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In Peace Journalism we Trust? Effects of Peace Journalism on News-item Credibility and Media Trust

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ABSTRACT

Responding to criticisms that conflict reporting is at times overly sensational with negative impacts on individuals, peace journalism aims to shift journalistic attention from episodic, event-based reports to coverage highlighting structural causes of conflict as well as its peaceful transformation. However, little is known about how audiences perceive such reports, particularly when it comes to perceptions of credibility or trust. Using an experiment in the U.S. context, this study examines the effects of exposure to peace journalism on individuals' perceptions of news-item credibility and trust in news media generally. Results show that peace-journalism framing may have short-term positive effects on individuals' perceptions of a news article's credibility, but general media trust is primarily driven by political ideology. Implications for journalism theory and practice are discussed.

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From news about immigration to gun control to social welfare policy, conflict is popularly considered an essential element of storytelling. Indeed, media researchers have long counted conflict as a major news value (Harcup and O'Neill 2001; Shoemaker and Reese 2014). However, news reports about conflict are criticized as being overly sensational with undesirable impacts on how individuals understand the world around them (Allen and Seaton 1999; Carruthers 2011), thereby motivating the development of alternative reporting approaches, such as peace journalism. While traditional conflict reporting—or “war journalism”—gives preference to episodic violence and sensational events, “peace journalism” instead focuses on suffering and structural causes on all sides of conflict as well as its peaceful transformation (Galtung 2003).

Following these conceptual developments, some newsrooms have likewise begun incorporating these new practices into their reporting. This interest has been met by a large body of research examining peace-journalism news content and, to some extent, peace-journalism practice, though fewer studies have investigated the individual-level effects of these reports. Studies that consider effects have tended to analyze affective outcomes like levels of happiness or hopelessness (e.g., Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers 2015; McGoldrick and Lynch 2016) or cognitive effects, such as changes in political knowledge (e.g., Thiel and Kempf 2014).

Such contributions notwithstanding, if peace journalism is to improve social conditions, which some theorists have envisioned as a normative goal (Aslam 2016; Peleg 2006), this outcome presumably occurs because that content has been received and processed. Yet little is known about how audiences perceive peace journalism, particularly regarding the extent to which individuals judge these reports as credible. This is noteworthy given that perceptions, particularly those related to media trustworthiness, are critical in illuminating the conditions under which peace-journalism content may exert an influence in other outcomes, such as those related to attitudinal change or knowledge gain. After all, those who trust the media are more likely to believe—and be influenced by—the content therein (see Feldman et al. 2017; Tsfati and Cohen 2005). Moreover, trust in mainstream news may be especially important in times of conflict, where news media can be crucial in informing audiences and in creating mutual understanding.

To address this scholarly gap, the following study examines the effects of exposure to peace journalism on individuals' perceptions of news-item credibility and trust in news media generally, using an experiment in the U.S. context. Rather than focus on war or international conflict, as most peace-journalism scholarship is apt to do, this study examines the application of peace-journalism frames to a more everyday, structural conflict—namely, homelessness. With more than half a million people experiencing housing insecurity at any given moment in the U.S. (Meyer, Wyse, and Corinth 2022), homelessness is a serious social issue that garners its share of sensational, conflict-based news coverage (Borum Chattoo et al. 2021). Thus, our findings have implications not only for the type of interstate or violent conflict typically associated with peace journalism but also for many framing processes across a range of conflictual social issues.

Conflict Reporting and Peace Journalism

Conflict is inherently present in news reporting. Certainly, journalists are expected to accurately portray events and happenings, and this includes disclosing conflicts as a core function of communication (Lasswell 1948). However, reporting on conflict often focuses on negative events and can be sensational, which can decrease prosocial behavior and tolerance as well as lower evaluations of strangers (Galician and Vestre 1987; Veitch and Griffitt 1976). In an effort to curb these undesirable responses, alternative reporting approaches foreground a commitment to the social responsibility theory of the press, focusing on social problems as well as responses to those problems (McIntyre Hopkinson and Dahmen 2021).

Peace journalism represents one such approach and joins the ranks of other related reporting models, such as development journalism and solutions journalism. However, unlike development journalism, where reporting efforts are primarily concerned with nation building, economic freedom, and government accountability (Xiaoge 2009), and beyond solutions journalism, which emphasizes use of solution-oriented frames (Lough and McIntyre 2023), peace journalism aims to depolarize conflictual issues. More specifically, a peace-journalism approach aims to correct for perceived value biases of contemporary war journalism, which include a general preference for episodic, event-based reporting, official sources, and a narrative dichotomy of good and bad actors (Allen and Seaton 1999; Galtung 2003; Shinar 2007). Thus peace-journalism interventions are

designed not only to confront pressing social issues, as development and solutions journalism also address, but to de-escalate tensions between parties involved in the conflict.

In practice, peace journalism emerges when “editors and reporters make choices—of what to report and how to report it—that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolence responses to conflict” (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 5). These decisions can manifest as specific word choices, such as avoiding demonizing labels, as well as the selection of particular conflict narratives, like highlighting the grievances of all stakeholders. Such decisions have obvious implications for both information gathering, such as who journalists decide to interview, as well as the actual construction of stories and news reports. While research has primarily concerned itself with peace journalism’s theoretical development and news content, relatively few studies have examined its production and still fewer on its effects (Doll and Moy 2022).

