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## Examining Framing of Local and National Media Coverage of Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary School Shootings

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**EXAMINING FRAMING OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL  
MEDIA COVERAGE OF SANDY HOOK AND ROBB  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SHOOTINGS**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Department of Mass Communication

by  
Gabrielle Lois deBruler  
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2021  
May 2023

*This research is dedicated to the children who have lost their lives in mass school shootings, the survivors of these attacks and all victims and survivors' families who must face each day with these horrific memories.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First, I would like to thank my family and friends for always encouraging me to strive to the highest potential. The people that surround me make me who I am today, and I would be nowhere without them.

I would also like to acknowledge the people who have supported me in my academic journey. First, I would like to acknowledge my thesis chair, Dr. Will Mari, for constantly giving me encouragement and feedback in this process. I also want to thank the two other members of my committee, Dr. Ruth Moon Mari and Dr. Jinx C. Broussard, for giving me diverse feedback and allowing for a change in perspective of my topic. I would also like to thank Professor Roxanne Dill, who served as an amazing mentor as I completed my graduate assistantship for the last two years. I also want to thank Professor Doug Draper for his encouragement in my undergraduate career and to pursue the graduate school at LSU. Lastly, I want to thank the Manship School faculty for making this school my home for the last six years. I would not trade my undergraduate and graduate experience for the world, and that is mainly because of the Manship School at LSU.

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## **ABSTRACT**

There have been over 350 K-12 school shootings since the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999 (Cox et al., 2023). Thousands of journalists cover these attacks each in their own way with unique motives. This information goes to the public, and it is up to that person how they want to consume the story and view the shooting. National and local journalists tend to cover school shootings quite differently throughout time with unique frames. The shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary and Robb Elementary Schools illustrate this framing distinctively.

Through a qualitative study of national and local coverage of the Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary shootings, this study finds key differences in how journalists framed the stories following the shootings. As the two deadliest elementary school shootings to date, they share many similarities, yet many differences in how journalists framed them.

In the ten years that divided the shootings, gun control became a significant frame locally and nationally from as early as the day of the shooting. In the Sandy Hook shootings, local coverage framed the rebuilding of a broken community, whereas national journalists framed on gun control and NRA power. In the Robb Elementary shootings, after a week of coverage framed on gun control, journalists focused on law and police responsibility.

Because of the dominant frame of police responsibility for the Robb shootings, there were fewer differences between national and local coverage. Because of this dominant frame, there was an overall lack of coverage for the victims of the shooting nationally and locally.

## INTRODUCTION

Americans live through a mass shooting epidemic, where one in 10 gun deaths is 19 or younger (*16 facts about gun violence and school shootings*). A Pew Research Center study found that roughly a third of K-12 parents were either very or extremely worried that a mass shooting would occur in their child's school (Hurst, 2022). Thus, the journalism of these events is even more critical.

Since the shootings at Columbine High School in 1999, nearly 300,000 students have experienced a school shooting (*16 facts about gun violence and school shootings*). Years after Columbine, twenty-year-old Adam Lanza entered Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, and killed 20 students and six adults on Dec. 14, 2012 (CNN Editorial Research, 2022). Ten years later on May 24, 2022, another mass shooting occurred by 18-year-old Salvador Ramos at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, which left 19 students and two teachers dead (Jacobo, 2022). The shootings at Robb Elementary became the second deadliest in a K-12 school, following the Sandy Hook shootings in 2012 (Fetcher & Ozner, 2022).

Ten years divide the shootings, but they have many similarities. Both shootings were plotted and planned by young males in small towns with an unknown history of mental illness. These similarities and their impacts on the rest of America are why these two school shootings were chosen for this research. The shootings at Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary have had long-lasting impacts on their communities and news coverage. Journalists have called the two massacres “hauntingly similar” (Ryser, 2022). The shootings at Sandy Hook happened days before Christmas break, and the shootings at Robb Elementary occurred days before the summer break.

Through a textual analysis of articles from both the Robb and Sandy Hook Elementary shootings, this research will look for significant differences and similarities in how journalists covered school shootings in the ten years that divided them. Additionally, this research will study the differences and similarities between print news coverage after the shootings at Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary.

So, why do Americans read about events like mass shootings? Viewers read about school shootings because they are “considered uniquely newsworthy because they are often unforeseeable, highlighting the news values of unexpectedness and relevance” (Pelled et al., 2021, p.191). Journalists themselves have discussed the difficulties of reporting on school shootings, especially when they are in their local towns. John Voket, one of the local journalists who reported on Sandy Hook, said that as someone covering such a horrific event, he must prioritize that “the information that [he] end[s] up having to relay is sensitive and accurate and not sensational” (Miller & Broussard, 2019, p.182). As these shootings occur, journalists tend to frame the information of the shootings in a certain way.

