At times the relationship is positive showing the heroic efforts of law enforcement and the amount of commitment they give to their community. Other times the relationship is negative showing the aggressive nature and acts of excessive force among police. No matter the relationship, they are required to work together to get the facts straight and report the story.

Newspaper reporters have historically had the most contact with law enforcement. Part of their daily news includes articles on crime or law enforcement. A large number of newspapers have a column specifically for such entries. “Despite dwindling readership...newspapers remain America’s premier source of public affairs information” (Robinson & Levy, 1996, p. 135). In 1992, it was estimated that at least twenty-five percent of all news is devoted to crime (Surette, 1992). Journalists rely heavily on institutionalized positioned officials and are considered the most legitimate sources of news. The news tends to reflect the views and concerns of the political elite because they have to select sources that represent the public views of the world (Lawrence, 2000).

While journalists focus on communicating the news to the public, some individuals have argued that the media only feeds into the problem. Ronald Hampton (1996), former president of the National Black Police Association, argued that the media contributed to the continuation of excessive police force rather than just an outlet for news. He argued that journalists ignore members of the community and do not include their stories in the news reporting and because of this, the journalists “side with the police” by relying almost exclusively on the police comments. The police departments are in control of the information that they share and that they withhold. Official sources that give information to the journalist typically portray the use of force as consistent with police department regulations leading them to believe it is legitimate. News reporters tend to frame their articles with the idea that force is necessary and the officers were acting in defense (Lawrence, 2000).

The media and law enforcement have much in common and are both powerful. Institutions that are highly visible in the public eye are often secretive about their methods of operations and their sources of information as well as members who often speak publicly for their organizations. They both attract a growing number of young men and more recently, young women to their jobs. Lastly, they both tend to fail to acknowledge their short comings (Kelly, 1987).

*The beginning of newspaper media portrayal of excessive police force*

When it comes to the relationship between the media and police work, the inevitable question arises: “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” As far back as history will allow, there has been some type of media form covering police work. The National Police Gazette, started in 1845 by George Wiles and Enoch Camp in New York City, covered crime through articles and illustrations. In Volume LX – No. 768, the newspaper wrote:

The Police Gazette is a newspaper in the real sense of the word. It prints the news of the week, but eliminates the filth. It selects the events with due regard to their importance from a news standpoint, and presents them to its readers in entertaining and readable shape. In addition to printing the news, the Police Gazette illustrates it. In that respect it has the advantage of the daily newspapers. But it never publishes anything that could give offense to the most punctilious person (Fox, 1982, p. 2).

The Police Gazette included many articles, with such titles as “BECAUSE SHE WAS LONELY” and “FOUND DEAD IN A BAGNIO”. The words were animated and the pictures were detailed.

Kobre Sidney (1939) described how a crime news story should be reported in the press. The article described how the reporter needs to go beyond the surface and look at the economic factors including unemployment and the psychological and sociological factors such as family trouble, gang activity, and access to firearms. In the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, news reporters were paid by the space their story filled within the column which caused some exaggerations. If the reporters chose to report only the facts, their pay was dramatically reduced so in turn, the newspaper rewarded exaggerations and sensationalisms instead of accurate reporting (Smythe, 1980).

In order to keep the reader’s attention, it was imperative that the news reporter included statements in their articles to intrigue the reader. Mitchell Stephens (1988) concluded that there are four qualities that intrigue readers of modern American newspapers in regards to crime. They are a woman or a child as a victim or suspect; a well-known victim or suspect; doubt about



the guilt of a suspect and relating to promiscuous behavior by the victim or suspect. Readers were also interested in the events taking place during that time period.

As newsprint media grew more popular and reporters continued to sensationalize, problems inevitably arose between the media and law enforcement. In 1971, a Miami police officer was gunned down. The lead prosecutor had a star witness that was going to testify. A reporter for the *Miami Daily News* got a hold of some court documents and was able to determine the name of the witness. The reporter, John Katzenbach, wrote a story and included the new information he had discovered but decided to call the lead prosecutor and advise him of the story being released. The prosecutor sent police out to the witness' home to ensure he was not spooked by media but the media cameras were already there. The witness disappeared and later denied knowing anything. The prosecutor, Richard Katz, later stated, "I don't blame either the press or the police for what happened but I do think there's a definite correlation between the witness vanishing and the reporter showing up at this house" (Kelly, 1987, pp. 65-66).

The Rodney King beating incident in 1991 was a widespread media coverage event of alleged excessive police force. George Holliday, who videotaped the entire King beating from a neighboring house, caught on video a black man who was down on his hands and knees, being tazed and beaten with metal truncheons, fifty-six blows total, by two officers while a third officer was shown stomping on King. The video also shows ten officers standing and watching the entire beating. Holliday took the video to the police station but was blown off stating that the officer seemed uninterested (Skolnick, 1993). After Holliday was unable to get the results he wanted from law enforcement, he took the video to Channel 5 (KTLA) in Los Angeles. Within days, the video had become worldwide news, giving the American public a full view of what excessive police force can look like.

Daryl Gates was the Police Chief at the time in Los Angeles and he responded to the video saying it was an “aberration” although in the year before the King beating, Los Angeles had paid out a total of \$11.3 million to settle lawsuits alleging police misconduct (Skolnick, 1993). Since King was an African American male, the Los Angeles police department was also seen as racist and black members of society spoke out using the media as an outlet. In the New York Times, one man interviewed stated, “Young blacks and Hispanics have been persecuted, beaten and pulled out of cars because of stereotypes. We’re tired of being treated like garbage. We’re tired of living in a society that denied us the right to be considered as a human being” (Mydans, 1992).

