

Partisan Media Bias in the Framing of the Parkland School Shooting and the March For Our Lives Movement

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<https://doi.org/10.53076/JMVR53552> | Article History: Received October 13, 2023; Accepted August 14, 2024

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of partisan media bias in the reporting of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018, and on the March For Our Lives gun control protests that followed the shooting. This study posits partisan media bias at the center of the Parkland shooting. It asks how partisan bias affected the way the media constructed narratives about the shooting and the youth activists who mobilized because of their experiences of victimization. The results show that the national media's framing of the Parkland advocates and the tragedy itself depended on their partisan orientations. Additionally, the results indicate that there are meaningful differences in the reporting that advocates can strategically use to gain positive coverage from news media.

KEYWORDS

mass shootings, partisan media bias, gun control, media framing, Parkland

The shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018, sparked a nationwide student-led social movement that demanded more gun control¹ measures from political leaders. The March For Our Lives (MFOL) demonstration in Washington, D.C. grew into one of the largest protests in the United States, with over 800 sibling events nationwide. Elected officials, the media, and the public praised the young Parkland students for their activism. The activists also had a significant impact in building both public and elite consensus on the issue of gun control. The Republican-led Florida Legislature passed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act less than a month after the shooting, which tightened gun control measures in Florida. In addition, while the student-led nonprofit organization March For Our Lives was unable to convince the Trump administration to support legislative changes on a federal level, their policy suggestions were embraced by the presidential campaign of Joe Biden in 2020. This study explores the impact of the Parkland students' activism by examining the narratives that were told about them in national news media together with narratives about guns and gun control. In particular, this study seeks to understand how narratives about guns are constructed in mass shooting reporting by an increasingly partisan news media and the opportunities activists might have in communicating their message within that landscape.

The data for this study was collected from four national news media sources, *The New York Times*, CNN, Fox News, and Breitbart to answer two research questions: 1) How did major news outlets frame the survivors-turned-advocates for gun control and 2) how did major news outlets frame the topic of mass shootings in the aftermath of the Parkland shooting? The analysis relied both on deductive and inductive content analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Kuckartz, 2014; Morse et al., 2021; Schreier, 2012), while drawing on studies on media framing of youth political participation (Gordon, 2009; Thurlow, 2007; Wyn, 2005), mass shootings in general (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004; McCluskey, 2017; Muschert & Carr, 2006), and the Parkland shooting in

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particular (Holody & Shaughnessy, 2020; LaRose et al., 2021; Rohlinger et al., 2022). The findings were considered within the framework of partisan media bias (Levendusky, 2013a; Mutz, 2006; Shultziner & Stukalin, 2020, 2021) to untangle the choice of frames each news outlet was contending with from the very beginning of the shooting.

The way partisanship affects mass shooting reporting by the media has been researched to some degree (McCluskey, 2017; Muschert, 2007). However, besides the study by Holody and Shaughnessy (2020), the role of partisan media bias has been absent from the studies examining the reporting on the Parkland shooting. Arguably, the Parkland shooting presents a unique case to study due to the emergence of a strong national student movement that made explicit political claims about the shooting, inclining the news media towards a particularly partisan framing in its reporting. Researching the effects of partisan media bias on mass shooting coverage is crucial, especially as highly publicized, high-fatality shootings are becoming more frequent (Valeeva et al., 2022). At the same time, the media landscape is increasingly fragmented and partisan (Hollander, 2008; Mutz, 2006; Stroud, 2010). In addition, this study contributes to the scholarship on media representations of social movements and protests by considering the interaction between the protest paradigm and partisan media bias. The traditional protest paradigm dictates that media representations of social movements are mainly negative and sensational (McCurdy, 2012; McLeod, 2000). However, recent studies have found that if the ideological leanings of the newspaper align with the movement, the protest paradigm is less consequential (Chuang & Tyler, 2023; Kananovich, 2022). The case of the MFOL movement offers a new perspective on a student-led protest, which was highly critical of both parties in the divided government but took a partisan stance on a contentious political issue.

The Parkland students' social media activism has gained considerable research attention (Austin et al., 2020; Cheas et al., 2020; Jenkins & Lopez, 2018; Zoller & Casteel, 2021), but little consideration has been given to how the national news media participated in either promoting their message or discrediting it. By examining how prominent news outlets represented the activists themselves and their diagnosis of the issue and its solutions, inferences can be drawn about the frames different media outlets are willing to adopt and how advocates can strategically exploit partisan media bias. In addition to studying how partisan media bias influences the framing of mass shootings, the study's findings clarify the opportunities and challenges that partisan media poses to advocacy groups.

Literature Review

Gun Control as an Issue

Gun violence is a unique epidemic in the United States (American Public Health Association, 2022). On one hand, studies consistently show that there is a correlation between gun ownership and gun-related deaths (Leach-Kemon & Sirull, 2023; Miller et al., 2022; Studdert et al., 2022; Wallace et al., 2021). On the other hand, gun culture is steeped with historical ideas about what it means to be "American," notions that are intertwined with individualism and the fundamental rights of citizens to be free from overreaches by the government inscribed into the Constitution. In the U.S. context, gun control is difficult as a social regulatory issue that is passively supported by the majority of the public (Gallup, 2022) but singularly opposed by an active minority (the gun control paradox, see Cook & Goss, 2014; Goss, 2006). Furthermore, the 400 million guns in circulation (Small Arms Survey, 2017) can make the problem seem insurmountable. These factors have contributed to the fact that it was only after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting that a nationwide grassroots movement mobilized around the issue of gun control in a comprehensive way (Cook & Goss, 2014). Sustained advocacy work has only recently led to significant action by state and federal legislatures to address the problem, even though mass shootings are a constant reason for public outrage, and communities, often poor and of color, are being ravaged by everyday gun violence (Kravitz-Wirtz et al., 2022).

Partisan Media Bias and Covering Protest

Gun control messaging in the United States happens in a media landscape that is especially fragmented and politically polarized (Starr, 2012; Steppat et al., 2022; Stroud, 2011). Partisan media has been widely studied and debated. There is significant disagreement whether news media is traditionally more liberal (Groseclose, 2011) or conservative (McChesney, 2003), how much partisan preferences influence the public's choice of news outlets (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2017; Nelson & Webster, 2017; Weeks et al., 2016), or how much media exacerbate partisan polarization of the public (Levendusky, 2013a, 2013b; Stroud 2010; Suhay et al., 2018). However, it seems clear that news media is increasingly being influenced by partisan considerations from the top of the organizational structure to the individual choices journalists make (Mutz, 2006; Shultziner & Stukalin, 2020, 2021). Partisanship does not affect every news outlet the same way, but it can influence what news gets reported, what becomes salient, and what frames are used (Shultziner & Stukalin, 2021).