### **Statement of the Problem**

When looking at overall media coverage of school shootings, there was a gap in the literature when comparing local and national coverage. There was also a lack of research on media framing between the two shootings chosen for the research. Additionally, there was a gap in the academic research on the overall news reporting of the shootings in Uvalde. This research hopes to begin the conversation on how journalists framed the Robb Elementary shootings locally and nationally.

Many researchers have studied different aspects of the Sandy Hook shootings, so this research will acknowledge some of their findings in the literature. This research will also utilize



first-hand accounts of local journalists who covered these shootings and an analysis of media framing in several local and national articles from both the Robb and Sandy Hook Elementary shootings.

## **SCHOOL SHOOTINGS**

Why do school shootings happen in America? Journalists and the rest of Americans aim to determine this answer after each shooting.

School shootings are mass shootings that occur at a place of education. Crime violence group Gun Violence Archive defines a school shooting as “an incident with death or injury that occurs on school property when students, faculty and/or staff are on the premises. Intent during those times are not restricted to specific types of shootings” (*Gun Violence Archive*, 2022).

According to CNN, the United States has had “57 times as many school shootings as the other major industrialized nations combined” (Chabow & Rose, 2018). In this study, CNN looked at six other countries with the most advanced economies in the world from 2009 to 2018 and found that there were at least 288 school shootings in the U.S. during that time frame (Chabow & Rose, 2018). The U.S. has a unique problem with school shootings. They happen more in America than anywhere else in the world (Chabow & Rose, 2018). That said, the American media constantly places the blame on why this happens. Following school shootings in the U.S., journalists follow them closely for a certain time.

This research will focus on two of the deadliest school shootings to date. The shootings at Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary are approximately ten years apart, one in the first year of its news cycle and the other past a decade. Both schools were closed indefinitely following the shootings, and current students finished their schooling at other places. Facts and details of both shootings will be essential to fully understand the news coverage following both events.

### **Sandy Hook Elementary School Shootings**

In the early morning of Dec. 14, 2012, Adam Lanza killed his mother, Nancy, with a .22 caliber Savage Mark II rifle at her home in Newtown, Connecticut (CNN Editorial Research,

2022). After killing his mother, Lanza drove his mom's car approximately five miles to his previous school, Sandy Hook Elementary School, which housed approximately 700 students (Stoller & Dorell, 2012). As Lanza walked into the building, the school psychologist and principal stopped him in his path, both of whom he killed using a Bushmaster XM15-E2S rifle (Almasy, 2012). Lanza then entered two other classrooms, rooms eight and 10, killing 20 children and four other adults. Only one student survived in room eight. The six-year-old survivor attributed her survival to playing dead in the classroom bathroom while Lanza was there (Altimari & Goode, 2013). After his rampage in Room 10, Lanza died by suicide in the same room. From when Lanza entered the school to when he died, he was there for 11 minutes.

In the weeks and months following the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary, there was nationwide unrest on gun control and mental health. Almost two years after the shootings, the Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate released a report profiling Lanza's life and any warning signs of his mental illness. In the report, the office details that Lanza had not left his mother's home for three months before the killings. They also found that while his mother could not have stopped him, she could have intervened at multiple points in his life before the shootings. The FBI found that Lanza's attack was well-thought-out and that he had "appear[ed] to have been on a path to violence for quite some time" (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014, p. 104). In the report by the Office of the Child Advocate in Connecticut, they concluded that Lanza may have had anorexia nervosa (Office of the Child Advocate, 2014, p. 71). In the next few years, multiple families of those killed at Sandy Hook filed several lawsuits against the estate of Nancy Lanza and the manufacturers of one of the rifles that Lanza used (CNN Editorial Research, 2022).

Ten years after the shooting on Nov. 13, 2022, the Sandy Hook memorial for the 26 victims was opened on the site where the shooting occurred (Sylla & Tucker, 2022). The memorial sits next to the newly built Sandy Hook Elementary School and serves as a remembrance of the lost lives from the shootings.

### **Robb Elementary School Shootings**

Days after turning 18, Salvador Ramos of Uvalde, Texas, purchased two assault rifles he would later use to kill 21 people (Jacobo, 2022).

On May 24, 2022, Ramos shot his grandmother and drove minutes away to his previous elementary school, Robb Elementary. His grandmother, still alive, called 911 and reported her grandson to the police. Minutes later, Ramos arrived at Robb Elementary and shot at two witnesses near a funeral home as he exited his car. He entered the school through an ajar door and began firing off his Daniel Defense AR-15-style assault rifle. A teacher in the school noticed him walking around the school and called 911. Officers arrived on the scene and attempted to stop Ramos, and in doing so, Ramos shot at both. Thirty minutes after Ramos entered the building, Ramos continued firing gunshots in the building (Jacobo, 2022).