After the Rodney King beating, the media started to revisit previous cases that might not have received the necessary or accurate attention. In 1985, William Retana, a Mexican American who received a Purple Heart in Vietnam and was a staff sergeant with the U.S. Air Force, was beaten by police into a coma and died two weeks later. When the article was written in 1985, it stated that Retana was drunk and resisted police. When the incident was revisited 6 years later, the facts showed that Retana did not hit or resist police (Skolnick, 1993).

#### *Unemployment and its effect on society*

Unemployment rates have fluctuated with the economy, declining in times of economic booming and increasing in times of recession. The response to unemployment can be more than just financial. It can be dependent on many factors which include the perception of economic difficulties, social circles, and the individual’s employment history. Because of these many factors it is expected that not all unemployed individuals will become involved in crime. Instead, it is expected that only a sub-population of these unemployed individuals will be involved in crime (Box & Hale, 1985).

General Strain Theory (Agnew, 2000) assists to explain the relationship between unemployment and crime. The theory states that crime results from the inability to achieve monetary success or valued goals through legitimate means. This inability causes the individual to feel strain and resort to criminal activities (Agnew, 2000). Agnew (2006) suggested that the strain leads to crime because of an increase in negative emotions, such as anger or frustration. When the strain is seen as unjust or associated with low social control, the strain can lead to crime. Some of the specific strains that can cause criminal activity according to Agnew (2006) include chronic unemployment, homelessness, residence in economically deprived communities, and work in the secondary labor market. All of these specific strains can be directly related to unemployment. In American states, those with high unemployment rates tend to have more crime in comparison to international nations (Hemley & McPheters, 1974). There is also a higher homicide rate in nations with high unemployment rates (Krohn, 1976).

As the unemployment rate increases, the research should align with this project showing that a higher unemployment rate will in fact cause the media to have a negative perception of the police due to the strain on the individuals' within the three communities.

As the U.S. economy declined, unemployment rates rose. When examining media perception of excessive police force, this study examined newspaper articles in three different time periods to account for unemployment rates before, in the beginning stages, and during the declining economy to determine if perceptions change over a longitudinal study of years 2000, 2005, and 2009. In the city of Denver in 2000, the estimated population was 556,190 with an unemployment rate of 2.3 percent. In 2005, it grew to an estimated 566,359 with an unemployment rate of 5.3 percent and in 2009 had grown slightly to 566,974 with an unemployment rate of 8.4 percent. In the city of Colorado Springs in 2000, the estimated

population was 361,113 with an unemployment rate of 3.3 percent. In 2005, it was estimated at 371,287 with an unemployment rate of 5.5 percent ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). In 2009, the population was estimated to be 414,658 with an unemployment rate of 8.7 percent ([www.springs.gov](http://www.springs.gov)). In the city of Pueblo in 2000, the estimated population was 102,132 with an unemployment rate of 4.3 percent. With a slight growth, the population was estimated to be 102,612 in 2005 with an unemployment rate of 7.0 percent ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). In 2009, the population was estimated at 104,877 with an unemployment rate of 9.2 percent ([www.chieftain.com](http://www.chieftain.com)).

As the unemployment rates increase, it is important to study whether the media's perception of excessive police force changes based on the factor of the unemployment rate so that the public can have a better view of why the media perceives these incidents' the way they do.

## Methods

### *Content analysis*

This research was completed using a content analysis through a qualitative comparative design that patterns of news media perception were defined through analysis of newspaper articles. A quantitative methodology was used in the statistical analysis. This statistical analysis of the newspaper articles was accomplished by coding each article, which provided insight to the perceived relationship between media, excessive force by police and unemployment rates over time. According to Earl Babbie, content analysis allows for correction of error as it is easier to go back to the analysis and ensure validity instead of having to repeat field research if an error is found. Content analysis also allows for an unobtrusive measure as the analysis will not have an effect on the subject being studied, in this case newspaper articles (Babbie, 2010).

Newspaper articles retrieved online regarding excessive police force in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Denver, Colorado, and Pueblo, Colorado were analyzed looking at years 1998-2000, 2003-2007 and 2008-2010. The newspaper in Colorado Springs that was analyzed was *The Gazette*. This newspaper has been in production for over sixty years and can be delivered via email or paper ([www.gazette.com](http://www.gazette.com)). The newspaper in Denver that was analyzed was *The Denver Post*. *The Denver Post* is the largest newspaper in Denver. Residents of Denver think it is fairly neutral although tends to side with liberals ([www.denverpost.com](http://www.denverpost.com)). The newspaper in Pueblo that was analyzed was *The Pueblo Chieftain*. This newspaper has been in production since 1868 and is conservative in their reporting ([www.chieftain.com](http://www.chieftain.com)).

Three different time periods were analyzed to account for the declining economy. Articles from 1998-2000 were used for analysis with the unemployment rate given by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2000 to account for the period before the economic decline. Articles from

2003-2007 were used for analysis with the unemployment rate given by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2005 to account for the period in the beginning of the economic decline. Lastly, articles from 2008-2010 were used for analysis with the unemployment rate given by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2009 to account for the period during the economic decline.