When reporting on social movements and protests, the protest paradigm can complicate the logic of partisan bias. Gitlin (1980) argued that the media has a vested interest in upholding the status quo to protect its place in the power structure, and as such will not contradict the fundamental organizing principles of society. For example, when news media reports the actions of a movement protesting against its government, they reproduce social conflict “in terms derived from the dominant ideology” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 270). Indeed, scholars have found that news media's reports of social movements often marginalize protestors, especially those of color (Harlow et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2019; Mills, 2017), delegitimize movement claims (Ashley & Olson, 1998; Xu, 2013), emphasize individuals over the collective (Gitlin, 1980), and sensationalize violence (Brown, 2021). When the protestors are young, as was in the case of Parkland, negative tropes about youth political participation can also be employed. Young people can be seen as still “citizens in the making” who need to be taught how to “correctly” engage in politics by the adults in their lives such as their parents and teachers (Collin, 2015; Earl et al., 2017). These understandings of youth political participation can lead to media coverage that frames student activists in an infantilized manner, depoliticizing their message, or suggests that the students are being manipulated by radicalized adults (Gordon, 2009; Thurlow, 2007). Moreover, not only is youth activism sometimes seen as lacking in adult guidance, but it can also be likened to youth delinquency that is troubling and destabilizing for society (Wyn, 2005).

However, most recent studies have found that the protest paradigm misses some nuances in analyses of media coverage. Media can also portray protestors sympathetically by amplifying diverse social media voices (Elmasry & el-Nawawy, 2016) and legitimizing the claims of protestors (Li et al., 2023; Trivundža & Brlek, 2017). This is especially true if the protestors challenging the state are ideologically aligned with the partisan leanings of the news outlets (Chuang & Tyler, 2023; Kananovich, 2022; Kim & Shahin, 2019). In cases of student movements, sympathetically predisposed media coverage can also rely on positive conceptualizations of youth activism, where their participation is seen as different rather than lacking in adult guidance (Collin, 2015). These types of understandings can be tied to a notion that young people are capable of bringing about change in the world and as such become the sites where adults may project all their hopes and dreams of socioeconomic transformation (Wyn, 2005).

Framing of Mass Shootings

Gun control often gets attention in news media after a mass shooting. Scholars have extensively studied media framing of mass shootings since the Columbine shooting of 1999. Studies of mass shooting reporting have employed framing analysis from diverse perspectives. For example, Lawrence and Birkland (2004) analyzed issue-defining frames, while Holody and Daniel (2016) and Muschert and Carr (2006) considered frame salience by studying which frame was given the most attention, based on factors such as repetition or headlines. Holody and Shaughnessy (2020) examined frame valence by analyzing whether frames emphasized positive or negative qualities of the subject matter. In Columbine, the most prevalent media frames were gun control, mental illness, and violent popular culture (Lawrence & Birkland, 2004; Muschert,

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2007). Mass shootings were framed through moral panics, which were particularly popular in news media discourse at the turn of the 20th century. The perceived rise in crime was seen as connected to young people confusing fantasy with reality and being corrupted and desensitized to violence due to TV shows and video games (Glassner, 1999). Such narratives permeated the Columbine reporting too, which played its part in popularizing the “tough on crime” policy positions that followed (Altheide, 2009; Madfis, 2016; Morrow et al., 2016).

The frames in later shootings have remained largely the same with the three key narrators offered as the most prevalent explanation to the question of why such massacres happen (Schildkraut & Muschert, 2013). Especially in the beginning of the news cycle, focus is given to the particulars of the perpetrator, their mental health, and race if it is something other than white (Holody et al., 2012). Attention is given to how culpable other actors are in the shooting, including law enforcement, the school, and the family of the perpetrator (McCluskey, 2017; Muschert, 2007). After the Aurora, Colorado theater and Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings in 2012, there was a widespread media shift to focus on the victims rather than the perpetrator (Holody & Daniel, 2016; Schildkraut & Muschert, 2014). Studies have also found evidence that the violent popular culture frame is becoming less relevant, while ideologically motivated, terrorism-related shootings are increasingly receiving intense attention in media coverage (Silva, 2020; Silva & Capellan, 2018, 2019).

The Parkland shooting has been the subject of multiple studies. Rohlinger et al. (2022) examined claims made for gun control and gun rights after the Parkland shooting in both national and local news and found that political actors in Florida were able to amplify a unified gun control message, while gun rights groups promoted multiple competing frames to their detriment. LaRose et al. (2021) studied how media framing of the Parkland shooting changed across time and place and discovered that while the framing remained largely the same as in previous shootings, there was a particular emphasis on school security. Holody and Shaughnessy (2020) identified in their study of media frames used in national and local coverage of the Parkland shooting that gun control was the most salient frame. They concluded that the MFOL activists recognized how previously established mass shooting frames, such as mental illness and popular culture, were distractions that disrupted the gun control conversation they wished to promote (Holody & Shaughnessy, 2020). Studies on media framing of school shootings have shown that news outlets rely on well-established scripts when reporting on such tragedies. Furthermore, the studies on Parkland in particular have shown largely the same trends, with the exception of the student activists who managed to draw more focused attention to gun control. This study continues and expands this literature by considering how partisan media bias affected these narrative choices and the opportunities and challenges the activists had in this landscape.

The Current Study

To examine partisan bias in the reporting of the Parkland school shooting and to understand how the activists and their advocacy work were represented by news media, this study posits two main research questions:

RQ₁: How did major news outlets frame the survivors-turned-advocates for gun control?

RQ₂: How did major news outlets frame the topic of mass shootings in the aftermath of the Parkland shooting?

Within the framework of partisan media bias and the protest paradigm, this study predicts that left-leaning news outlets (*The New York Times* and CNN) will frame the gun control advocates positively, while right-leaning news outlets (Fox News and Breitbart) will frame the movement negatively. Furthermore, the study predicts that partisan dynamics will also influence coverage about the shooting itself. Gun control as a solution to gun violence has been a dividing issue between the parties ever since the 1960s (Cook & Goss, 2014). Most recently, Democrats in Congress have almost unanimously supported gun control, while Republicans have remained unified in their support for gun rights (Kurtzleben, 2018). The study expects that established frames found in previous studies will be used to frame the shooting. In addition, the frames discovered in the

three Parkland studies provide insights into how gun control was countered (Holody & Shaughnessy, 2020; LaRose et al., 2021; Rohlinger et al., 2022). The analysis is therefore conducted by testing two overarching hypotheses with two sub-hypotheses.

H₁: The framing of the media coverage about the Parkland survivors and gun control advocates will align with the partisan leanings of the news outlet.

H_{1a}: Fox News and Breitbart will convey a message that the survivors are uninformed and victims of liberal indoctrinations.

H_{1b}: CNN and *The New York Times* will convey a message that the survivors have the power to effect change.

H₂: The media framing of mass shootings will align with the partisan leanings of the news outlets.

H_{2a}: Fox News and Breitbart will frame mass shootings as an issue of lack of school security, mental illness, and violent popular culture.

H_{2b}: CNN and *The New York Times* will frame mass shootings as an issue of lack of gun control.

Method

Data Collection

The articles were collected from the websites of four national news media outlets, which were chosen because of their significant readership and to represent the partisan bias evident in U.S. media. Metrics from Comscore were used to assess the most-read national news outlets.² In January 2020, CNN was reported to be the most popular online news media platform with the most unique visitors (148 million), while *The New York Times* had 109 million visitors (CNN Pressroom, 2020). Fox News had 114 million unique visitors on its website in January 2020 (CNN Pressroom, 2020). Breitbart is a less consumed news source among the wider population with 5.2 million unique visitors in February 2019 (The Righting, 2019).