Most, if not all, interventions associated with the peace-journalism reporting model are undergirded by framing theory, and measures developed in previous work facilitate operationalizing peace journalism as a news frame in media-effects studies (Lee and Maslog 2005). A news frame, at the core of most scholarly definitions, involves visual or verbal information that directly or implicitly defines a problem, suggests the moral evaluation of the problem, and identifies who or what is responsible for its creation as well as its solution (Entman 1993; Tewksbury 2015; Tversky and Kahneman, 1981). As such, a peace-journalism frame therefore emphasizes the perspectives of ordinary people (as opposed to elites), highlights long-term effects of conflict (as opposed to isolated events), reports the motives of all stakeholders involved (versus simple dichotomies), and deploys precise language (as opposed to generalities or stereotypes) (McGoldrick and Lynch, 2000).

As these aforementioned dichotomies illustrate, peace-journalism framing is often cast as a binary to war journalism. However, no pure peace- or war-journalism frame exists. Rather, news framing is an exercise in the social construction of reality (Tuchman 1978), influenced by myriad forces on many levels (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). This means that, in reality, all news reports are likely to contain, to varying degrees, elements of both peace and war framing. When news articles contain roughly equal numbers of peace- and war-journalism framing indicators, peace-journalism researchers categorize them as “mixed” (see Lee and Maslog 2005). In addition to more closely approximating reality, studying mixed-journalism articles allows researchers to explore the incremental effects of peace journalism and determine whether the partial inclusion of peace-journalism framing techniques might lead to individual-level effects.

Within the broader landscape of framing research, peace journalism is perhaps most closely affiliated with thematic framing approaches. Whereas thematic frames tend to foreground depth of coverage, trends, and systemic issues tied to an event, episodic frames tend to present the event in a more decontextualized fashion (Iyengar 1991). As with thematic framing, peace journalism aims to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive perspective on conflict reporting, going beyond the traditional “who, what, where, when” approach. However, peace journalism goes beyond thematic framing in that its goal is not only to identify systemic structural issues, but also to de-escalate tension and work toward peaceful resolution.

With respect to the effects of thematic framing, individuals exposed to thematically framed news are more likely to attribute responsibility for social problems to the government or society than those exposed to episodic frames (Gross 2008; Hart 2011). However,

because episodic frames personalize complex issues and can actually increase audience engagement, episodically framed stories ultimately may heighten issue importance (Grabe et al. 2017). At the same time, thematic framing studies have yielded mixed or no effects. For instance, while some studies point to the power of episodic frames to change people's perceptions and judgments, they do not always contain base-rate measures or control condition to demonstrate the actual influence of these frames (e.g., Krupnikov and Levine 2019; Ostfeld and Mutz 2014; Springer and Harwood 2015).

The relationship between thematic framing and media trust, in particular, remains an underexplored topic, an area to which this study contributes. Most framing-effects studies focus on attitudes or opinions toward a specific issue or on cognitive or affective responses toward a news item (de Vreese and Lecheler 2012). Source credibility has mostly been treated as a moderating variable in such studies. The studies that did focus on news trust as a dependent variable mostly focused on different types of frames (e.g., the game frame) as antecedents (Hopmann, Shehata, and Strömbäck 2015).

As with other studies that approach framing effects as the interaction between content and pre-existing schema audience members use to process this content (Scheufele 1999; Shen and Edwards 2005), this study of peace-journalism effects presumes that news is constructed in a way that certain frames are salient and accessible. However, the social and psychological realities of those who consume some news journalism content may well interact in ways that make favorable framing outcomes, such as increased trust in the news media and particular news items, more or less persuasive.

The influence of pre-existing attitudes and opinions on peace-journalism framing effects is especially noteworthy, given that conflict reporting ordinarily deals with sensitive political events, such as uprisings or interstate war. However, many have argued for peace journalism's relevance beyond active violence, or "hot" conflict, to include peace-oriented framing of systemic "cold" conflicts, in which conflict is not always visible in active combat or physical violence (McMahon and Chow-White 2011). Such ideas are further captured by the notion of positive peace, which refers to the "fulfillment of humans and nature, beyond simply meeting basic needs" (Galtung 2015, 321). Where most peace-journalism research has examined reporting in the context of negative peace, or the absence of active violence, less empirical work explores the role of peace journalism in advancing social justice alongside enduring structural issues. Of the few studies that have heeded this call, research has examined peace-journalism approaches toward reporting on climate change (Hackett 2017), islamophobia (Anderson 2015), racial tensions (McMahon and Chow-White 2011), and immigration debates (Carter, Thomas, and Ross 2011). Thus, the present investigation expands on this work by examining individuals' perceptions of peace-journalism framing of cold conflict, which is not only undertheorized, but also arguably more present in day-to-day news reporting around the world.

As a "cold" conflict, homelessness is frequently covered by news media, and research suggests that such reports stigmatize and vilify those who experience housing insecurity, ultimately advancing decontextualized understandings of homelessness as an individual-level problem (Borum Chattoo et al. 2021; Shields 2001). Moreover, causal attributions for homelessness are found to be rarely included in US newspaper coverage (Truong 2012). In other words, homelessness is frequently depicted in a manner reminiscent of conflicts—lacking substantial contextualization, marked by stigmatization and dehumanization, and

often neglecting underlying structural issues (Gowan 2010). By focusing on homelessness, our study aims to extend the application of peace journalism beyond traditional “hot” conflicts, showcasing its relevance in addressing a variety of societal challenges.

Peace-journalism Effects and Media Trust

Research in peace journalism includes studies on its individual-level effects. For example, experiments demonstrate that those exposed to peace journalism generally feel more empathetic and hopeful compared to those exposed to war journalism (McGoldrick and Lynch 2016). Psychophysical studies similarly suggest that those exposed to peace journalism feel reassured or soothed, citing changes in heart rate (Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers 2015). With respect to how individuals understand conflict, those exposed to peace journalism are more likely to attribute conflict to systemic causes than those exposed to war journalism (Lynch and McGoldrick 2012). These aforementioned studies, which collectively involved conflicts and participants in multiple continents, operationalized peace and war journalism in specific ways. Namely, peace (war) journalism was operationalized in televised news headings as the presence (absence) of “approach-based indicators” (e.g., empathy for the subjugated group, shared problem definition) as well as the absence (presence) of “language-based indicators” (e.g., emotive words, labeling of parties as good or bad).