### *Sampling*

The target sample for the content analysis was retrieved using search terms in each online newspaper's archives. Analyzing a body of textual materials needs to use units of analysis which can include words, themes, etc. (Berg, 1989). The search terms used were "police killing", "police brutality" and "excessive force". Every article relating to this study was coded and analyzed to ensure for a valid sampling.

Due to the Denver Post being the largest newspaper in Colorado, the sampling size of articles was larger than Colorado Springs and Pueblo. From 1998-2000, there are twenty-three newspaper articles from *The Denver Post*, twelve from *The Chieftain* and seven from *The Gazette* being analyzed. From 2003-2007, there are thirteen newspaper articles from *The Denver Post*, nine from *The Chieftain*, and eight from *The Gazette* being analyzed. From 2008-2010, there are seventeen newspaper articles from *The Denver Post*, twelve from *The Chieftain* and seven from *The Gazette* being analyzed. This sampling size accounts for a total of fifty-three articles from *The Denver Post*, thirty-three from *The Chieftain*, and twenty-two from *The Gazette*.

### *Coding*

Each article was coded using ten factors and was split up amongst the appropriate timeframe. For the purpose of this research, the factors were broken into columns of "Pros", "Cons" and "Neutral". The pros' column symbolized a factor that showed favorable interest to

the citizen party and not the police officer. The cons' column symbolized a factor that showed favorable interest to the police officer and not to the citizen party. The Neutral column was not to be favorable to either side and remain neutral to both parties. Each factor was accounted for in each time period.

There are four factors that were considered favorable to the citizen party. They include the article referring to a injured citizen party, a settlement amount that was received by the citizen party from the law enforcement agency, reference to any pending charges against the police officer involved in the incident, and the reference to any investigations that have been or are currently taking place with a police officer or the law enforcement agency as a whole.

There are three factors that were considered negative to the citizen party and favorable to the police officer and law enforcement agency. The reference to any actions by police officers being justified, reference to any substance abuse by the citizen and reference to any mental illness from the citizen as well. These factors reflected negatively on the citizen party and show ways that the police officer was justified in their actions.

There are three factors that reflected no favorability to either party. When an article contains a quote from the police department or a police officer specifically, reference to the police department or law enforcement agency reviewing their current policies, and the explanation of the type and severity of the injury. These three factors allow the articles to be coded for specifics to the research topic but are not favorable to either party.

Each article was individually coded first using the ten factors listed in Appendix A. After the analysis for every article in one newspaper was completed, the total results were placed into the chart in Table 1, 2, and 3 showing the trends for that newspaper per timeframe. This was duplicated for each newspaper. After every article for all three newspapers was coded and input

into the chart in Table 1, 2, and 3, any trend regarding unemployment was detected through city and timeframe.



**Results**

Tables 1, 2, and 3 list the percentages of articles that were favorable to each party specified by newspaper and timeframe. The tables also include the total number of articles used in this project. These figures show the percentage of articles that were majority favoritism to citizen party (Pro), police party (Con), remained neutral (Neutral), had an equal numbers of factors for Pro and Con (Even), had an equal number of factors for Con and Neutral (Con/Neutral), and had an equal number of factors for Pro and Neutral (Pro/Neutral). The total number of articles per timeframe is listed in the last line of the figure.

Table 1

*Percentages of articles that were favorable to each factor group listed for The Denver Post*

Group	Timeframe		
	1998-2000	2003-2007	2008-2010
Total # of Articles	23	13	17
Pro	61%	38%	88%
Con	0%	8%	6%
Neutral	4%	0%	0%
Even	13%	31%	6%
Con/Neutral	0%	0%	0%
Pro/Neutral	22%	23%	0%

Note. maximum percentage = 100%

Table 2

*Percentages of articles that were favorable to each factor group listed for The Chieftain*

Group	Timeframe		
	1998-2000	2003-2007	2008-2010
Total # of Articles	12	9	12
Pro	50%	33%	25%
Con	8%	0%	8%
Neutral	0%	11%	8%
Even	17%	45%	25%
Con/Neutral	17%	0%	0%
Pro/Neutral	8%	11%	34%

Note. maximum percentage = 100%

Table 3

*Percentages of articles that were favorable to each factor group listed for The Gazette*

Group	Timeframe		
	1998-2000	2003-2007	2008-2010
Total # of Articles	7	8	7
Pro	86%	50%	57%
Con	14%	0%	0%
Neutral	0%	0%	0%
Even	0%	12%	0%
Con/Neutral	0%	0%	0%
Pro/Neutral	0%	38%	43%

*Note.* maximum percentage = 100%

All of the articles were coded based on a ten factor coding system (See Appendix A).

Table 4 shows the percentage of articles that included each factor per newspaper per timeframe.

See Tables 1, 2, and 3 for total number of articles per newspaper and timeframe.