How to consider partisan bias in the selection of the news sources was more complex. For comparison's sake, the ideal scenario would include a right-wing news source that is three standard deviations to the right of center on the ideological spectrum and a left-wing news source that is three standard deviations to the left of center. Unfortunately, such precise quantitative measures of news source ideology do not exist, and more crude measures have been heavily criticized (Benjes-Small & Elwood, 2021; Mahadevan, 2023). In fact, studies of right-wing media in the U.S. find that there is no comparable media ecosystem on the left (Benkler et al., 2018).

Another option was to consider the partisan identification of the audiences reading the news outlets. Pew Research Center finds that 93% of those adults who named Fox News as their main source of political news identified as Republicans, while 91% of those respondents who named *The New York Times* and 79% of those who named CNN identified as Democrats (Grieco, 2020). Less than 2% of the respondents mentioned other right-leaning news sources. Notably, audiences identifying as Republicans tend to cluster around Fox News, while Democratic audiences are split among a wider array of media sources (Grieco, 2020). For this case study, Breitbart was chosen due to its unique position as a popular platform among the voices in the constellation of right-wing actors who promote so-called anti-woke, anti-liberal, anti-elite positions that are often rooted in ideas of white supremacy and misogyny (Benkler et al., 2018; Hawley, 2017). Overall, the aim was not to make definite statements about the level of partisan biases present but to account for some of the different narratives that exist both in left-wing and right-wing media. Importantly, including additional sources would not change the current interpretation of the news media analyzed here.

The data sample was collected by searching for the phrases "Parkland school shooting" and "March For Our Lives" beginning from the shooting on February 14, 2018, and ending on February 28, 2019, with the last year mark story. This search produced 236 articles. When attempting to collect new data at a later period, two

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issues arose. First, some news stories were never long-term archived. Second, some news stories were actively removed from the websites. Therefore, comparability issues would exist if new data were collected at a different period, even if looking in archives. The data was further narrowed to articles with mentions of the Parkland students as well as to articles that comment on the issue of mass shootings. This search produced a final dataset of 200 articles, excluding episodic articles. The articles were divided fairly evenly, with 42 articles collected from CNN, 48 from *The New York Times*, 59 from Fox News, and 51 from Breitbart.

Coding Process and Data Analysis

Emergent themes from the data were coded using the NVivo qualitative analysis tool, which allows systematic coding according to themes, sentiments, relationships, and the exploration of linkages between the three. Drawing on previous studies on media framing of both youth activism and mass shootings and in particular the Parkland shooting, both deductive and inductive content analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Kuckartz, 2014; Morse et al., 2021; Schreier, 2012) were used to generate categories of frames found in the data. News articles describing either the Parkland advocates or the issue of mass shootings were considered to contain a frame if it promoted “a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The sections within an article coded for particular frames ranged from a phrase to multiple paragraphs in length. This analysis meant coded sections could contain multiple, co-occurring, and overlapping frames.

In the first phase, the data was carefully read and coded according to all the themes found in the text. From the initial codes, main framing categories were developed by combining inductive and deductive content analysis that relied on theoretical frameworks. To answer the first research question, how the news outlets framed the activists, four main categories were identified drawing on the emergent themes arising from the text and theories of media representation of youth political participation and the protest paradigm:

- 1) Victims: framing the activists through their experiences of victimization
- 2) Youth power: framing the activists as smart/capable/strong and/or their activism as something useful/impactful/desirable
- 3) Youth deficit: framing the activists as naïve/stupid/uneducated/gullible and/or their activism as something unhelpful/bad/harmful
- 4) Co-opted movement: framing the activism as deceitful/taken over by adults

To answer the second research question, how the news outlets framed the topic of mass shootings, seven main categories were identified drawing on the inductive content analysis and theories of mass shooting framing:

- 1) Gun control: access to guns as the cause/gun control as the solution
- 2) Special interest groups: gun lobby/political groups as the cause/obstructing the solution
- 3) Government failures: lack of action/action by government agencies the cause/solution
- 4) School security: lack/more school security the cause/solution (security officers, security tools, arming teachers)
- 5) Mental health: mental illness the cause/improving mental health the solution
- 6) Local officials: actions of local officials the cause/solution (police department, school board, teachers, superintended)
- 7) Violent popular culture: violence in video games/TV shows/movies the cause/restricting consumption the solution

In addition, following the definition by Holody and Shaughnessy (2020), frame valence was considered to provide more information about how the news outlets represented gun control activism and the topic of guns. If the framing of an article was positive towards the MFOL activists or presented gun control as the solution to

stopping mass shootings, it was considered positive. If the framing of the article was negative towards the advocates or delegitimized gun control as a solution, it was coded negative. In the presence of both perspectives, the salience of the frames was considered by analyzing whether one frame was used multiple times or presented in the headline, abstract, or beginning of the article. Cases where activism and/or gun control were present without any commentary, quotes, or details into the content of the suggestions were considered neutral.

The codebook drafted for the second phase included criteria for coding the articles into the four categories identified for the framing of the MFOL activists and the seven categories identified for the framing of the shooting. In addition, the instructions included guidelines for coding the valence of the articles, when activist frames and gun control frames were present. To check the quality of the coding process, intercoder reliability was tested on a 10% random sub-sample of the articles. The author and a researcher outside of the study coded the articles with the codebook using the NVivo software. The guidelines in the codebook were discussed and clarified before coding. Agreement between the coders in the test sample was 95%. Disagreements were resolved in a feedback session and the guidelines were revised accordingly. The rest of the articles were coded again by the author.

After the coding process, descriptive tables were created to offer an overall summary of the data analysis. The tables describe the number of articles coded for specific frames as well as the valence of the articles in each news source with MFOL activist frames and gun control frames. Comparisons between the number of frames and the valence of the frames were made to test the hypotheses that the framing of activism and the shooting aligned with the partisan leanings of the news sources. In addition, qualitative content analysis (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Kuckartz, 2014; Morse et al., 2021; Schreier, 2012) was used to consider how each news source employed and combined particular frames to present an overarching narrative about the Parkland school shooting and the activism that followed it.

Results

Framing of the Activists

The activist frame was the only frame that was consistently and prominently featured in all four news outlets from the very beginning of the shooting in February to the end of the year mark. *The New York Times* and CNN's portrayal of the MFOL activists were overwhelmingly positive. In *The New York Times*, 77% of the articles that used activism frames used them positively while in CNN, 79% of the articles with activism frames were positive. CNN focused heavily on the activists immediately after the shooting, while *The New York Times* shifted their attention to the activism primarily in March, when the March For Our Lives protest was organized. In contrast to the more left-leaning news outlets, Fox News and Breitbart in particular overwhelmingly framed the activists negatively. In Fox News, 47% of the articles with activism frames were negative toward the activists (35% of them were neutral). In Breitbart, 69% of the articles with activism frames were negative. Breitbart, out of all the outlets, right from the beginning, was much more focused on the activism than the shooting itself—it was the only outlet that had more articles about the shooting in March than in February when it occurred. Where the other outlets for example featured the gun control frame from the beginning until the end, the focus of Breitbart remained on the activists and the political figures Breitbart drew into its narrative. None of the articles on CNN and *The New York Times* that had activist frames were negative. Overall, the findings confirm that the framing of the coverage that the news outlets provided about the Parkland survivors-turned-gun control advocates aligned with their partisan orientations (Table 1).

However, there are significant discrepancies in how the different media outlets framed the narratives of the MFOL activists that need to be considered further (Table 2). The specific frames each news source chose illustrated the type of narratives they told and the different ways the partisan leanings materialized.