Beyond such affective and cognitive effects, peace-journalism research has examined few other outcomes, though not sufficiently frequently so as to warrant clear conclusions (Lough and McIntyre 2023). Given the press’ watchdog role and how it is popularly thought of as a check on elected political leaders and a central institution in strong democracies (Schudson 2008), we focus this study on another criterion variable: trust in the media. After all, an important outcome of peace journalism is the extent to which its content prompts individuals to trust the information therein, as well as trust the institution of journalism more broadly.

Regarding the former, research concerning the trustworthiness of an individual news report is often conducted under the banner of media credibility. Though frequently used interchangeably with media trust, media credibility refers to “the clues that people use to evaluate their trust in media” (Strömbäck et al. 2020, 141). Such clues include perceived characteristics of a news item and may refer to credibility of the medium, source, or message content (Kiousis 2001). Across these referents, credibility is said to be based on factors like accuracy, believability, fairness, and objectivity (Henke, Leissner, and Möhring 2020; Tsfati 2017).

The evidence is equivocal with regard to how peace journalism may shape perceptions of news-item credibility. On one hand, research has pointed to how strategic frames, or a focus on conflict at the expense of substance and context, not only leads to a vacuum of information needed for meaningful decision-making (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996), but also can increase audience members’ cynicism (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). By subtractive logic then, peace journalism is likely to provide more substantive information and increase credibility perceptions of news reports.

On the other hand, peace journalism’s divergence from traditional news values like conflict (Loyn 2007) may result in decreased trust if individuals do not perceive its reports as realistic. So while audience members may feel soothed or hopeful following

exposure to peace journalism—or may even prefer to read reports modeled after peace journalism—they might still perceive these reports as less credible given the relative infrequency with which they encounter peace journalism vis-à-vis traditional conflict reporting. Thus, we formulate a research question concerning news-item credibility:

RQ1: How does peace-journalism framing influence individuals' perceptions of news-item credibility compared to mixed- or war-journalism framing?

Beyond perceptions of an individual news item, this study also considers effects on individuals' trust in institutionalized news media more broadly. Here, media trust refers to the uncertain relationship between news consumers and the news media in which the trustor (i.e., audience member) places confidence in a trustee (i.e., news media) under the expectation that "interactions will lead to gains rather than losses" (Strömbäck et al. 2020, p. 141). Thus, as opposed to assessing credibility of a particular object or news item, an investigation of media trust assesses individuals' level of trust in undefined circumstances or with respect to their generalized attitudes toward news media as a system (Henke, Leissner, and Möhring 2020; Prochazka and Schweiger 2019).

This additional focus on trust in the institution of journalism is grounded in both normative and empirical considerations. First, trust in mainstream news is especially crucial in times of conflict: The media play a role not only in informing the public about a conflict but also in fostering a mutual understanding among diverse stakeholders. Second, lower levels of trust in mainstream news have been shown to increase polarization as well as reduce overall trust and participation in communities (Fletcher and Park 2017). In addition, focusing on general media trust responds to calls for increased understanding of how these levels of analysis—credibility of a specific news item and trust in the institution of journalism broadly—are related (Strömbäck et al. 2020).

While studies of media trust have examined multiple attitude objects—e.g., the news report itself, individual journalists, trust in institutions or organizations (Strömbäck et al. 2020)—the latter is of chief importance given our interest in peace-journalism frames. However, it is unclear how such framing might impact more stable perceptions of news as an institution. On one hand, exposure to peace journalism could theoretically improve trust in the journalism, which is commonly criticized at the institutional level as being depressing or overly negative (Patterson 2000). On the other hand, such stable attitudes may not be easily moved following exposure to a single news report. Thus, to examine these two related, yet distinct, possible effects of exposure to peace journalism—credibility of a single news item versus trust in the institution of news media more generally—a second research question asks:

RQ2: How does peace-journalism framing influence individuals' perceptions of general trust in news media compared to mixed- or war-journalism framing?

Across investigations of both news-item credibility and general media trust, we anticipate interplay between peace-journalism framing and individual ideologies. After all, seemingly neutral coverage of an event can lead to media distrust based on selective recall of negative information and partisanship (Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken 1994). This phenomenon, referred to as the hostile media phenomenon, arises when individuals on opposing sides of an issue perceive the same information as biased against their respective side (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper 1985). Closely related are theories of motivated

reasoning, whereby individuals discredit information that is incongruent with their pre-existing attitudes (Kunda 1990), as well as selective exposure to news, in which people choose to focus on media that confirm their current beliefs or opinions (Garrett 2009).

Because reporting of conflict is often ideologically laden, peace-journalism framing may have effects only to the extent that it is consonant with study participants' existing mental models and their ideological beliefs more generally. If the treatment frame is not congruent with *a priori* positioning, then cognitive dissonance should occur (Festinger 1957) and the individual should consequently reject the frame and the potential for any associated increase in news-item credibility or general media trust. As homelessness is a politicized issue, with politically left and right camps differing on how it should be addressed, any observed effects of reading peace-journalism coverage on general media trust should therefore be moderated by political ideology. Specifically, we expect that compared to liberals, conservatives will report lower perceptions of news-item credibility and general media trust following exposure to peace journalism. Thus, two directional hypotheses state:

H1a: The effects of exposure to peace-journalism framing on perceptions of news-item credibility will be moderated by political ideology; specifically, conservatives will report lower levels of credibility compared to liberals following exposure to peace journalism.