Table 4

*Percentages of articles that included each factor per newspaper per timeframe*

Factors	Newspapers/Timeframe								
	The Denver Post			The Gazette			The Chieftain		
	98-00	03-07	08-10	98-00	03-07	08-10	98-00	03-07	08-10
Reference to Injured Parties	57%	92%	100%	100%	100%	100%	83%	100%	92%
Settlement Amount	22%	0%	47%	29%	13%	71%	50%	44%	25%
Pending Charges Against Officer(s)	48%	23%	18%	14%	0%	0%	17%	0%	0%
Reference to Investigation of Officer(s)	70%	31%	47%	43%	75%	14%	17%	22%	50%
Reference to Actions Being Justified	26%	15%	6%	29%	38%	29%	50%	100%	50%
Reference to Substance Abuse From Citizen Party	9%	31%	18%	0%	13%	0%	33%	11%	25%
Reference to Mental Illness from Citizen Party	0%	31%	0%	29%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Containing a Quote From Police Department	30%	15%	6%	0%	63%	29%	25%	22%	42%
Reference to Police Reviewing Their Policies	9%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%	8%
Explanation of Type And Severity of Injury	74%	62%	77%	57%	75%	86%	58%	100%	92%

Note. maximum score = 100%

### Discussion

The results of the research study gave a clearer understanding of what factors in the ten factor coding system proved to be significant and which proved to not have significant results in terms of the location and the unemployment rate in the declining economy. It was hypothesized that cities with lower unemployment rates have a higher population of individuals with a pro-social behavior and, therefore, would have a positive perception of the police involved in an excessive police force incident. In contrast, it is believed that cities with higher unemployment rates would have more delinquency and fewer pro-social behaviors. This would infer that these cities would have a negative perception of the police involved in an excessive police force incident. The results reflected that some of the factors with varying unemployment rates did affect the media's perception of excessive police force, however; other factors reflected the opposite (See Graphs below).

The most consistent factor out of the ten was the "Settlement Amount" (See Figure 1). Both *The Denver Post* and *The Gazette* had a decrease between 2003-2007 but then experienced a large increase in 2008-2010. *The Chieftain*, however, started high and steadily increased over time. This is inconsistent with the other two newspapers.

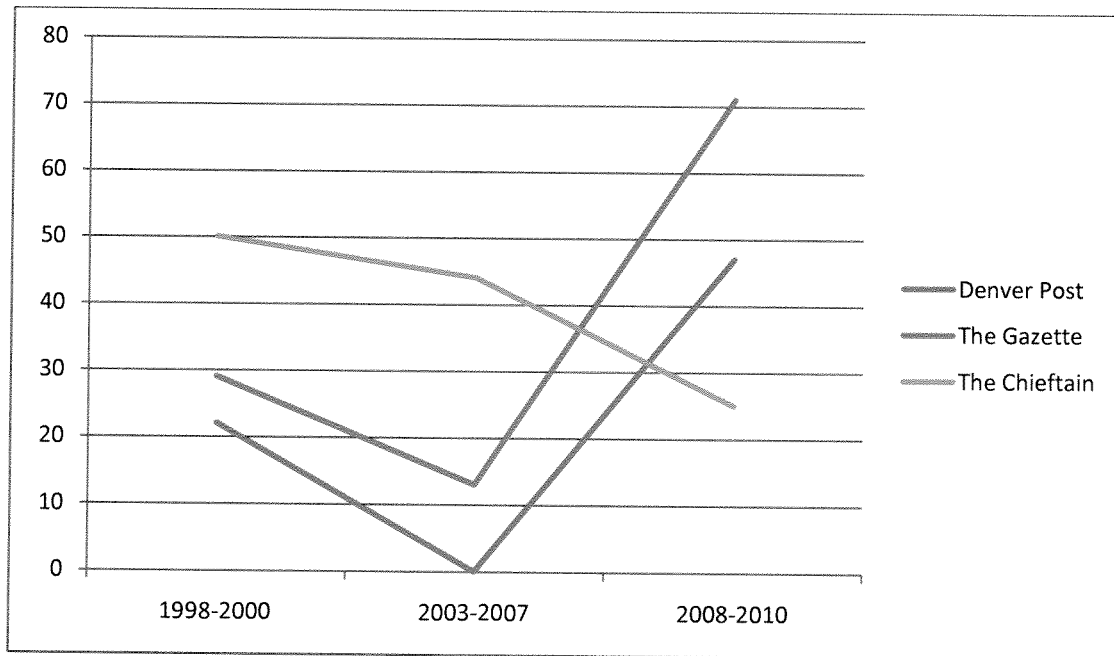


Figure 1 Percentage of articles per newspaper and timeframe that contained the factor “Settlement Amount”

The analysis from coding the articles for the factor “Pending Charges Against Officers” showed opposite results than were hypothesized (See Figure 2). If the hypothesis was validated, the results would have shown that as the unemployment rate increased, the number of references to pending charges against officers would have increased as the higher unemployment rate would have shown favor to the citizen party involved in the excessive police violence incident. It also would have shown that articles in *The Chieftain* would have referred to pending charges against an officer more often than the other two newspapers as Pueblo, Colorado had the highest unemployment rate.

In 1998-2000, before the economic decline occurred is when all three newspapers experienced the majority of the pending charges against officer(s) based on the coded articles. From 2003-2007 and 2008-2010, both Pueblo and Colorado Springs did not have any articles

refer to pending charges against an officer, even though these cities had a higher unemployment rate than Denver at the time.