Ramos spent most of his time in connecting classrooms, rooms 111 and 112. Before Ramos entered classroom 111, teacher Arnulfo Reyes instructed his students to “get under the table and act like you’re asleep” (Cohen & Bruggeman, 2022). These were the last words Reyes ever told his students. Ramos killed all 11 students in his classroom, and Reyes, although he was shot twice in the back and lung, survived.

As time passed, parents at Robb Elementary learned of the lockdown at the school through social media and started to get restless. A group of Deputy U.S. Marshals from Del Rio, which is approximately 70 miles away from Uvalde, arrived on site nearly 40 minutes after

Ramos entered the school (Jacobco, 2022). After 40 minutes, a 911 caller from inside one of the classrooms confirmed that multiple people were dead. Five more minutes passed, and U.S. Border Patrol members arrived at the school.

After 77 minutes of lockdown, officers entered one of the classrooms and killed Ramos. After this, police and medics began assessing the injuries and deaths in the classrooms and rescued those still alive. At 1:06 p.m., the Uvalde police announced on social media that they had shot the killer (Jacobco, 2022).

After the shootings at Robb Elementary, many stories about how Ramos became one of the deadliest school shooters flooded news stories everywhere. Shortly after the shootings, Facebook released that Ramos sent a private message the morning of the attack saying, “I’m going to shoot my grandmother,” and “I’m going to shoot an elementary school” (Nix & Lerman, 2022). This information was not released or found until after the event occurred. Investigators found other warning signs as well. Two months before the shooting, in a group chat, one of his friends asked Ramos, “Are you gonna shoot up a school or something?” He replied, “No. Stop asking dumb questions. You’ll see” (Fechter & Oxner, 2022).

Most coverage long after the shootings focused on how long it took the police to intervene. It took local and national police and federal officials 90 minutes before they found and killed the shooter (Fechter & Oxner, 2022). Writers from the *Texas Tribune* wrote, “police officers did not act sooner to stop the 18-year-old gunman rampaging at Robb Elementary School because the school district’s chief of police wanted to wait for backup and equipment” (Fechter & Oxner, 2022). By the time federal officers arrived, Ramos had been in the building for over an hour. Officers were en route to stop Ramos but constantly stopped themselves, waiting for more backup and equipment. The lone survivor of classroom 111, Arnulfo Reyes,

called the police officers cowards; “They sit there and did nothing for our community. They took a long time to go in... I will never forgive them” (Cohen & Bruggeman, 2022).

Additionally, there were stories about how a teacher had propped open the door that Ramos used to enter the building, but nothing was confirmed.

Since the lockdown was announced on social media while the shooter was still active, many parents knew Ramos was in the building but could not go in to save their children. They instead waited for police force.

As the first anniversary of the massacre at Robb Elementary approaches, Americans, including these parents, continue to seek answers.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Relevant literature includes the history of school shootings, media framing of school shootings and analysis of the overall media coverage. Additionally, this research will analyze first-hand experiences from local journalists who covered both Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary School shootings. Because of the qualitative research, the literature review will be crucial to the overall study. By looking at past research on framing and the reporting of school shootings, there will be a clearer picture of what this research will result.

In *News Framing of School Shootings*, McCluskey (2017) asserts that each news article about a school shooting relies on other assumptions and frames of previous shootings. After school shootings, the public speculates about the event, and journalists write news stories interpreting the event. McCluskey (2017) focuses on 11 school shootings that occurred between 1996 and 2012, one being the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary. Using a mixed methods approach, McCluskey (2017) analyzes the frames given in these shootings. He found that the most dominant nine frames were “guns, popular media, school security, parents, teen life, the criminal justice system, mental health, drugs/alcohol and religion” (McCluskey, 2017, p. 7). McCluskey (2017) also writes of the heroism featured in many stories that followed these shootings. Among the 1,326 articles he reviewed, over 10 percent of them referenced an act of heroism (McCluskey, 2017, p. 162). The most prominent frames were about gun culture and gun control, meaning that most journalists placed the blame on this. McCluskey (2017) also mentioned that the psychological state of the Sandy Hook shooter made mental health prominent for this shooting. The shooting at Sandy Hook was the second-most followed story of 2012, and polls showed that many people still followed this story months later. Through research of articles, McCluskey (2017) found that the Sandy Hook shooter “was described as a loner,

socially awkward, or troubled, and his mother as having problem trying to reach him” (p. 130). Journalists wrote many articles about how people could have caught Adam Lanza’s deteriorating mental health. This book gave a more detailed look at the frames that followed Sandy Hook and other prevalent frames that followed school shootings in the early 2000s and late 1990s. This analysis continues by comparing some of the frames found in *News Framing of School Shootings* for the Sandy Hook shootings to those for the Robb Elementary shootings.