H1b: The effects of exposure to peace-journalism framing on perceptions of general media trust following will be moderated by political ideology; specifically, conservatives will report lower levels of general media trust compared to liberals following exposure to peace journalism.

Method

To study the influence of peace journalism on news-item credibility and media trust, we conducted a between-subjects experiment on a nationally representative sample of U.S. citizens. Study participants were recruited using Lucid, a survey distribution service, which uses quota sampling to produce a sample that is reasonably representative of the U.S. population. Following IRB approval (00013958) from the University of Washington's Human Subjects Division, the study was conducted 11–13 July, 2022 and recruited 802 participants across four conditions (peace journalism, war journalism, mixed journalism, and control group). Reimbursement for participation was granted through the platform.

Before launching the full study, a pilot test was conducted in the Lucid marketplace with 218 participants. Following analysis of the pilot data, the stimuli were revised in an effort to increase the salience of each frame. These final stimuli were reviewed and ultimately approved by three senior journalists and editors, serving as a check on external validity of the articles.

Stimuli

Study participants were asked to read an online news article that was constructed to match the frames of war journalism, peace journalism, or a mix of both peace- and war-journalism indicators (see Appendix 1). The inclusion of a "mixed" treatment derives from the notion that a "neutral" control is not theoretically viable in this

context, given that peace and war frames are not pure binaries, and most, if not all, articles include some elements of both. In addition, an article that combines both peace- and war-journalism indicators allows us to examine the possibility of incremental gains in trust.

Stimuli for all treatment conditions were constructed using existing U.S. news headlines, including core facts from actual news reports, and subsequently constructed using Lee and Maslog's (2005) indicators of war and peace journalism, which account for differences in both language and narrative framing approach. Content across the articles varied in six main areas: (1) the visibility of the effects of conflict, with war journalism focusing primarily on visible effects and peace journalism reporting invisible effects as well; (2) orientation toward elites versus people; (3) a focus on dichotomies versus multiparty orientation; (4) event-based reporting versus reporting that addresses solutions or long-term consequences; (5) the presence or absence of victimization language and (6) emotive word choices. The resulting peace- and war-journalism materials included parallel manipulations throughout at the paragraph level (i.e., each paragraph containing war-journalism indicators was exchanged with a paragraph using peace-journalism indicators and vice versa) as well as different headlines. The stimuli include an equal number of source quotes, though the nature of these sources varied according to the coding categories shown in Table 1.

The "mixed" treatment article was constructed using an equal number of war- and peace-journalism indicators from the respective test materials and focused primarily on event facts as opposed to any interpretation, the precedent for which comes from Lee and Maslog's (2005) coding of what they call "neutral" journalism. Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of these manipulations, following Lee and Maslog's (2005) approach. Individuals in the fourth (control) group were not exposed to any article and therefore only answered questions pertaining to general media trust.

All stimuli were provided under the guise of the Associated Press (AP) and did not include a listed byline, thus controlling for credibility of the message source across conditions. We chose the Associated Press because it operates as a wire service, which is less familiar to the average audience member in comparison to prominent national news

Table 1. Coding categories for peace-journalism and war-journalism frames with illustrative examples.

<i>(adapted from Lee and Maslog 2005)</i>	Frame coding categories <i>War journalism (WJ)</i>	Examples from treatment material <i>Peace journalism (PJ)</i>
WJ: Reports mainly on visible effects of conflict PJ: Reports also on invisible effects of conflict	e.g., emphasis on "cleaning up" streets	e.g., emphasis on mental health provisions, social services
WJ: Elite-oriented PJ: People-oriented	e.g., primarily quotes from mayor and local government officials	e.g., primarily quotes from activists and people who are homeless
WJ: Two-party orientation; dichotomy of good and bad PJ: Multiparty orientation and avoids dichotomies	e.g., issue between residents and people who are homeless	e.g., issue for official and community collaborations
WJ: Focuses on here and now; zero-sum orientation PJ: Reports causes and consequences; solution-oriented	e.g., keeping sidewalks open and safe for residents	e.g., structural change, alternative options to address homelessness
WJ: Uses victimizing and demonizing language PJ: Avoids victimizing language	e.g., "the troubled encampment along Fourth Avenue ..."	e.g., "people living in the area of Fourth Avenue ..."
WJ: Uses emotive words PJ: Avoids emotive words	e.g., "intensifying the battle for Seattle's streets"	e.g., "Efforts taken to address encampments"

outlets (e.g., Fox News, MSNBC, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*). Additionally, compared to outlets with ideological leanings, the AP is generally regarded as impartial and unbiased by audiences (Gallup/Knight Foundation 2018).

The news topic of the article revolved around homelessness in Seattle, Washington, USA. The United States provides a unique context in which to consider the effects of peace journalism, given that the majority of studies in this area have focused on large inter- and intrastate wars, or ongoing “hot” conflict in the Global South (McMahon and Chow-White 2011), with less attention paid to how similar processes unfold in seemingly stable democracies like the United States. As a topic, homelessness represents the type of “cold” conflict previously described. Furthermore, homelessness is sufficiently salient so as to warrant media coverage (thereby bolstering external validity), and despite political ideology shaping attitudes toward these issues to some extent, the proposed solutions to homelessness have social and economic as well as political implications. Individual differences in topic salience and involvement therefore were included as control variables in the analyses.

Before reading the online news article, study participants completed a questionnaire that captured information about their socioeconomic and demographic information, political ideology, political interest, media exposure, and attitudes toward homelessness. After participants read their randomly assigned article, they completed a questionnaire tapping into their evaluation of the article, reported credibility and accuracy of the article, and reported trust in news media more generally. Several manipulation and attention checks were included throughout the instrument. On average, respondents completed the questionnaire in under 15 min ($M = 13:04$, $SD = 11:43$). All respondents in the three treatment groups answered the manipulation check following exposure to the stimulus.