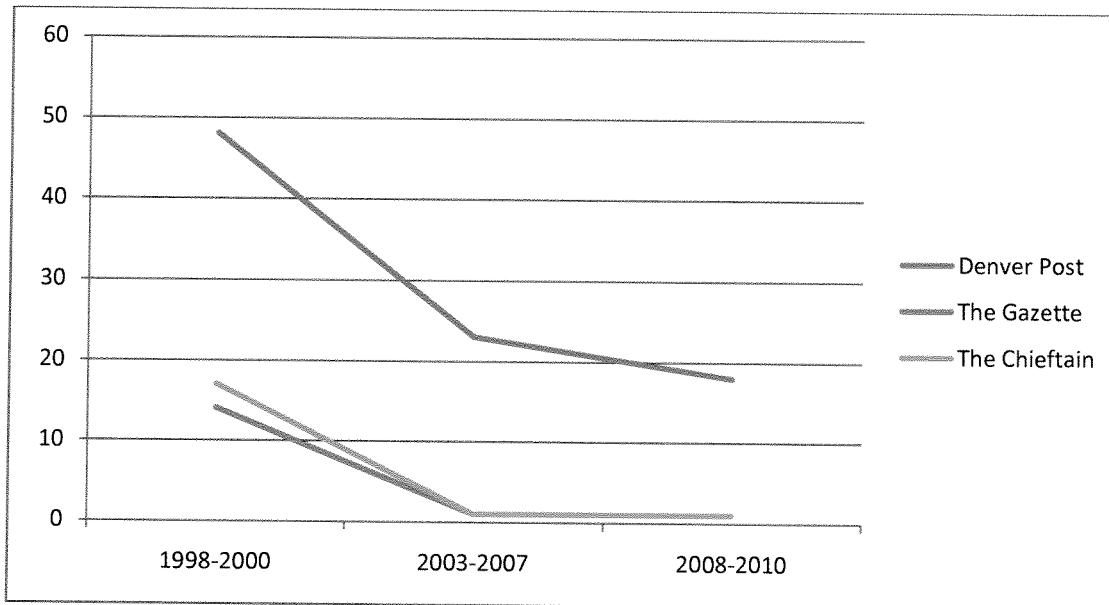


Figure 2 Percentage of articles per newspaper and timeframe that contained the factor “Pending Charges Against Officer(s)”

The results for the factor “Reference to Actions Being Justified” did not validate the hypothesis nor invalidate it. These results showed that while there was some decline in *The Denver Post*, the other two newspapers had a decline only after an increase during the middle timeframe (See Figure 3). Pueblo, Colorado had the largest increase spike, therefore, creating the largest decreasing spike.

*The Denver Post* had a steady decline in their newspaper articles in reference to the officers’ actions being justified which is consistent with the hypothesis that as the economic decline increases, the amount of articles that are favorable to the law enforcement agency or officer specifically will decrease. However, Pueblo, Colorado and Colorado Springs, Colorado do not follow this pattern. If the hypothesis was validated, the results would have shown that

*The Gazette* and *The Chieftain* would have had similar results but *The Gazette's* would have steadily declined further than *The Denver Post* and *The Chieftain* would have declined further than all of the newspapers.

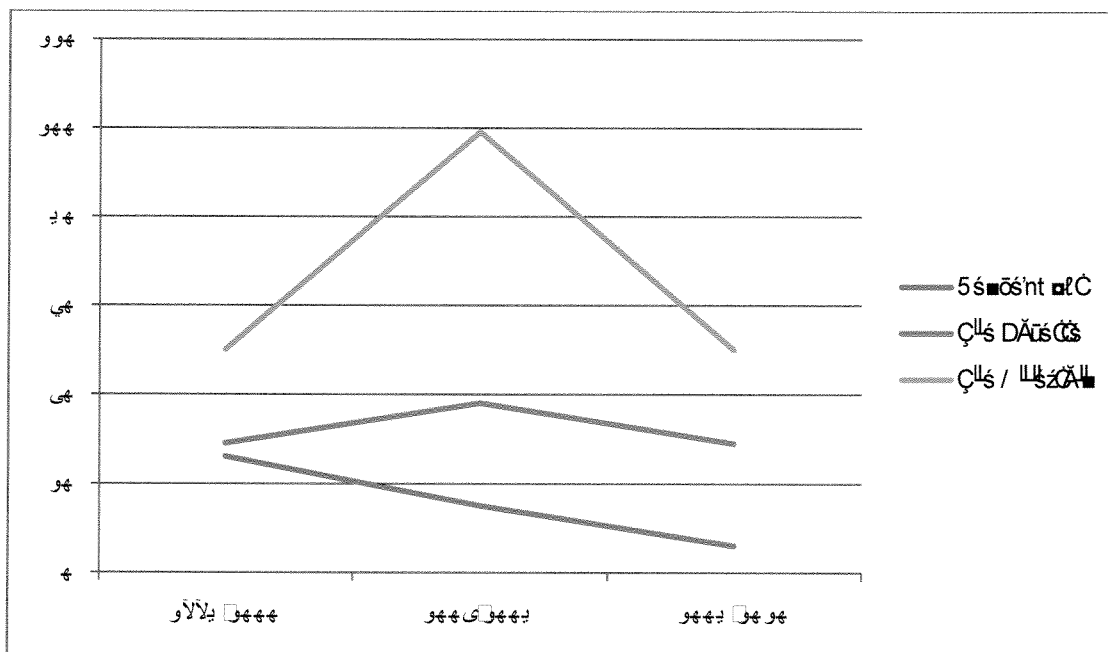


Figure 3 Percentage of articles per newspaper and timeframe that contained the factor "Reference to Actions Being Justified"

It was hypothesized that the unemployment rate would dictate the media's perception of excessive police violence; however, Figure 3.2 shows a lack of consistency with that idea in terms of the factor "Containing a Quote from Police Department". Each newspaper reflected different results. *The Denver Post* declined, *The Chieftain* increased, and *The Gazette* had a large increase and then a large decrease. The unemployment rate did not affect the increase or decrease as each newspaper had a different pattern. Because of this, the hypothesis was null.