Pelled et al. (2021) performed a comparative analysis of school shooting news coverage from 59 shootings in *Death Across the News Spectrum: A Time Series Analysis of Partisan Coverage Following Mass Shootings in the United States Between 2012 and 2014*. These events were coded for “characteristics of victims, shooters, and context, contrasted with coverage in six major news outlets during 2012–2014” (Pelled et al., 2021). Through their analysis, the researchers found several patterns. One of the patterns they found was a distinct correlation between child deaths and coverage of gun rights in the news. Many researchers quote the commonly said happenstance “if it bleeds, it leads.” Pelled et al. (2021) found this true in their quantitative research. They also investigated the partisanship of the news and the media coverage of the shooting in which it showed. They found a framing agenda of racial aspects for the partisan news outlets they researched. Because of this, they looked specifically at the shooter and the victims’ race. One of their findings was that “conservative and moderate outlets direct less coverage to gun violence in the wake of events involving a high number of Black deaths” (Pelled et al., 2021). This research influenced the analysis of the Robb Elementary shooting frames. Uvalde, Texas, houses a large Hispanic population. Although Pelled et al.’s research focused more on Black deaths, this research influenced the search for racial framing after the Robb Elementary shootings.



This research brings up the many similarities in reporting on school shootings throughout time. Although Pelled et al.'s research involved a shorter timespan than this research, the researchers bring up the idea of frames in the media and takes a quantitative look. This research will investigate qualitatively and compare both Robb Elementary and Sandy Hook shootings.

In *#NEVERAGAIN: Framing in Community and National News Coverage of the Parkland Mass Shootings*, Holody and Shaughnessy (2022) studied media framing of the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The Parkland shooting marked the deadliest high school shooting to date (Holody & Shaughnessy, 2022). This shooting took the lives of 17 people on Feb. 14, 2018. Holody and Shaughnessy (2022) found salience in the Parkland shootings. While most school shooters are either killed by police or kill themselves at the end of their rampage, police arrested this school shooter, and he survived in the end. This arrest marked a significant difference from most school shootings. Following other school shootings like Columbine and Sandy Hook, the victim's parents became activists; however, in this case, the actual survivors were the ones to speak out. Because of this uniqueness, the researchers found that the activism disrupted traditional frames that follow most school shootings.

These researchers examined the salience and valence of frames in regional and national newspapers following the shootings. Salience signifies "how prominently a frame is utilized in a news article and how frequently it is used across multiple new articles" (Holody & Shaughnessy, 2022). This view refers to how to discuss articles on these mass shootings qualitatively.

They found that although there were prominent frames like gun control, popular culture and school safety, there were also newer frames following the Parkland shooting like partisan divide, activism and mental health. This research inspired later research on the salience of the

Robb Elementary shootings compared to Sandy Hook. What made the Robb Elementary shootings different and unique? How did that affect the frames of the shooting? This question will be investigated in the research.

Holody and Shaughnessy (2022) conclude that there are a lot more research opportunities looking at the special circumstances of each shooting. Youth activism sparked a new frame in the Parkland shootings. Every school shooting will have its own salience. Thus, it is more challenging to generalize the news coverage following individual shootings. There will always be ways that they are different and unique. However, journalists may have “settled on a specific, unique set of frames to use when covering mass shootings” (Holody & Shaughnessy, 2022). In this research, Holody & Shaughnessy (2022) separated the established and developed frames, meaning the ones that were the “norm” and the frames specific to Parkland. This research provided the basis of the frames that were looked at for the research, which include race, mental health, gun control, popular culture, activism, community change, law responsibility, family responsibility, school safety, partisan divide and National Rifle Association (NRA) power.

Hume and Perreault (2022) utilize field theory to compare CNN news coverage of shootings at Columbine and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. The researchers define field theory with a sports metaphor: “Fields tend to fight for the preservation of their space as it stands, even as athletes push against the renegotiation of the games’ rules while in play” (Hume & Perreault, 2022). Journalists act with the information that they already know. In their study, Hume and Perreault (2022) look at how journalists go against this grain. In this study, Hume and Perreault (2022) found that CNN focused its media coverage on the shooter in both shootings they studied. For both shootings, the shooter had a history of mental illness, so much of the CNN broadcast after focused on mental health reform in the U.S. Instead of watching broadcasts, this

study will focus on news articles. This study also looks at how news coverage is skewed after school shootings to explain why they happened.