Table 1*Valence of the Activism Frames*

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Overall
CNN	23 (79%)	0 (0%)	6 (21%)	29 (22%)
NYT	27 (77%)	0 (0%)	8 (23%)	35 (26%)
FOX	6 (18%)	16 (47%)	12 (35%)	34 (25%)
Breitbart	1 (3%)	25 (69%)	10 (28%)	36 (27%)
Overall	57 (42%)	41 (31%)	36 (31%)	134

Note. Percentages represent proportion of overall (total) articles by source with the activist frame.

Table 2*Framing of the Activists*

	Victims	Youth Power	Youth Deficit	Co-opted Movement
CNN	16 (52%)	15 (44%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
NYT	9 (29%)	18 (53%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
FOX	5 (16%)	1 (3%)	12 (41%)	3 (27%)
Breitbart	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	17 (59%)	8 (73%)
Overall	31	34	29	11

Note. Percentages represent proportion of overall (total) articles by all sources with the respective frame.

From Victimization to Activism and the Power of Youth Political Participation

As survivors of a mass shooting, the Parkland students were given space to express their views in all the media under study, but CNN and *The New York Times* connected those aspects positively to their activism. CNN in particular framed the activists first and foremost through their experiences of victimization. Fifty-two percent of all the activism frames that represented the MFOL advocates primarily as victims appeared on CNN (see “victims” in Table 2). These articles approached the narrative through the everyday consequences a shooting leaves in a person’s life and how activism can be used to heal from that experience. Activism as a response to trauma and turning “pain into change” (Ryan, 2018) was an explicit structure CNN used multiple times (see Appendix A1).

In contrast, *The New York Times* featured 53% of all the youth power frames in the data. These frames focused on the power of youth activism, particularly what set them apart from those that came before them (see “youth power” in Table 2). One of the main claims made by the Parkland students, who would later organize the MFOL marches, was that gun violence is more of an intergenerational issue than a partisan one. The activists continuously juxtaposed the “adults” who have been incapable of solving the continued epidemic of gun violence and the “kids” who have been left to suffer the consequences in a way that has come to define them

as “the mass shooting generation” (Burch et al., 2018). Instead of relying solely on their authority over the issue through their experiences of victimization, they emphasized their own power to affect change: “The adults who ‘have the responsibility to take care of these things’ have failed, he said. ‘It’s our generation’s responsibility’” (Turkewitz & Yee, 2018). *The New York Times* represented the MFOL movement in ways that set them apart in a positive manner from political decision-makers. In their narrative, young age offered a unique perspective that could have a transformative effect:

Even after a year of near continuous protesting — for women, for the environment, for immigrants and more — the emergence of people not even old enough to drive as a political force has been particularly arresting, unsettling a gun control debate that had seemed impervious to other factors. (Yee & Blinder, 2018)

The students were described as being unsullied by cynicism and traditional politics. Although inexperienced in politics, they were seen as eloquent and savvy enough to be capable of inspiring societal change (see Appendix A2).

Naïve Youth Running a Co-opted Movement

Fox News and Breitbart focused on employing the tactics of negative media coverage of youth activism, where young people were represented as not as capable of participating in civic action due to their lack of experience and knowledge (see “youth deficit” in Table 2). Forty-one percent of these types of frames appeared in Fox News, where patronizing language was used to frame the youth activists advocating for gun reform, describing them as being well-meaning but naïve and ignorant of the realities of the real world (see Appendix A3). The rest of the 59% of the articles were found in Breitbart, where the language used was even more hostile towards the students, and tropes about youth delinquency were employed. The radicalized leftist adult was seen as responsible for the brainwashed, misbehaving youth (see “co-opted movement” in Table 2). Breitbart devoted significant attention to stories that suggested that the entire movement had been co-opted by liberal elites, claiming that “the rally first planned by high school students was quickly hijacked by the left and gun control groups, transforming it into a turn out-the-liberal-vote event” (Starr, 2018a). In Breitbart, very little explicit exposition was needed to mark MFOL as an illegitimate, adult-led movement. Michael Bloomberg and George Soros, two billionaires who have donated money to Democratic campaigns and gun control activism, were frequently mentioned with the presumption that readers would know who they were and what their association implied. The narrative of corrupt liberal elites working behind the scenes and deceiving the public to advance their own agenda was told with cues that readers who already share this worldview know to look for. 73% of the articles where the co-opted movement frame was used appeared in Breitbart, but the remaining 27% of the cases were found in Fox News (see examples in Appendix A4).

However, the negative narrative Fox News and Breitbart constructed about the MFOL activists seemed to be more motivated by partisanship and a distaste for the policies the youth were advocating for than disbelief in youth activism in general. In 27% of the negative articles about the young gun control activists, Fox News and Breitbart contrast them specifically to the few students who were vocal advocates of gun rights. Not only was the participation of these students seen as desirable, but they were also framed as heroes whose fight with their liberal classmates, the media, and the Democrats was admirable and courageous: “Being a hero of the right isn’t easy. Especially for a 16-year-old who opposes the majority of his classmates’ calls for more restrictive gun laws” (Flood, 2018).

Framing of Mass Shootings

The central claim the youth activists made was that guns were the main cause of the shooting and that the best way to prevent one in the future was to implement more gun control measures. Gun control has consistently been part of mass shooting reporting, but it was particularly prominent in the Parkland coverage

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due to the considerable role of the activists. As with the framing of the activists themselves, the framing of the shooting aligned with the partisan leanings of the news outlets (Table 3). Seventy-five percent of the articles that had the gun control frame were positive in *The New York Times*, while the same was true for 67% of the articles on CNN. Both left-leaning sources reaffirmed the claim that guns are the cause of mass shootings. Fox News framed gun control negatively in 53% of the articles that discussed the issue, while Breitbart delegitimized gun control as a solution in 83% of the articles.

Table 3

Valence of the Gun Control Frames

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Overall
CNN	20 (67%)	2 (7%)	8 (27%)	30 (23%)
NYT	27 (75%)	1 (3%)	8 (22%)	36 (28%)
FOX	9 (33%)	14 (53%)	4 (14%)	27 (21%)
Breitbart	2 (6%)	30 (83%)	4 (11%)	36 (28%)
Overall	58 (45%)	47 (36%)	24 (19%)	129

Note. Percentages represent proportion of overall (total) articles by each source with the gun control frame.

Exploring the frames used to define mass shootings revealed how the partisan leanings of the news outlets influenced the vastly different stories they told about the tragedy in Parkland (Table 4). *The New York Times* and CNN framed the lack of gun control as the main issue, focusing on government failures and the influence of special interest groups that lobby for gun rights such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) as the reason for that oversight. Fox News and Breitbart used other common mass shooting frames to counter gun control as a solution, primarily focusing on the failures of local officials as the reason for the shooting and promoting school security and arming teachers as a solution. Contrary to expectations, violent popular culture was not a prominent part of the reporting by any of the news outlets.