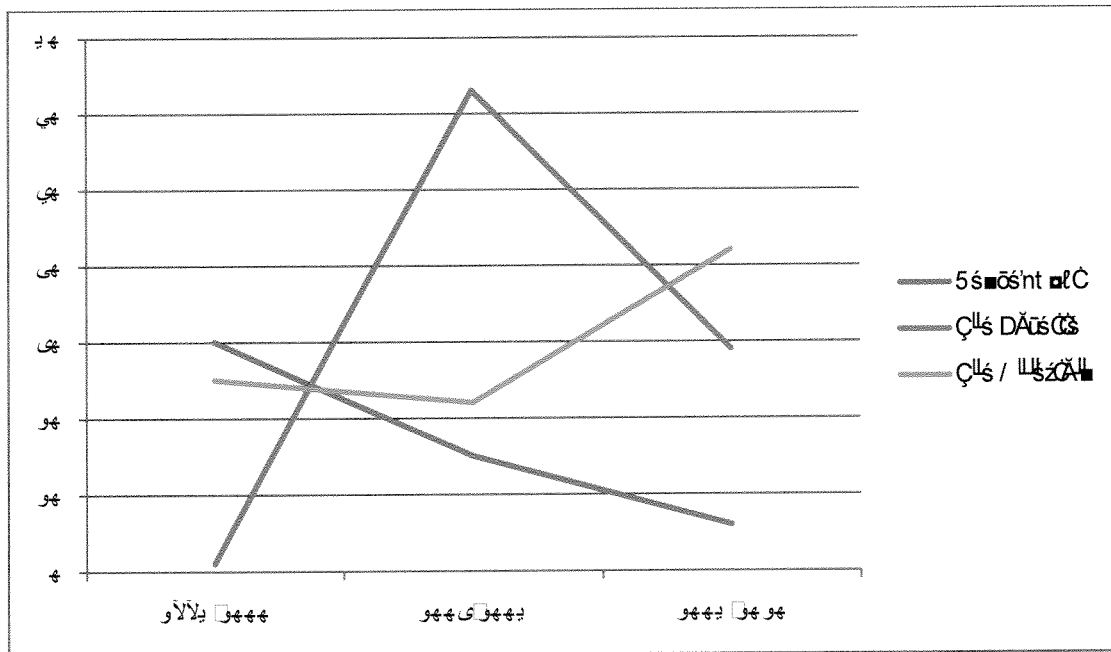


Figure 4 Percentage of articles per newspaper and timeframe that contained the factor “Containing a Quote from Police Department”

Figures 5, 6, and 7 represent the overall pattern of each newspaper per timeframe and the percentages of articles that were favorable to the citizen party (pro), the police party (con), a neutral perspective (neutral), and an even column which represents an equal amount of con and pro factors (even). The citizen party is the non-police party who was involved in the excessive police force incident. The police part is the police officer(s) who was involved in the excessive police force incident.

*The Denver Post* analysis reflected that the percentage of articles that are favorable to the police party remained fairly consistent over the three time periods (See Figure 5). The percentage of articles that were favorable to the citizen party had an increase from 1998-2000 to 2008-2010. There is no explanation as to why the middle timeframe, 2003-2007, remained lower than both timeframes. The hypothesis is consistent with the first and last timeframes where



the media’s perception of excessive police force was favorable to the citizen party more as the unemployment rate increased, however, this does not match the middle timeframe.

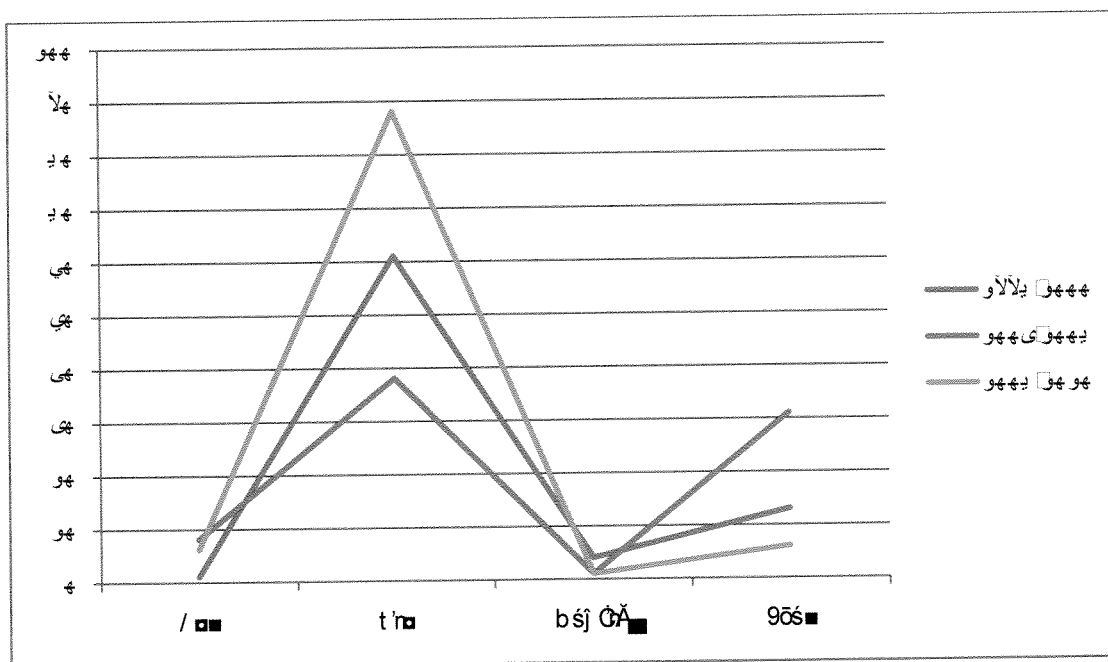


Figure 5 The percentage of articles that were majority of each party specification by timeframe for *The Denver Post*.