Chyi and McCombs (2004) study the object salience of the Columbine school shooting in 1999. They define object salience as “the relative importance of an object- a public issue, public figure, or any other topic- in the media or among the public, [that] has been the central focus of agenda-setting research” (Chyi & McCombs, 2004, p. 22). Typically, researchers measure object salience by the amount of media attention a topic attracts over time. However, in this research, the researchers examine how news coverage builds salience through the time of a press agenda. This study looks at the agenda-setting and frame-changing process that occurred after the Columbine shooting. Frame changing is the convergence of agenda-setting and framing. Chyi and McCombs (2004) studied *New York Times* articles for a month after the Columbine shootings. They found that news articles peaked on April 22, immediately after they first reported on the shootings. Of the articles studied, 52% portrayed a societal frame in which they related to the social issues at large (Chyi & McCombs, 2004, p. 29). Topics like gun control attracted the most attention. At the national level in the *Times*, journalists framed Columbine at a societal level. National coverage will likely take a more societal frame, and there will likely be similar findings in the meta-coverage of Uvalde and Sandy Hook. There will likely be textual similarities in the frame-changing throughout the timespan of the media coverage.

Muschert and Janssen (2012) discuss the blame frame in news discourse when it relates to school shootings. These researchers focused on *New York Times* articles across one month, precisely nine school shootings from 1997 to 2001. These researchers effectively examine Karen Cerulo’s four sequences following these shootings. Cerulo “demonstrated that the sequencing (i.e., the order in which elements of a news story appear) of news coverage reflects journalistic

conventions regarding the deviant or justifiable nature of a violent act” (Muschert & Janssen, 2012).

Through this insight, Muschert and Janssen’s (2012) findings help to “understand the process through which journalists came to settle on a conventional way of assigning moral responsibility to school shooters.” Researchers found a more proportional distribution of the shooters’ blame when looking at the sequences of the school shootings studied. Half of the shootings studied attributed blame to the shooter, and the other half were unclear. Muschert and Janssen (2012) also found that when the shooter took their own life, it often swayed the journalist’s decision to attribute blame to the shooter. Overall, this research showed a unique look at the blame frame, but for a shooting that happened over 20 years ago.

In *Public Relations and Journalism in Times of Crisis: A Symbiotic Partnership*, Miller and Broussard (2019) interviewed journalists, editors and others involved in the Sandy Hook Elementary shootings. In one of the chapters, Miller describes how national and local journalists covered Sandy Hook with first-hand accounts and best practices as public relations professionals and journalists as it related to school shootings. The primary publication in Newtown was the *Newtown Bee*, a local publication published weekly on Fridays. As the Sandy Hook shootings occurred on a Friday, journalists at the *Bee* had a normal Friday on Dec. 14, preparing for the holidays until the shootings occurred. The morning of the shooting, the headline read "Vandalism Leaves Old Headstones Cracked and Damaged" (Satija, 2012).

John Voket, associate editor of the *Bee* at the time of the shootings, was one of the main reporters that day. Voket was one of the first journalists to begin news coverage at Sandy Hook. Following the shootings, he was one of the only journalists to report from the local firehouse, where many family members picked up the Sandy Hook students later that day. When asked

about his experience at the firehouse, he said, “I just [had] to try to observe the best of my ability without being invasive, but also [had] to be the representative of the newspaper here who’s invested in the community” (Miller & Broussard, 2019, p.182). That day, the *Bee*’s website had more traffic than ever, as the site typically received 2,000 visitors daily. On the day of the shootings, the website received over 120,000 hits (Satija, 2012). Following the shootings, the *Bee* released a free special print edition for the first time in its 135-year history, published the following week. The special edition received positive feedback throughout the community and won several regional awards.

Many interviewed in *Public Relations and Journalism in Times of Crisis: A Symbiotic Partnership* described national journalists as aggressive following the Sandy Hook shootings. Janet Robinson, the superintendent of the Sandy Hook schools at the time, knew that they did not release information as quickly as they could have, but nothing like that had ever happened to them before. They acted exactly how they thought they should; there was no guidebook on this type of event. Quickly, as information leaked, it was skewed and lost as national and local journalists sought answers. Robinson said, “I wish we could have had at least some of that information out there before it just became so pervasive” (Miller & Broussard, 2019, p.182). Days after the shooting, Robinson had no idea what was to come. She even called a friend who worked in public relations to help media train her. Robinson felt helpless as national journalists “were just overly aggressive and just wanted to get it out first. And, and didn’t check their data, didn’t check the facts” (Miller & Broussard, 2019, p.185). National media outlets created problems throughout coverage of the Sandy Hook shootings. National news coming in so aggressively at Sandy Hook “took away much of [local news’] power to control the story and often what they believed their community needed in terms of locally-relevant information”

(Miller & Broussard, 2019, p.185). Robinson felt that this would be most difficult for the local community, as their aggression would interfere with the community members' healing processes.