Gun Control, Government Failures, and Special Interest Groups

Regardless of the political biases of the news media or the valence of the frame, each news source used the gun control frame the most often with cases found in 99 articles overall. On CNN, gun control appeared the most (31%), while on Fox News, it appeared the least (21%). All outlets, with the exception of Breitbart, also consistently featured gun control from the beginning until the end of the year mark. Both CNN and *The New York Times* amplified the gun control frame by writing stories about the specific policy proposals the activists were advocating for and by offering contextual information that reinforced their claims. CNN had links to the MFOL website and introduced their primary demands (banning assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, restricting ammunition sales, and closing loopholes to background checks). *The New York Times* wrote about the type of assault weapons used in other mass shootings to support the assault weapons ban advocated by the MFOL activists (see Appendix B1). Fox News and Breitbart framed gun control as a vague and ineffective policy at best and government infringement at worst (see Appendix B1). They explicitly criticized policy proposals that targeted specific types of guns or their features. Fox News saw no practical difference between an AR-15 rifle and a game-hunting rifle (Lott, 2018b), while Breitbart took the argument even further claiming that a ban on any part of the weapon would lead to the banning of guns altogether (Hawkins, 2018a). In the two Breitbart articles where gun control was framed positively, Breitbart reproduced

Table 4
Framing of the Parkland Mass Shooting

	Gun Control	Special Interests	Government Failures	School Security	Mental Health	Local Off.	Violent Pop Culture
CNN	30 (31%)	12 (25%)	13 (20%)	7 (22%)	5 (21%)	5 (12%)	0 (0%)
NYT	24 (24%)	10 (21%)	22 (34%)	10 (31%)	7 (29%)	11 (27%)	2 (50%)
FOX	21 (21%)	8 (17%)	15 (24%)	8 (25%)	8 (33%)	14 (35%)	2 (50%)
Breitbart	24 (24%)	18 (37%)	14 (22%)	7 (22%)	4 (17%)	10 (25%)	0 (0%)
Overall	99	48	64	32	24	40	4

Note. Percentages represent proportion of overall (total) articles by all sources with the respective frame.

mainstream media articles quoting speeches of Democratic politicians notorious in right-wing spaces such as Hillary Clinton. This is a common tactic in right-wing alternative media where mainstream media is used as a reference to recontextualize information within their own news content and ideological agenda (Haanshuus & Ihlebæk, 2021; Mayerhöffer & Heft, 2021). No explicit negative framing was present, but within the context of the overarching narrative Breitbart has been producing about corrupt liberal elites, it was precisely the positive framing of gun control through Hillary Clinton that made the policy itself suspect.

Government failures was the second most used frame in the data, appearing in 64 articles overall. Twenty percent of the government failures frame were in CNN, which used the framing of the activists who presented the problem as intergenerational rather than partisan and reproduced their advocacy for bipartisan solutions. While *The New York Times* also reaffirmed the intergenerational nature of the issue, the stories also elaborated on the resistance from the Republican Party and the Trump administration to enact policy (see Appendix B3). In contrast to the other outlets that focused on government failures from the beginning until the summer, *The New York Times* also featured the frame for the whole duration of the one-year reporting. This focus was apparent in the number of times the frame was used as well. With 34% of the cases, government failures appeared most often in *The New York Times*. Both Fox News and Breitbart also used the government failures frame but with a different focus. Breitbart, with 22% of all the articles that used the frame, and Fox News with 24%, mainly described gun violence as the result of bad liberal policies. These policies enacted by various actors, such as the Obama administration and Democrats in Congress, left people unsafe and vulnerable (see Appendix B3). However, for both Fox News and Breitbart, government failures also implicated mistakes made by the FBI, particularly its failure to respond to a tip it had received about the threats the perpetrator was spreading online:

In January, the FBI had the dots connected for them by a tipster who told them all about Cruz, his fascination with firearms, and his desire to kill people — and they did absolutely nothing. This what you call a catastrophic failure of law enforcement. This is also a situation where everyday citizens did exactly what they were supposed to — they saw something and then they said something — but in an ocean of red flags, the government still failed at its primary function — to protect us. (Nolte, 2018a)

The activists highlighted the role the NRA has played in preventing the passing of gun control legislation and both *The New York Times* and CNN contextualized this in their reporting (see Appendix B2). *The New York Times*, which showed the most diversity on the framing choices out of all the news outlets, used the special

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interest group frame in 10 articles (21% of the cases). It was the only one to feature the frame across the yearlong reporting. On Fox News, where the frame appeared the least (17%), the NRA was only used when the speeches of the youth were reproduced and only once was blaming the NRA portrayed as a negative position to hold (see Appendix A4). NRA was defended vigorously on Breitbart. However, most of the time, when they mentioned special interest groups they were talking about entirely different organizations. In clear contrast to the other three news media outlets, Breitbart spent considerable time negatively framing the connections of the youth activists to adult-led gun control groups and used those connections as proof of the fraudulent nature of gun control as a solution (see Appendix B2). Left-wing media was accused of backing those organizations and assigned blame for mass shootings due to their refusal to enforce accountability on the real enablers and perpetrators (see Appendix B2). Breitbart's unique focus was also reflected in the fact that Breitbart had the highest number of articles that used the special interest frame (37%).

School Security, Mental Health, and Failures by Local Officials

Three frames—school security, mental health, and local officials—were used by all the news outlets but Fox News and Breitbart explicitly positioned them to be either the cause or the solution to mass shootings instead of gun control. School security was a particularly useful example when considering the effect partisan media bias had on the reporting. For *The New York Times*, which used the frame the most with 10 articles (31% of the cases) and for CNN, which had it in seven articles (22%), school security meant different security enforcement tools such as metal detectors, armed law enforcement, and clear backpacks that could serve as additional measures to gun control. For Fox News, which used the frame in eight articles (25%), school security could mean those things, not as an addition but as an alternative to gun control. However, in most cases, school security meant arming teachers. For Breitbart, which used the frame as often as CNN, security and broadening the purview of gun rights to include schools and teachers was ubiquitous (see Appendix B4). Importantly, the school security frame had the most lasting power in comparison to all the counter-frames found in the reporting of all the news outlets. It was the only frame in addition to activist and gun control frames that was featured in all the news outlets from the beginning until the end of the year mark.

The mental health frame was the least prevalent out of the three that were used to counter gun control with appearances only in 24 articles across all the news sources. Mental health was featured in all the outlets only in the beginning of the reporting in February and March. While the activists who paid less attention to the topic may have influenced the lack of mental health framing, the school security (32 articles overall), and local officials frame (40 articles overall) were more prominent in countering the gun control message. As a solution, addressing mental health concerns through increased funding or in other undefined ways was mostly a promise made by lawmakers or the few prominent voices emerging out of Parkland that were self-proclaimed defenders of the Second Amendment (see Appendix B5). Breitbart in the four articles that featured the mental health frame did not dedicate any time on how it could be part of the solution and instead, only lamented on the mental illnesses of the perpetrator.

Local officials such as law enforcement and the school board were also blamed for the Parkland tragedy particularly in the beginning of the reporting. All four news outlets covered stories criticizing the police officers who had refused to enter the building during the shooting and questioned how the perpetrator had obtained a gun, given his previous run-ins with the local police department (see Appendix B6). Likewise, the news outlets reported on the troubling behavior that went ignored by the school officials, which was enough for the two parents of Parkland victims to run for the district school board (see Appendix B6). Fox News focused the most on the failures of local officials (35%), but Breitbart explicitly used those failures as proof of the need for strong gun rights so that citizens could be armed to defend themselves: “The only lesson a rational person can take away from the Parkland school massacre, is this: federal and local law enforcement is either too corrupt, inept, or hamstrung, to protect our children. Therefore, we must protect ourselves” (Nolte, 2018b). A surprising element emerging from this analysis is that unlike hypothesized, the frame of violent popular culture often found in other shootings was not relevant here. There was no mention of it in the reporting of Breitbart or CNN,

and on Fox News and *The New York Times*, the frame appears only twice—both in February and in March about a video game that allowed players to act out school shootings. It could be that the particulars of the Parkland shooting made the violent popular culture frame less relevant. For example, the glaring mistakes by the local officials made them easy to blame for the shooting, which meant less focus was paid to other potential causes.