Measures

Our first dependent variable, *news-item credibility*, was assessed by a battery of five-point Likert items, adapted from Gaziano and McGrath’s (1987) News Credibility Scale, which offers a global assessment of credibility across four dimensions: believability, reliability, ability to improve understanding, and medium preferences (see also Tsfaty and Cappella 2003). Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that the article they had read was (1) credible, (2) balanced, (3) fair, (4) accurate, (5) biased (reverse-coded), and (6) opinionated (reverse-coded). The scale also included items about whether the article (7) told the whole story, (8) was based on factual information, (9) reported fairly on the topic, and (10) can be trusted. The items were averaged to create a single measure of news-item credibility ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.75$) and was highly reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .908$).

Our second dependent variable, *general trust in news media*, was designed to tap media trust at an institutional level rather than trust in the specific stimulus provided to each participant, respectively. The same items employed in the operationalization of news-item credibility were used in measuring general trust in news media, with respondents being asked, “In your opinion, the news media are ...” The ten items were averaged to create a single measure of general media trust ($M = 2.77$, $SD = .90$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .935$). While many operationalizations of media trust exist, there is some consensus that media trust should be measured “by multi-item scales but not different dimensions that are measured and used as separate variables” (Strömbäck et al. 2020, 142). We again use the News Credibility Scale with “news media” in general as the referent, given

previous work showing good model fit when applied to general trust in media, both in the scale's original form (Gaziano and McGrath 1986) as well as in later variations (Prochazka and Schweiger 2019). Furthermore, this decision eases interpretation when compared alongside news-item credibility scores.

The analyses for this study also included a number of covariates. *Political ideology* (conservatism) was assessed by averaging two seven-point, left-right scales measuring social and economic liberalism and conservatism, respectively ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.72$). *Political interest* was measured using one five-point item asking respondents how interested they are in politics ("not at all [interested]," "not very," "somewhat," "very," or "extremely interested") ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .79$). *News use* was calculated by averaging six items asking respondents how often ("never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," or "all the time") they use magazines (print or online), newspapers (print or online), television, radio, social media, and the internet ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .69$). *Issue salience* was assessed by asking respondents how important they perceived homelessness to be as an issue currently facing the U.S. The average response on the 11-point interval-level scale ("not at all important" to "extremely important") was high ($M = 8.03$, $SD = 2.04$). The instrument also included several demographic variables that served as controls: age ($M = 52.92$, $SD = 16.70$), gender (68% female), race and ethnicity (82% White), and education (Mdn = Associate's degree).

Manipulation Check

Because the stimuli were created based on Lee and Maslog's (2005) indicators of war and peace journalism, an approach that takes into account differences in both language and overall narrative framing, our manipulation check asked respondents to assess the relative amount of conflict versus cooperation present in the article they read. Tapping into participants' cognitive processing of the larger narrative framing of the article—a latent dimension of peace- versus war-journalism framing—provides a more robust manipulation check than asking them to recall specific language manipulations such as source type or demonizing word choices.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that our manipulation check was successful. The three experimental groups reported significantly different mean levels of cooperation based on their condition assignment ($F(2, 597) = [27.21]$, $p < .001$). The peace-journalism group reported the highest level of cooperation in the article ($M = 3.95$, $SE = .11$), followed by those in the mixed-journalism condition ($M = 3.25$, $SE = .11$) and the war-journalism condition ($M = 2.80$, $SE = .11$). A post-hoc Tukey's HSD test showed the means differed significantly from one another at $p < .001$. Therefore, the peace-, war-, and mixed-framing treatments had the intended effects.

Results

News-item Credibility

RQ1 asked whether peace-journalism framing would influence perceptions of news-item credibility. According to the ordinary least squares regressions shown in Table 2, exposure to the peace-journalism frame results in higher credibility judgments of the news article than the war-journalism frame (see Model 1). A similar effect emerges for the mixed condition

Table 2. Predicting news-article credibility.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
Condition (Referent: war journalism)						
Peace journalism	0.338***	(0.074)	0.362***	(0.078)	0.861***	(0.209)
Mixed journalism	0.173*	(0.074)	0.155*	(0.078)	0.509*	(0.202)
Political ideology (conservatism)			-0.021	(0.019)	0.051	(0.033)
Age			0.000	(0.000)	0.000	(0.000)
Education			-0.008	(0.022)	-0.008	(0.022)
Gender (female)			-0.012	(0.069)	-0.031	(0.069)
Issue salience			0.026	(0.016)	0.025	(0.016)
Political interest			0.012	(0.040)	0.017	(0.040)
News use			0.168***	(0.049)	0.171***	(0.049)
Interactions (Referent: war journalism)						
Peace journalism * conservatism					-0.121**	(0.046)
Mixed journalism * conservatism					-0.089†	(0.046)
Adjusted R^2	.031		.051		.061	

Notes: Cells represent coefficients from ordinary least squares regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

† $p < 0.10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

containing both peace- and war-journalism indicators. While exposure to either peace-journalism or mixed-journalism framing bolsters perceptions of news-article credibility, the former has a stronger effect. Moreover, this finding remains robust after controlling for other demographics, media use, political interest, and issue salience (see Model 2). These control variables were included in the analysis to improve the robustness of the models. Of the control variables, news use was the sole statistically significant predictor of news-article credibility: The more people consume news in general, the higher their perceptions of news credibility.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that political ideology moderates the effect of exposure to peace-journalism frames on trust in the news article that study participants read. Specifically, more ideologically liberal (conservative) individuals would find peace-journalism (war-journalism) frames more credible. In line with this expectation, Model 3 reveals a negative interaction effect of peace journalism and political ideology. As depicted in Figure 1, the peace-journalism article was judged most credible by liberals and least credible by conservatives who were exposed to this condition. A similar trend emerged in the mixed-journalism condition, whereby greater conservatism was associated with lower credibility scores for the article. This latter trend, however, did not reach statistical levels of significance. Contrasted against the peace- and mixed-journalism conditions, the war-journalism condition found greater conservatism to be positively associated with perceived credibility of the news story. H1a was thus supported.