While many felt that national journalists invaded locals' privacy, community members also felt that local organizations treated them with more respect (Miller & Broussard, 2019). Local news organizations treated Sandy Hook stories differently than any other news story. They did not follow the norms and procedures that most journalists follow. The local press aims to "link the public with specific information to help them make decisions, as well as foster a sense of community" (Miller & Broussard, 2019, p.190). One of the reasons most of the more informative journalism following the shootings was at the local level was because of the sense of community. The national press should deliver broader information, giving citizens resources and ensuring everyone feels heard.

Overall, Miller & Broussard (2019) attest that school shootings should be treated as unique forms of crisis communications. They label school shootings as an "emotional crisis as opposed to a physical crisis" (Miller & Broussard, 2019, p.197). For journalists covering a school shooting, they advise that they should advocate for the local press, know their audiences, ask difficult questions and be respectful of all people. Generally, all stakeholders should respect all emotions following one of these events.

In the middle of the day on May 24, 2022, *Austin American-Stateman* reporter Tony Plohetski decided to drive two and a half hours to Uvalde, Texas, to cover the shootings that happened earlier that day (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023). He recalls it beginning like any other ordinary day. Plohetski was getting his hair cut when he initially heard of two injuries at a shooting in Uvalde from Twitter. Because Uvalde was not in his typical coverage area, he did not

initially plan to drive there to cover the events and find out more. But, as time went on, he had not heard any more information about the shootings. After talking to his editor, Manny Garcia, he decided to contact anyone he knew in the Uvalde area to see if they knew what was going on. After talking to a Texas official and hearing that up to 14 students may be dead, he swiftly drove to Uvalde and arrived by sunset. The first thing he did was book a hotel room in Uvalde. Uvalde was not a town that could handle the number of people that would soon be there covering the stories. On the day of the shootings, he recalls going first to the town square of Uvalde and then to the Robb Elementary campus. Plohetski said, “When you first get there on the day of, the networks and the CNNs of the world had not had the opportunity to deploy their whole army of people. The town was not as saturated as it quickly became with journalists from all over the country” (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023).

Quickly, he knew that access and proximity would be crucial for covering this event (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023). After arriving in Uvalde, he began interviewing townspeople and coordinated with another journalist at the *Austin American-Stateman* to start a live-updated article on the timeline of events. Plohetski utilized Twitter for some of the major initial updates to the public.

A few days after the shootings, Garcia sent 12 people from the *Austin American-Stateman* to Uvalde to work on covering the stories and profiling the victims. At first, Plohetski recalled many inaccuracies in the media and conflicting reports on what happened. He called the situation a “category five hurricane of information, pounding you hour after hour with new information” (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023).

Weeks after the shootings on July 12, Plohetski was the first journalist to release a 77-minute video of police officers entering Robb Elementary and failing to enter the classrooms to

stop the gunman. When released, this video debunked the original tale of heroism that officials created while praising police officers. After releasing the video, Plohetski “felt like [he] had served the public by bringing truth and reality” (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023). Additionally, he attributes being a local journalist as one of the main reasons he obtained this footage. Having connections in the local and state departments and after working for over 20 years in the area, Plohetski was one of few people to see the 77-minute video and push to get access of it.

Nevertheless, he knows that national journalists “have a huge advantage because they have a team of producers who are on the ground” (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023). Unfortunately, local publications do not have those types of resources, but they do have the connections that national journalists lack.

Plohetski called covering the Robb Elementary shootings the “hardest thing [he’d] ever done in [his] professional life” (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023).



## THEORIES AND MODEL

In this research, there were two theories that played a role in the results. The two theories researched were the agenda-setting and framing theories. These theories were also often mentioned in the literature reviewed. Shoemaker and Reese's Hierarchy of Influences Model was also analyzed to identify how framing occurs generally. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) give a theoretical model that scholars can use to determine how journalists frame articles, which will help when analyzing this research.

### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

The agenda-setting theory suggests "that the media affects society by deciding which topics people view as most important" (Mohn, 2022). Research on this theory is crucial because it allows people to see how mass media and public opinion are skewed by public policy. According to this theory, when people view something in the media, they will likely see it as a more important topic. Additionally, the media focuses on one topic more than another, and the public will automatically believe that the other topic is more important than the other. Thus, this theory acknowledges that the media is highly influential in determining public attitudes and opinions.

Walter Lippmann was one of the first academics to research the media's influence in this way. In Lippmann's book *Public Opinion*, he explains public opinion issues in a democratic society. He writes that people analyze public opinion "by recognizing the triangular relationship between the scene of action, the human picture of that scene, and the human response to that picture working itself out upon the scene of action" (*Public Opinion by Walter Lippmann*, p. 11). Lippmann's thoughts set the foundation for the agenda-setting theory.