Discussion

The activists were prominently and consistently featured in all the outlets for the entirety of the period under study here, from the beginning of the shooting on February 14, 2018, until February 28, 2019. The fact that there is reporting about the MFOL activists throughout the year shows that their activism impacted the duration of the reporting on the Parkland shooting, which was far longer than the one month that is typical for mass shootings. This finding is in line with studies such as by Holody and Shaughnessy (2020). In addition, like Holody and Shaughnessy (2020) and LaRose et al. (2021), this study mirrored the results of other studies that found that mass shooting reporting after Columbine has stayed largely the same and that gun control continues to be the most prominent frame to be used in such media coverage. However, the effects of partisan bias on mass shooting media coverage have not been systematically explored before. Thus, this study asked how major news outlets framed the Parkland shooting and the gun control movement March For Our Lives that followed it.

First, it was hypothesized that framing of the media coverage about the Parkland survivors and gun control advocates would align with the partisan leanings of the news outlets. The findings illustrate that negative and positive framing of the activism was dependent on the partisan leanings of the news outlets. CNN and *The New York Times* conveyed a message that the survivors could effect change by advocating for gun control policies. They framed the young age of the activists as precisely the reason why they should be listened to, seeing them as different rather than lacking in adult guidance and in that difference holding the key to breaking the pattern of inaction in federal gun control legislation. In clear contrast to the traditional protest paradigm and building on the findings of recent research such as Chuang and Tyler (2023), Kananovich (2022), and Kim and Shahin (2019), this study provides firm evidence that when the partisan positions of the activists align with the newspapers the coverage is sympathetic and message-affirming. In the case of Parkland, where the activists were particularly young, the media coverage took advantage of tropes that emphasized the positive aspects of youth political participation and the transformational power generational shift could bring (Collin, 2015; Wyn, 2005).

Fox News and Breitbart conveyed a message that the MFOL activists were uninformed and victims of liberal indoctrinations. Employing the trope of “citizens in the making” (Collin, 2015), they framed the MFOL youth as naïve, incapable of comprehending the effects of the policy positions they were advocating for and lacking in skills to participate in politics without adult guidance. More in line with the traditional protest paradigm, their claims were delegitimized, they were infantilized and accused of being manipulated and radicalized by adults with a nefarious agenda. Yet, in conservative youth, the conservative media outlets found the same hope for their future that CNN and *The New York Times* found in the MFOL movement. The MFOL advocates were disparaged to discredit their claims about gun control. Secondly, it was hypothesized that media framing of mass shootings would align with the partisan leanings of the news outlets. The findings illustrate that the different causes and solutions offered to mass shootings were dependent on the partisan leanings of the news outlets. CNN and *The New York Times* conveyed a message that guns and lack of gun control are the most immediate causes of mass shootings. Frames such as government failures and special interest groups were used to support that main frame by offering reasons for how and why inaction on policies restricting access has led to the current situation. In contrast, Fox News and Breitbart conveyed a message that mass shootings happen not because of easy access to guns but because of lack of security and armed staff as well as poor law enforcement responses and school policies. However, unlike in previous shootings and hypothesized,

mental health was not a significant frame used to explain mass shootings. Violent popular culture was even less relevant.

Instead, Fox News and Breitbart countered gun control by prominently featuring frames such as government failures and special interest groups. However, in their narratives, these referred to the failures of lenient liberal policies, politically compromised FBI, and incompetent local officials. Their mistakes were proof of the inability of government, local or federal, to keep its citizens safe and inevitably, proof of how government regulation policies such as gun control could not work. They sought alternative solutions to mass shootings by keeping schools secure with tools such as metal detectors and by arming school officials. The importance of school security as a solution, compared to mental health or attempting to restrict access to violent popular culture, is central to the findings of this study. It is in line with studies such as McCluskey (2017) that found that Republican states often framed school shootings through the school security frame and LaRose et al. (2021) that found school security was particularly emphasized in the Parkland case. Silva (2020) and Silva and Capellan (2018, 2019) also found that ideology and terrorism-related frames seem to be replacing the violent popular culture frame. Building on this research, this study argues that the importance of mental health and violent popular culture as frames used in mass shooting reporting are waning. Concurrently, school security is being developed as a prominent counter frame to gun control. It could be that the particulars of the Parkland shooting drove these framing choices. It may also be that frames like arming teachers, which directly oppose gun control, may become increasingly appealing as right-leaning outlets prioritize “culture war” issues.

Limitations

The data selection process of this study brought with it some limitations. The findings could have been more conclusive and shown greater variety if the study had included more news sources from a broader ideological spectrum such as *Mother Jones* or the *New York Post*. In addition, the data did not include any local newspapers. While Holody and Shaughnessy (2020) did not find differences in the frames that community newspapers and national newspapers used, the importance of partisan media bias on local news reporting, especially in the case of mass shootings, should be further explored. Finally, partisan alignment impacts the way news media interacts with the messaging by activists, which in turn gives advocates more opportunities to influence the media framing of their issues. While those opportunities are considered in this study, more research is still needed to understand how media framing and partisan bias affect the messaging of activists. It seems clear that the MFOL activists were aware of how media framing tactics could serve as a distraction from the gun control conversation. How much that awareness affected their messaging strategies is less clear. Due to the data selection, this study can only offer findings from the way the media framed the issue and the activists.

Policy and Research Implications

The present study aimed to further the research on mass shooting reporting and the partisan media biases that influence it, particularly as mass shootings have become a prominent site for political activism. The frames used in the coverage of Parkland were not new but there were qualitative differences in how each news outlet used them. Researchers and advocates alike should understand what purpose each frame serves in media narratives. Partisan bias is not the only factor that affects journalistic choices. However, an issue that has become as polarized as guns in the United States is increasingly susceptible to such influences. Mass shootings are at the center of a policy fight that is not only deeply ingrained into partisanship but has direct, devastating, real-life consequences. Mass shootings do not happen nearly as often as gun suicides or everyday gun violence that are destroying particularly impoverished communities. Yet, mass shooting reporting is still one of the most effective ways advocates can get attention to their messaging, even or especially in the current fragmented media landscape. This study showed that positive media coverage is possible when the policy positions of advocates and protestors align with the media outlet’s partisan leanings.

CNN and *The New York Times* consistently reaffirmed both the policy of gun control and the credibility of its advocates.

Breitbart was unlikely to positively frame the MFOL advocates or their solutions once gun control became their primary policy goal. Fox News was inclined to positively frame solutions that targeted school security or mental health, but this came at the expense of gun control policies. Advocates should be more conscious of the overarching stories offered by different media to understand how their claims can be aligned with those stories. The results are not surprising, but they do offer nuance to the discussion about mass shooting framing and the importance of partisan media bias. Left-leaning narratives have consolidated around gun control. Future research should keep exploring how frames such as school security are being developed, employed, and consolidated as counter to gun control. Whether these trends affect local reporting should also be investigated. There the opportunities for advocates could be more favorable.