Pueblo, Colorado had the highest unemployment rate out of the three cities so it was hypothesized that *The Chieftain* would show the largest increase in the media’s perception of excessive police force with favorability to the citizen party. The results proved that it was the opposite of what was hypothesized (See Figure 6).

*The Chieftain* had the highest percentage of favorability of the citizen party in 1998-2000 and it steadily decreased over time instead of the hypothesized increasing. The media’s perception with favorability towards the police party was the same percentage for the 1998-2000 timeframe and the 2008-2010 timeframe and decreased slightly in the 2003-2007 timeframe.

These results would indicate that the unemployment rate might have had an adverse effect on the media's perception of excessive police force.

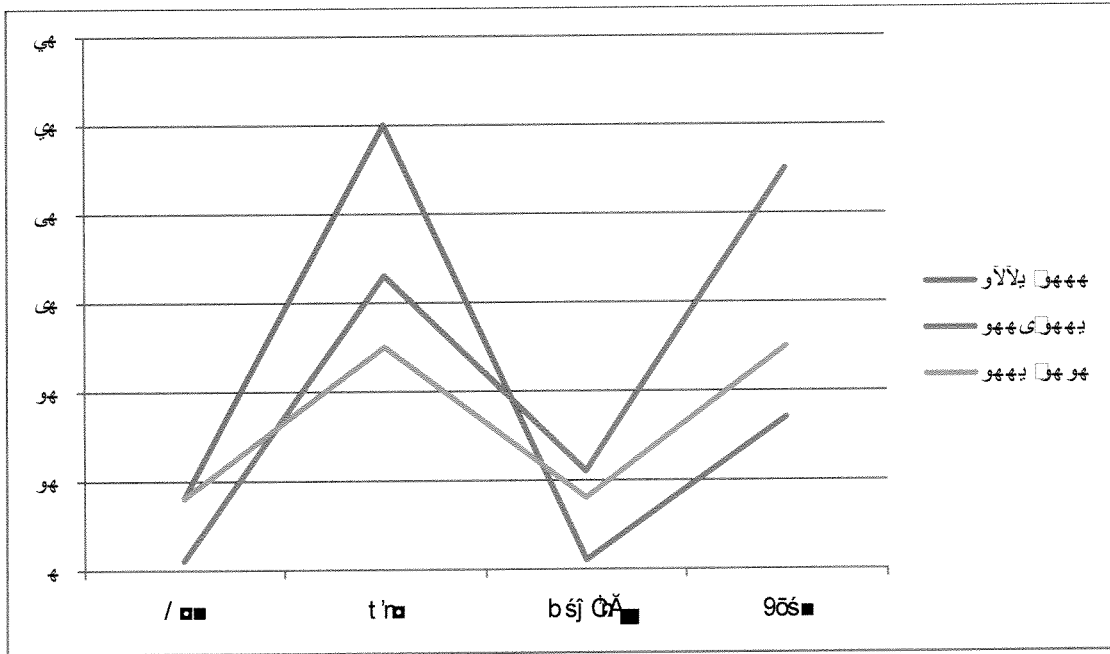


Figure 6 The percentage of articles that were majority of each party specification by timeframe for *The Chieftain*.

*The Gazette* which represents the city with an unemployment rate in between Pueblo, Colorado and Denver, Colorado showed results that were in the middle of the two cities (See Figure 7). The first timeframe, 1998-2000, showed the highest percentage of favorability to the citizen party, however, the next highest percentage was the last timeframe, 2008-2010, showing no consistency between the three timeframes.