General News Trust

Regarding individuals' general trust in the news media (RQ2), Table 3 indicates our experimental stimuli did not have an effect and accounted for virtually zero variance in the outcome variable. However, once the analysis (Model 2) includes control variables, the variance accounted for increases to more than 13%. Three control variables emerged as significant predictors: political ideology, political interest, and news use. In particular, the more conservative people are, the less they trust the news in general. A higher political interest also positively influences general news trust. As with news-item credibility, media use positively predicts general trust in the news media.

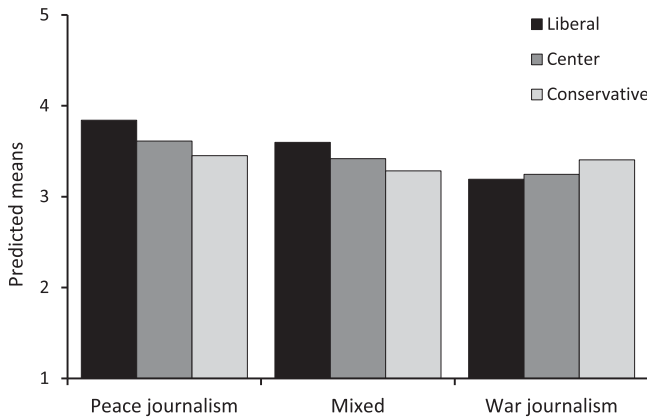


Figure 1. Credibility of news article by experimental condition and ideology.

Hypothesis 1b stated that political ideology would moderate the effect of our experimental manipulations on general news trust. Model 3 (Table 3) shows the results of the model, including the interaction terms between political ideology (conservatism) and each of the peace-journalism, mixed-journalism, and control conditions with war journalism as the referent. The data reveal a statistically significant interaction effect between peace journalism and conservatism. As shown in Figure 2, among study participants who read the peace-journalism article, general trust in news media was highest among those most liberal and lowest among those most conservative. Indeed, this general trend emerged for all treatment groups. However, the difference between liberals and conservatives is least among those in the war-journalism condition. In other words, peace-journalism reporting appears to have the greatest impact in bolstering media trust among those who are most liberal. H1b was therefore supported.

Table 3. Predicting general news trust.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	(SE)	B	SE	B	(SE)
Condition (Referent: war journalism)						
Peace journalism	-0.117	(0.091)	-0.025	(0.090)	0.535*	(0.242)
Mixed	-0.127	(0.091)	-0.100	(0.090)	0.177	(0.235)
Control	-0.155	(0.091)	-0.079	(0.090)	0.197	(0.232)
Political ideology (conservatism)			-0.158***	(0.019)	-0.086*	(0.040)
Age			0.000	(0.000)	0.000	(0.000)
Education			0.007	(0.022)	0.007	(0.022)
Gender (female)			0.030	(0.068)	0.016	(0.068)
Issue salience			0.019	(0.016)	0.018	(0.016)
Political interest			0.097*	(0.040)	0.101*	(0.040)
News use			0.214***	(0.048)	0.218***	(0.057)
Interactions (Referent: war journalism)						
Peace journalism * conservatism					-0.135*	(0.054)
Mixed journalism * conservatism					-0.071	(0.054)
Control * conservatism					-0.071	(0.053)
Adjusted R ²	.001		.134		.138	

Notes: Cells represent coefficients from ordinary least squares regressions with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Discussion

Motivated by the dearth of empirical research on the effects of peace journalism, this study sought to examine how exposure to an article employing peace-journalism techniques might shape audience members' perceptions of that article's credibility as well as their general trust in the news media. After all, trust in news—whether it be news content, a specific news source, or the news media in general—can influence the extent to which individuals attend to and/or process information. Also, given how the lion's share of research on peace journalism revolves around “hot” conflicts that involve active violence or interstate war, we examined the effects of peace journalism by applying its concepts to news coverage of a systemic U.S. social issue.

Our findings indicate that peace-journalism framing does indeed exert some level of influence on how individuals evaluate the trustworthiness of news. Specifically, compared to conventional conflict reporting, our study shows that peace-journalism framing may have short-term positive effects on individuals' perceptions of a news article's credibility, even when accounting for one's political ideology. Peace-journalism framing was the strongest predictor of how credible readers perceived the article to be, but interestingly, study participants in the mixed condition also were likely to report their article as being more credible compared to individuals who read the article framed in traditional conflicting-reporting style (our referent group). In other words, including some war-journalism elements results in lower credibility scores for the article, even when counterbalanced by an equal number of peace-journalism elements. This finding suggests that including even some elements of peace journalism is enough to increase audience members' trust in an individual news article. Contrary to its effects on trust in the article itself, peace-journalism framing did not exert an impact on trust in the media more generally. Instead, our findings suggest that these more generalized attitudes were driven by individuals' levels of conservatism, their levels of political interest, and their consumption of news (which also predicted trust in the news article).