NOTES

1. Gun control is used throughout the article because it describes the advocated policy, and the media sources analyzed in the study use it widely. However, recently activists themselves have shifted from talking about gun control to gun violence prevention to better describe the scale of the problem and the solutions.
2. Information about unique visitors is available through the reporting of news sources that pay companies such as Comscore to release the data. In February 2020, CNN pressroom offered comparative results about the largest news sources including CNN, Fox News and The New York Times but had no such reporting on Breitbart. The closest comparable time frame could be found in the reporting of The Righting in January 2019, which also uses Comscore data.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the author.

FUNDING STATEMENT

This work was supported by the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Benita Heiskanen, Dr. Kirsi Cheas, and Dr. Maiju Kannisto for their invaluable assistance with this study as part of the #TRAGE research project as well Jaakko Dickman for his generous help with the coding process. I am grateful to Associate Professor Michael Hansen, whose insightful comments and guidance were essential to the publication of this paper. Finally, I extend my thanks to the editors of this journal and the two anonymous reviewers, whose comments and suggestions greatly improved the manuscript.

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Newspaper Quotes on Student Advocates**A1: Victims**

- Responses to trauma take different forms, and a handful of students are channeling their grief into activism. In interviews with 12 students, most said their activism was a coping strategy; others called it a response to the reality of what they'd experienced. (Grinberg, 2018)
- Six Parkland survivors agreed to share with CNN their progress during the weeks since the shooting. They have been using their cellphones to capture their thoughts and moments from their lives. What emerged are intimate portraits of strength, solidarity, grief, defiance and a sense of determination to turn pain into change. (Ryan, 2018)
- If Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School were like any other school, its students and staff wouldn't be balancing their academic lives with the public ones they never asked for. But the day 19-year-old Nikolas Cruz barged into his former school with a Smith & Wesson M&P 15, they were pulled through a prism of identities: They became survivors, advocates, activists, leaders, mourners, celebrities, political figures and pariahs. (Willingham & Gallagher, 2018)
- In the weeks after the shooting, as Stoneman Douglas senior Hannah Karcinell bounced among funerals and protests, she channeled her grief through activism. (Grinberg, 2019)

A2: Youth power

- Some on the left were hopeful that the unsullied voices of teenagers, cutting through the usual tussle over whether gun control advocates were politicizing a tragedy, would move previously unbudgeable lawmakers. (Turkewitz & Yee, 2018)
- What makes teenagers amazing — or infuriating, if you're in an argument with one — is they don't know what they're not supposed to be able to do. They haven't learned that being smart means being cynical about what you can accomplish. They haven't been hard-wired with platitudes and euphemisms. They haven't internalized a list of questions that are too naïve or impolite to ask. (Poniewozik, 2018)
- And perhaps most dramatically, the We-Call-B.S. teenagers of Florida have injected a passionate new energy into a stale debate, organizing demonstrations, flooding the Statehouse in Tallahassee, composing songs, creating protest signs, confronting politicians and taking to TV airwaves with an intensity and composure and power rarely seen in recent years. (Baker & Shear, 2018)
- The first major coordinated action of the student-led movement for gun control marshaled the same elements that had defined it ever since the Parkland shooting: eloquent young voices, equipped with symbolism and social media savvy, riding a resolve as yet untouched by cynicism. (Yee & Blinder, 2018)

A3: Youth deficit

- "You sicken me," said one child on CBS. "President Trump, you control the House of Representatives, you control the Senate, and you control the executive [branch]. You haven't taken a single bill for mental health care or gun control and passed it. And that's pathetic. We've seen a government shutdown, we've seen tax reform, but nothing to save our children's lives. Are you kidding me? You think now is the time to focus on the past and not the future to prevent the death of thousands of other children?" President Trump does not control the House or the Senate. It's too bad the CBS host did not correct the young man. Maybe CBS didn't know any better, either. (Starnes, 2018)
- [Ingraham]: The AR-15 is not an automatic weapon, but if you are not familiar with guns or you don't know -- that's what kind of people think and believed, and I feel bad for a lot of these kids because -- I didn't know anything about this when I was 15 and 16-years-old. I just didn't know. (Ingraham, 2018)

- The ideas sound good at first glance and are certainly well-meaning. But in reality, the policies being proposed will either have no effect or even cause harm. (Lott, 2018b)
- “This is the problem with political theater lacking substance,” Ingraham said. “Lots of people show up and they applaud for Lin-Manuel [Miranda] and Amy Schumer, but what are they marching for? To repeal the Second Amendment? To ban weapons they can’t even define? The truth is, they don’t really know.” (Fox News, 2018b)
- This sort of millennial generation who is self-obsessed and who wants recognition. And this is especially true in those who feel marginalized and swept aside and are looking for some kind of voice. (Francis, 2018)

A4: Co-opted movement

- So when you hear the youngsters spouting off about how the NRA should be destroyed and how NRA members are child killers -- take a deep breath and understand they have been brainwashed by government-funded indoctrination camps - pardon me - public schools. And now CNN and MSNBC are using the kids as political pawns. (Starnes, 2018)
- Indiana parent activist Heather Crossin tells Breitbart News the student walkouts are an example that the “radical left has stooped to a new low with this latest stunt of using minors to fight their battles.” “Asking them to disrupt learning time, during the regular school day, to make a political statement is unconscionable,” she adds. “It shows what little regard national organizers actually have for the students whose individual schools they hope to destabilize or for the adults who are charged with running them.” (Berry, 2018a)
- “The Whitney Houston song about letting the children lead the way wasn’t actually had operating paradigm for life.....,” Hughes wrote. “And when the truth don’t line up with your bullshit narrative just hold your breath and stamp your feet and refused to except it.... then take multiple days off of school playing hooky at the expense of 16 of your classmates blood....!.... it might be funny if it wasn’t so pathetic and disgusting.” (Hawkins, 2018b)
- But as Breitbart News reported, the rally first planned by high school students was quickly hijacked by the left and gun control groups, transforming it into a turn out-the-liberal-vote event. Breitbart News also reported that very few teens actually attended the D.C. event. (Starr, 2018a)

Appendix B: Newspaper Quotes on School Shootings

B1: Gun control

- After Trump spoke, a sophomore at the Parkland school stated the obvious in an interview with CNN. “There’s no reason that a kid 19 years old that’s been investigated already, and not even a year ago, being able to purchase an AR-15,” said Isabella Gomez. The gun used in Florida is similar to the kind of rapid-firing weapons used to mow down first graders in Newtown, club-goers in Orlando, civil servants in San Bernardino, and music-lovers in Las Vegas. In our country, a nation with a gun homicide rate 49 times higher than other wealthy countries, lunatics have easy and legal access to these guns. (Egan, 2018)
- According to a petition on the event’s website, March for Our Lives has three primary demands:
 1. Pass a law to ban the assault weapons frequently used to carry out mass shootings
 2. Stop the sale of high-capacity magazines, restricting the amount of ammunition
 3. Close loopholes in America’s background checks and implement laws that require background checks on every gun purchase, including those that occur online or at gun shows (Andone, 2018b)
- “I understand how people feel that this is what it’s leading to with the availability of guns. Having said that, I’m looking specifically at the use of ‘Never Again’ to promote gun control. The problem with that is that the Jews were kind of not allowed to have arms. They were stripped of arms and therefore could not fight back.” (Hayward, 2018)