Dr. Donald Shaw and Dr. Maxwell McCombs wrote about the agenda-setting theory after their “study to monitor the effects of the media during the presidential election of 1968” (Mohn, 2022). They examined the public’s reaction to different media messages during this campaign. At this time, the most prominent form of media was newspapers, but since then, researchers have continued to focus on television, social media, and other forms of media. Years later, Shaw and McCombs completed another study on how the agenda-setting theory impacted people based on political participation.

People view agenda-setting in many ways. One way people view it is that the media picks a topic, and in return, the public views it as important (Mohn, 2022). Another way that people view agenda setting is by giving attention to specific topics, giving that topic more prominence than another. Researchers also define this as media framing.

### **Framing Theory**

The social movement framing theory challenges “to understand the way in which social movements and social movement actors create and use meaning, or how events and ideas are framed” (Christiansen, 2021). This theoretical research has been vital in understanding how social movements are created and continue.

Erving Goffman first mentioned the idea of framing analysis in 1974 (Christiansen, 2021). Goffman found that people frame ideas to learn the world around them more confidently. Like a picture frame, media frames cater to one existing topic while neglecting excess information. Goffman found that every interaction centers along a media frame. People will then react based on their perception of the topic and who they are.

## Shoemaker and Reese's Hierarchy of Influences Model

In *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective*, Shoemaker and Reese (2014) analyze the numerous factors that may influence media coverage. Using the original framework of Gans (1979) and Gitlin (1980), they put their research on media coverage categories into a theoretical umbrella. They call this the Hierarchy of Influences Model. The five levels included in their analysis are social systems, social institutions, media organizations, routine practices and individuals.

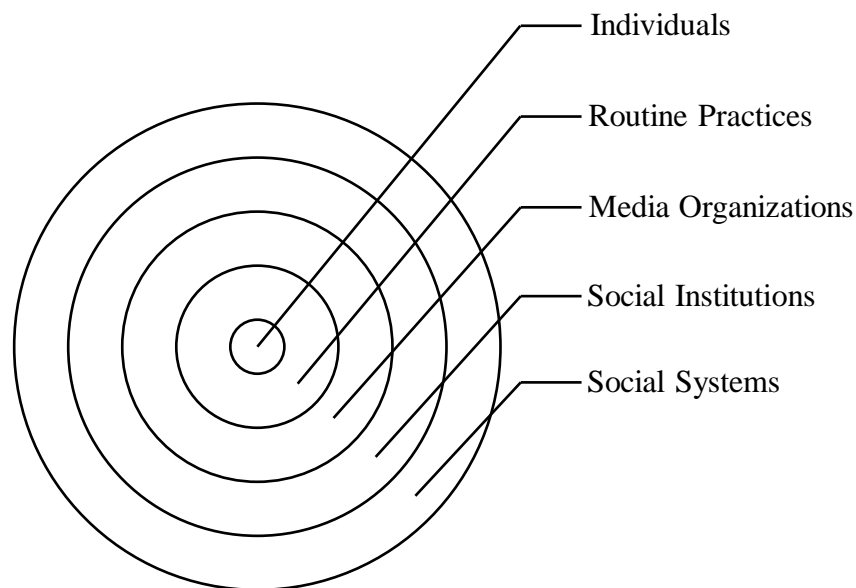


Figure 1. The Hierarchy of Influences Model by Shoemaker and Reese (2014)

At the center of the hierarchical model lies the individual level, which includes the communicator's factual, psychological and sociological characteristics (Zamith, 2022, p. 88). A communicator's gender, race, ethnic and religious background will all come into their writing, and it will show in the articles. However, it is not always a conscious effort. These characteristics are what drive the media content. The individual level is the smallest and most micro level.

Routine practices then comprise the next level, which are recurrent practices and norms that communicators follow. These practices follow a pattern, including “rules that journalistic actors use to do their jobs” (Zamith, 2022, p. 88). This practice can include a specific type of criteria that a journalist follows when writing a story, such as describing both political affiliations of a story or writing in a specific style. One example of this would be the inverted pyramid style of writing, which puts the essential information at the beginning of an article.

The next level goes beyond the routines level and is characterized as the organizational level. The organizational level utilizes the norms of the structured entity in which the communicator operates. The organizational level includes the “occupational roles, organizational policy, and how the enterprise itself is structured” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014, p. 8). Organizations can become directly related to how journalists cover unique topics. This interference also concerns the medium through which the organization reports, such as print or online (Zamith, 2022, p. 89). The organization’s geographical location can also influence journalists’ coverage.