Moreover, the effects of these frames were not uniform. As predicted by our hypotheses and supported by the data, exposure to peace-, war-, and mixed-journalism frames exerted differential impacts on media-related trust, as evidenced by the significant

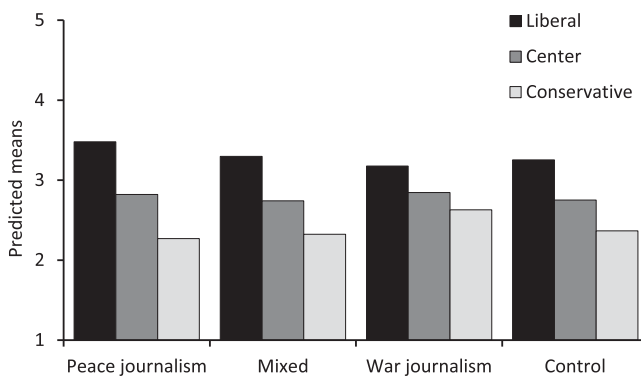


Figure 2. General news trust by experimental condition and ideology.

interaction effects. Our study shows that conservatives report higher levels of general news trust following exposure to the war-journalism article than conservative individuals who are exposed to peace journalism, lending support to existing literature around selective exposure, or the idea that individuals prefer content that is consonant with their mental models and ideological beliefs (Garrett 2009). These results are also consistent with the notion that questions asking about general attitudes toward unspecified media tend to elicit more ideological dispositions, perhaps for lack of a stable point of reference for judgments of trustworthiness, such as a particular news item or source (Strömbäck et al. 2020). However, given the increases in news-item credibility across diverse ideological orientations when exposed to peace journalism, one can reasonably surmise that if such framing is applied consistently, we might expect positive increases in general perceptions of media trust to emerge over time.

These findings have important implications for journalists, audiences, and society more broadly. With respect to journalists, conflict and negativity are often considered to be important news values. However, reporting social issues with an emphasis on the conflict itself—rather than a focus on cooperation, structural solutions, and creating mutual understanding—appears to decrease the trust audiences have in that news report. Thus, while journalists might produce sensationalist conflict (“war”) coverage in an effort to attract attention or increase engagement with news, such an approach may not only decrease engagement (McIntyre and Sobel 2017) but actually undermine the credibility of their reports.

However, our data also show that there may not be a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to increasing media trust, particularly given the moderating role of political ideology in shaping the exposure to peace journalism on news-item credibility. Instead, these results seem to support concerns over fragmented news publics, or the idea that audiences increasingly engage news media within small groups of like-minded individuals (Fletcher and Nielsen 2017; Jamieson and Cappella 2008). This may mean that efforts to increase trust among some audiences necessarily decreases trust among others. Journalists and media professionals should therefore consider a multifaceted approach when engaged in the work of trust building.

Our study may have further implications for audiences’ media use. Some evidence already indicates that individuals turn away from media outlets they do not trust and look for other sources of information (Tsfati and Cappella 2003). Thus, if a peace-journalism frame is perceived as relatively more credible than a war-journalism frame, it is likely that peace-journalism content may encourage audiences to support news work and engage with news content, whereas war-journalism framing would suppress or decrease these intentions. In times where many societal issues are highly polarized and trust in the traditional news media is decreasing, this point is especially critical. By consuming news that integrates peace-journalism guidance, audience trust might be—even partially—restored over time, ensuring that individuals are less likely to turn away from professionally vetted information in favor of more nefarious sources, such as sources of mis/disinformation.

As with any experimental study, our research design necessarily shapes the conclusions we can draw from the data. More specifically, because we manipulated treatment articles across several principles of peace journalism (e.g., word choice, source quotes, narrative frame, etc.), it is difficult to isolate or disentangle the extent to which each explains or drives the framing effects that emerged. For example, it is possible that a particular principle of peace journalism (e.g., people-oriented sourcing as opposed to elite

sources) influenced individuals' trust perceptions more than other indicators. While future work may seek to isolate the relative importance of specific peace-journalism indicators, peace journalism has been described as a "broad" framing approach (Lee and Maslog 2005). In other words, when peace journalism is presented to practitioners as an alternative reporting approach, vis-à-vis institutional trainings or other instructional materials, it is marketed as journalistic decision making across diverse story elements, theoretically necessitating the manipulation of multiple aspects of reporting.

Additionally, given that our experiment focused specifically on the issue of homelessness, research should attempt to replicate this study with other social issues. As a long-standing issue facing the U.S. and one that was exacerbated by the pandemic, homelessness was deemed by study participants as quite important. It would be useful to understand whether articles employing peace-journalism frames would be as effective (i.e., seen as more credible) when covering issues that are beginning to appear on the political landscape. If audience members' trust is critical in how they attend to and process information, then building that trust—as it relates to the media or other stakeholders—early on during public discourse about an issue is crucial.

Beyond considering how peace-journalism frames influence perceptions of news, additional research is needed to better understand the extent to which peace journalism influences audiences' attitudes and judgments toward social issues themselves. While previous research has examined how peace journalism affects people's emotions (e.g., Lynch, McGoldrick, and Heathers 2015; McGoldrick and Lynch 2016) or political knowledge (e.g., Thiel and Kempf 2014), we know less about whether peace journalism prompts individuals to support constructive conflict management or non-violent responses to conflict, which some have envisioned as normative goals (Kempf 2019; Lynch and McGoldrick 2005). Indeed, if the media's key functions include surveilling the sociopolitical environment and facilitating dialogue across diverse viewpoints, as Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) noted, peace journalism has the potential to foster social cohesion in times of distress. The question before scholars and practitioners is to understand the conditions and processes by which this can occur.

Disclosure Statement

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Appendix 1




(1) Peace-journalism stimuli



U.S. News World News Politics Sports Entertainment Business Technology Health Science Oddities Lifestyle Listen  

Seattle activists consider alternative approaches to address homelessness as encampment-removal deadline looms

March 9, 2022

SEATTLE (AP) — Advocates for the homeless in Seattle are ramping up efforts to work with city officials to provide legal temporary shelter for residents of the downtown Fourth Avenue encampments, an area that the city is now working to clear.