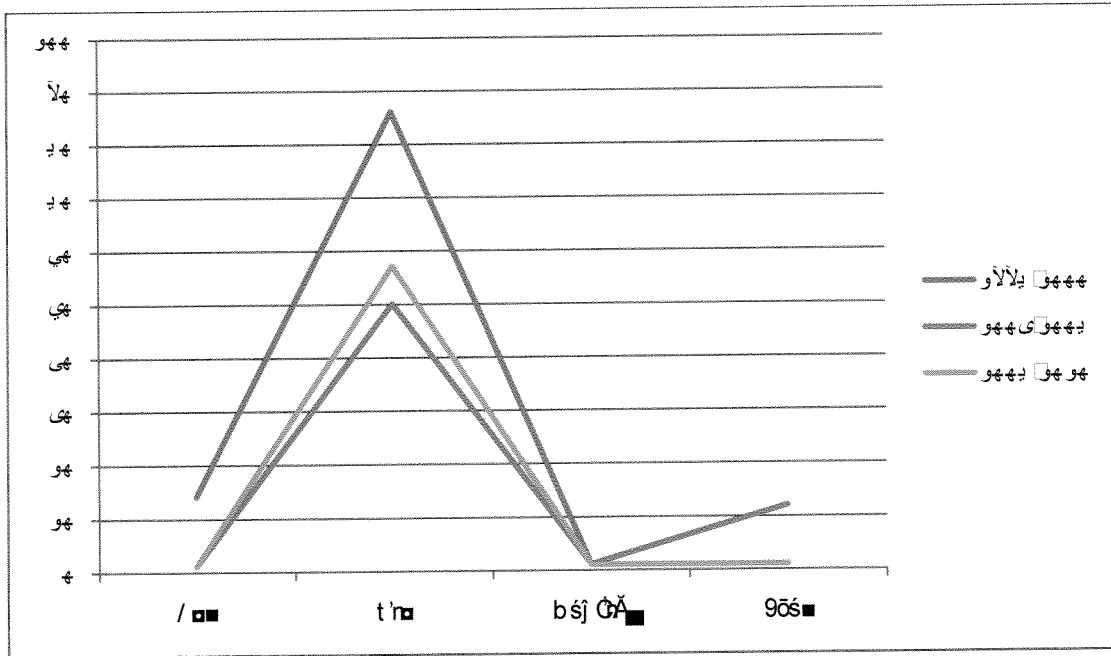


Figure 7 The percentage of articles that were majority of each party specification by timeframe for *The Gazette*.

While it was hypothesized that as the economy declined and the unemployment rate increased, the media’s perception of excessive police force would be more favorable to the citizen party, it was also thought that the city with the highest unemployment rate, Pueblo, Colorado, would show greater signs of this and would have fewer articles showing favorability towards the police party. The city with the lowest unemployment rate, Denver, Colorado, would then have the lowest percentage of articles showing favorability to the citizen party and the highest percentage in favor of the police party.

In comparing the three newspapers with the results, Denver, Colorado had one of the highest percentages of articles that were favorable to the citizen party proving to be a null hypothesis. In comparison, Pueblo, Colorado had the lowest percentage of articles that were favorable to the citizen party, also a null hypothesis. Colorado Springs, Colorado, the middle

city with an average unemployment rate proved to be in the middle of the two cities in terms of the percentage of articles favorable to the citizen party.

The results reflected a null hypothesis and the higher an unemployment rate is in a city, it does not necessarily reflect that the media will have a more favorable perception on the citizen party and a less favorable perception of the police party. It could also be assumed that perhaps there is a reverse effect on the media's perception of excessive police violence and the unemployment rate as some of the results were the complete opposite of the hypothesis. Further research could potentially look at whether the lower unemployment rates in a city have a more favorable view of the citizen party, as shown in the analysis of *The Chieftain*.

### **Conclusion**

After completing the analysis of the newspaper articles and labor statistics, the research is unable to validate that the General Strain Theory can be applied this research. Moreover, the city with the lowest unemployment rate, meaning the highest percentage of individuals with pro-social behaviors, showed favorability towards the citizen party instead of the police party. As hypothesized, the highest percentage of pro-social behaviors would cause the media's perception of excessive police violence to be favorable to the police party; however, this was not the case.

The research demonstrated that as the economy declines, the unemployment rate does not have an effect on the media's perception of excessive police force. While the hypothesis that the unemployment rate would dictate the media's perception of excessive police violence was null, it paves the wave for future research to find other factors that affect the media's perception of excessive police force. At some point, the declining economy will come to a halt and will start to rise again and this research will help reflect the lack of effect that the unemployment rate has on the media's perception of excessive police force. As the economy increases, further research could look at the employment rate as a factor to see if the newspaper media's perception of excessive police changes as the economy grows.

A limitation encountered in this study was the population size of newspaper articles found as well as the little fluctuation in unemployment rates. While each city did not lend a large number of online newspaper articles, the use of every applicable article using the search terms in the methods section allowed for the largest online newspaper sample possible. Further research may look at larger metropolitan cities across the country for larger changes with their fluctuation of the unemployment rate and potentially look at unemployment rate variations of ten percent or more. Further research could also look into crime rates per capita and how that affects

the media's perception of excessive police violence. Would the media in cities with a higher homicide rate have a difference perception of excessive police violence in comparison to a city that has a low homicide rate but a higher burglary rate? White collar crime rates could also be part of further research as corporations and government affiliates might have an impact on the media.

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APPENDIX A – Coding Factor Rubric

		<u>1998-2000</u>	<u>2003-2007</u>	<u>2008-2010</u>
<b><u>Pros</u></b>	Reference to Injured Parties			
	Settlement amount			
	Pending Charges Against Officer(s)			
	Reference to Investigation of Officer(s)			
<b><u>Cons</u></b>	Reference to Actions Being Justified			
	Reference to Substance Abuse from Citizen Party			
	Reference to Mental Illness from Citizen Party			
<b><u>Neutral</u></b>	Containing a Quote from Police Department			
	Reference to Police Reviewing their Policies			
	Explanation of Type and Severity of Injury			

Appendix A. Coding factors sorted in columns by favoritism to citizen party, police party or neutral factors by timeframes. This chart will be used for each newspaper to show trends per city per timeframe.

APPENDIX B – Newspaper Articles Used in Content Analysis

- Beating victim dies after suffering stroke. (2000, October 31). *The Denver Post*. Retrieved from [www.denverpost.com](http://www.denverpost.com).
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