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- Gun control advocates like to think this is a magic solution that would have prevented Wednesday's massacre. The proposed background check laws wouldn't have prevented the attack in Florida, nor any other mass public shooting that's happened in the 21st century. (Lott, 2018a)

B2: Special interest groups

- The law, known as the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, tightens gun control in several ways, and also allows some teachers to be armed. The National Rifle Association opposed a provision of the law that raises the minimum age to purchase a firearm from 18 to 21. It immediately filed a federal lawsuit against Florida, saying the age mandate violates the Second and 14th Amendments to the Constitution. (Karimi & Yan, 2018)
- And the N.R.A. pressed lawmakers, including the president, to give priority to the interests of gun owners. (Kramer & Harlan, 2019)
- So instead of making these preventable failures the primary narrative of this tragic event, the media have instead manufactured a Potemkin Villain in the form of the NRA, a civil rights group that is in no way responsible for Wednesday's massacre. (Nolte, 2018a)
- But like the March for Our Lives protest last month and the first National School Walkout on March 14, the anti-gun walkout protest is being pushed and funded by Michael Bloomberg's Everytown for Gun Safety, which spawned the Students Demand Action group that participated on Friday. (Starr, 2018b)
- Using the tragic facts above, our media could actually do some good. (Imagine that: the media doing good). Using actual journalism and their various platforms, these fatal mistakes could be properly investigated and exposed and focused on, accountability could be meted out, and this might result in stopping other school shootings. (Nolte, 2018a)

B3: Government failures

- "It's a midterm year and it's time to take action," Hogg said. "I don't care if you're a Democrat. I don't care if you're a Republican. Stand up for what you believe in. Let's make some compromises and save some children's lives." (Andone, 2018a)
- But at the federal level, any momentum for change was quickly stymied by partisan gridlock. Republican leaders in Congress remained silent as their Democratic colleagues called, once again, for changes in the wake of a mass shooting. The White House flip-flopped on promises to raise the minimum age to purchase rifles and to enforce universal background checks. (Kramer & Harlan, 2019)
- Runcie defends the PROMISE policy that drove down the number of minority student arrests and suspensions in his school district by allowing threatening and even violent behaviors to go unreported. In a column at the Sun Sentinel, Runcie – who once worked for President Barack Obama's education secretary Arne Duncan in Chicago – mocks the attention paid to the Obama-era Dear Colleague letter that coerced school districts into adopting the policy as a means to supposedly end the "school-to-prison pipeline" for minority students. [...] Nevertheless, the Broward County superintendent would prefer the focus to be on "easy access to guns" as the reason Cruz was able to obtain his firearm. (Berry, 2018b)

B4: School security

- "As I'm recovering and taking my online courses, that's when I'd like to take the chance to travel, and speak to large audiences, spread my message, speak to lawmakers, attend rallies, be everywhere I need to be so that people can hear me clearly," she said. For security, she wants "simple mechanisms we've had for ages, like bulletproof windows and metal detectors, and live-footage security cameras" feeding video to the sheriff's department, and more security officers on school grounds. (Hanna, 2018)
- Last month, the school district reassigned three Stoneman Douglas assistant principals and a security specialist as a result of the commission investigation, which identified a number of security failures, beginning with a pedestrian gate left open and unsupervised that allowed the accused gunman, a former student who should not have been on campus, to walk into the school. (Mazzei, 2018b)

- With the government proving again and again that they cannot protect our children, with the obscene push to disarm us turning into a 24/7 propaganda crusade — if I had school-aged kids, I would be pulling them out of any gun-free environment to either home school them or place them in a private school that cares enough to offer adequate protection. (Nolte, 2018b)
- INGRAHAM: The focus should be on school security. The soft targets that are so vulnerable today. Arming staff who are well-trained, getting authorities on the state, local and federal level to see the obvious warning signs and act on them. (Ingraham, 2018)
- The revelation about the school deputy’s failure to act came as President Trump floated the possibility of paying teachers a “bonus” to carry concealed firearms, stressing both the importance of school security and the strengthening of some gun laws in wake of the Parkland tragedy. (Fox News, 2018a)
- Defenseless teachers were simply gunned down with their students in Parkland. And the Florida Education Association (FEA), a teachers union, wants to maintain the status quo by keeping teachers unarmed. FEA spokeswoman Joni Branch said, “Teachers should not be acting as armed security guards. The majority of our members don’t want to be armed – they know it would be impractical and dangerous.” Branch did not explain why teachers would be dangerous with guns as there are no instances of an armed teacher harming a student (or students) in any of the states where armed teachers are allowed. (Hawkins, 2018c)

B5: Mental health

- “The main focus of all of us is to go and speak to our elected officials ... and hopefully create change so that this won’t ever happen again to any other student, to any other family,” said Hoth, a senior. “No one should ever have to go through this type of experience again. No one should have their lives taken this way when it can be something that’s easily preventable through common-sense gun control and mental health care that’s essential to everybody.” (Grinberg et al., 2018)
- Other members of his party echoed Mr. Trump’s sentiments. In a brief news conference, Speaker Paul D. Ryan said that “there may be some mental health issues with this shooting,” adding that it was not the time to jump to conclusions about tightening gun laws. (Rogers, 2018)
- “Trump addressed the nation, describing the massacre as a “scene of terrible violence, hatred, and evil.” He vowed to work with state and local leaders to help “secure our schools and tackle the difficult issue of mental health.” (Farber, 2018)
- Kashuv said he supports the bill because it is preventative – and not reactive. “I’ve always been outspoken,” he said. “But I saw there wasn’t a conservative Second Amendment supporter being represented.” Meanwhile, his self-funded preventative app -- designed to allow emotionally struggling or bullied students to get help -- is in the final stages of production. (Parke, 2018)
- And we need to focus on mental health issues and not make every time there is a shooting to make it be about guns and gun control. (Francis, 2018)

B6: Local officials

- The scrutiny after the mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla., immediately fell on law enforcement’s failures to heed warnings about the confessed gunman’s troubling behavior and prevent him from carrying out his deadly rampage. (Mazzei, 2018a).
- In the year leading up to the Feb. 14 rampage that left 17 people dead at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, suspect Nikolas Cruz asked to return to a special education campus, but school officials “fumbled his request,” the Sun-Sentinel reported, citing an independent review commissioned by the Broward County public school system. (Lieu, 2018)
- Stand with Parkland, a group formed by families of the victims, condemned the Broward County School Board earlier this month, saying the board was indecisive in implementing security measures and in following up on independent investigations. On August 28, five of the nine embattled members of the Broward County School Board are up for re-election. Among those looking to take their seats

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are Lori Alhadeff and Ryan Petty. Alhadeff's daughter Alyssa and Petty's daughter Alaina were both killed in the Parkland shooting. (Willingham & Gallagher, 2018)

- So let me set the record straight. If you want to blame someone for last week's massacre -- blame Nikolas Cruz, the monster who opened fire inside a gun-free zone. Blame the FBI for failing to stop the attack despite specific warnings. Blame the Broward County Sheriff and the mental health workers and the school district for turning a blind eye to a walking time bomb. (Starnes, 2018)