People living in the area of Fourth Avenue between James Street and Columbia Street were given a week's notice to pack their belongings, intensifying efforts to connect those at the encampment with social services.

Emilie Davis, a member of the Seattle-Tacoma County Coalition to End Homelessness, said the hesitancy stems from the city not going far enough to create an environment that truly addresses people's needs, which cannot be solved with just a bed.

"I don't think it's going to be possible to make an unacceptable solution acceptable just by wishing for it," she said. "I think the solution isn't about sleeping on a mat with a bin of your belongings. The solution is about structural change and having alternative options for people."

Victoria Smith-Garcia is working on one of those alternatives. Her organization, Forward Operating Base Hope, is working to set up a sanctioned campsite in Seattle to help get King County's homeless populations housed.

Because the campsite is sanctioned by the city, residents will not have to worry about being removed from the area, which Smith-Garcia said can make getting in touch with people difficult. She says she will know where to find people in the campsite when housing becomes available.

"When you got people out on the streets in different locations, they're getting pushed one way or the other, they don't want to leave their items because theft is real out in the streets," Smith-Garcia said. "They end up stuck in this little area, in their own little world, even though it's in everyone's best interest that we integrate these people back into our communities and work forces."


For Jacoby Carter, who has been homeless for nearly six months, this type of insecurity makes it particularly difficult to get ahead.



"Providing a space for people to rest their head and not have to worry about where the next meal is coming from, if their belongings are safe, not where they're going to get pushed to, and just focus on themselves is huge," he said. "I just want a safe and secure life, just like everybody else."

The efforts being undertaken now to address the downtown encampments suggest the way forward in Seattle might come from greater collaboration between city officials, non-governmental organizations, and community members.




The city announced Tuesday that it continues to assess encampments for clearing. Several more encampments sited along Fourth Avenue rank high on the list, as the city plans to install new sewer and water mains in the area.

(2) War-journalism stimuli



U.S. News World News Politics Sports Entertainment Business Technology Health Science Oddities Lifestyle Listen  

Seattle to forcibly clear troubled homeless encampment downtown amid looming safety concerns

March 9, 2022   

SEATTLE (AP) — After starting and stopping more than two weeks ago, city crews have begun finishing work to clear the troubled homeless encampment along Fourth Avenue across from Seattle City Hall.

In a statement from the city, Parks and Recreation staff posted a removal notice Wednesday at 6 a.m. to have all belongings and tents moved from Fourth Avenue between James Street and Columbia Street within the week or they will be bulldozed by force.

The effort comes to “address obstruction to pedestrian access” and “protect city residents,” according to the statement, nearly two weeks after the Seattle Fire Department responded to two fires at the encampment.

“We appreciate the effort of the city and county over the last weeks to get the chronically homeless out of the area,” the Downtown Seattle Association said in a statement. “As we work toward downtown’s recovery, it’s important to keep the city sidewalks open and safe to city residents.... At this point, it’s us versus them [the homeless].”

The city said the that social service organizations, such as the Seattle-Tacoma County Coalition to End Homelessness, have increased efforts to connect with those at the encampment over recent weeks. The Coalition’s efforts, such as working with the city to set up sanctioned campsites, are still developing.

Clean-up of the troubled Fourth Avenue encampment was halted in February after protesters disrupted crews who were removing tents. The clearing follows other major encampment forced removals that have taken place in recent months around the city. Shortly before Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell took office in January, the city cleared two large encampments at Ballard Commons and Green Lake Park.

“Cleaning up our streets and limiting dangerous interactions has been a priority of mine since the beginning of my campaign,” Harrell said in a statement.


In his first State of the City address in mid-February, Harrell outlined some of the changes his office would implement to deal with the homelessness crisis, including the launch of a new system to record complaints about encampments.



“Resident complaints are of the utmost concern to any city official,” Seattle Councilmember Sara Nelson said. “Mayor Harrell is keeping his promise to make downtown sidewalks safe and accessible for the residential community and I support him in that.”

Seattle resident complaints about violent disruptions by the homeless have reportedly increased in recent months, according to the city, heightening the stakes and intensifying the battle for Seattle’s streets.




The city of Seattle announced Tuesday that more sweeps will be taking place later this month. Several encampments along Fourth Avenue will be bulldozed for a city project to install new sewer and water mains in the surrounding area.

(3) Mixed stimuli



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Seattle moves to address homeless encampments in downtown

March 9, 2022   

SEATTLE (AP) — After starting and stopping more than two weeks ago, city crews have begun finishing work to clear the homeless encampment along Fourth Avenue across from Seattle City Hall.

People living in the area of Fourth Avenue between James Street and Columbia Street were given a week's notice to pack their belongings, intensifying efforts to connect those at the encampment with social services.

According to a statement from the city, forced removal of the encampment is intended to “address obstruction to pedestrian access” and “protect city residents,” this coming nearly two weeks after the Seattle Fire Department responded to two fires in the area.

However, Emilie Davis, a member of the Seattle-Tacoma County Coalition to End Homelessness, is skeptical of the forced-removal approach. “I don’t think it’s going to be possible to make an unacceptable solution acceptable just by wishing for it,” she said. “I think the solution isn’t about sleeping on a mat with a bin of your belongings. The solution is about structural change and having alternative options for people.”

The Coalition in recent weeks has increased efforts to connect with people living in the encampment as the reality of forced removal looms, fueling tensions.

“Cleaning up our streets and limiting dangerous interactions has been a priority of mine since the beginning of my campaign,” Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said in a statement.

The city announced Tuesday that more sweeps will be taking place later this month. Several encampments along Fourth Avenue will be removed for a city project to install new sewer and water mains in the surrounding area.