The next level is the social-institutional level. This level “refers to the norms, individuals, and organizations that operate outside a given journalistic organization” (Zamith, 2022, p. 89). The social institutional level involves media and official sources, interest groups, advertisers, public relations and media policies. For example, any relation or impact from a governmental agency would be at the social-institutional level.

The last and most macro level of influence is the social systems level. This broad level includes ideas that are generally accepted within society (Zamith, 2022). Shoemaker and Reese (2014) denote this level as “the structure of relationships among people and the institutions they create” (p. 64).

Each of these factors is important and exists while relying on other levels. Additionally, some can categorize these ideas into multiple levels of influence. Journalism constantly changes and shifts the model, but each influence changes simultaneously. Many scholars have used the hierarchical model as an impactful model for research. By analyzing the hierarchy of influences model, this research will utilize the levels of the model to determine how journalists framed the articles for each of these shootings.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Written journalism was selected as the medium for this research because of the specific interest in media framing. When designing the research for the timeline of this thesis, there would be better results from analyzing textual evidence.

For this project to get the most viable results, research was conducted using only the Access World News database. The main search function on the database was used when conducting the research. Key search terms were limited to one for each of the shootings. The key search term for the Sandy Hook shootings was “Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting” through all text. For the Robb Elementary shootings, the key search term was “Robb Elementary School shooting” for all text.

The research was also narrowed down by dates. For each shooting, research was limited to articles published the day of, one week after and one month after. For Sandy Hook, this date parameter meant Dec. 14, 2012, Dec. 21, 2012, and Jan. 14, 2013. For Robb Elementary, this date parameter meant May 24, 2022, May 31, 2022, and June 24, 2022. Prior research suggested that the life span of reporting a school shooting is one month long, thus why this research focuses within that time frame (Chyi & McCombs, 2004).

Local and regional articles were prioritized when selecting which articles to include in the research. The research was limited to articles produced in the United States. Articles from the state where the shooting occurred, and USA-national publications were included for location. The advanced search function on Access World News was used to determine article location. The article’s location was changed for regional pieces by specifying either “USA-Connecticut” for Sandy Hook or “USA-Texas” for Robb. The article's location for national pieces was specified by narrowing the search results to “USA-National” for both shootings.

Research prioritized breaking news articles and avoided articles that repeated the breaking news nationally. News briefs, opinion pieces, blogs or articles that only included videos or photos were not included. The research included articles that were at least 500 words. The search results that were transcripts of broadcasts were also not included. These steps went into finding the news articles that would then be categorized.

After reading all the articles in the initial research, the gestalt theory was utilized to take an overall deduction from each article and its framing. As Max Wertheimer explains, gestalt theory stems from gestalt psychology and attempts to look at the “effect of the whole event, not contained in the sum of the parts” (*What is gestalt?*). The established and developed frames that Holody and Shaughnessy (2022) found in their study on the framing of the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, were utilized in this research. The frames found in this study were gun control, mental health, race, popular culture, activism, community change, law responsibility, school safety, partisan divide and the NRA power. Specific salient frames not included in Holody and Shaughnessy’s (2022) research for both shootings were also searched in the articles. The frames from this research were used because as the Parkland shooting occurred in 2018, the timeline of these frames would be in the middle of the shootings at Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary. Only the main frame of each article is accounted for in the research, whereas many articles had many frames.

When looking at the overall framing of these articles, these were the two critical research questions.

R1: How do articles from the Robb and Sandy Hook Elementary shootings portray framing at national and local levels?

R2: What frames do national and local publications use to portray the shootings at Robb and Sandy Hook Elementary?

These research questions were chosen to allow a further investigation of how framing impacts American society. By knowing the facts of each shooting and first-hand experiences from local journalists for each shooting, this research will deduct overall implications of the framing that national and local journalists used.



## RESULTS

There was a significant difference in how journalists framed regional and national articles. Although the shootings at Sandy Hook and Robb were similar in nature, the framing was quite different at national and local levels. In the data collection using Access World News, 51 articles from the Sandy Hook shootings and 53 articles from the Robb Elementary shootings were found using the search tools provided in the methods section.

After analyzing these articles, these were the following results of media framing after the shootings. Of the 51 Sandy Hook articles, 24 were from national publications, and 27 were published locally. Of the 53 Robb Elementary articles, 25 were from national publications, and 28 were from regional publications. Below are the number of articles found for Holody and Shaugnessy's (2022) main frames for the Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary shootings. The table below includes the frames that yielded results for this study.

Table 1. Frames from Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary Shootings

Frames	Gun Control	Mental Health	Popular Culture	Activism	Community Change	Law Responsibility	School Safety	NRA Power
Sandy Hook Elem.	16	5	2	1	20	0	2	6
Robb Elem.	16	1	0	0	11	13	11	1

### Local Coverage of Sandy Hook Elementary Shootings

First, this research will cover the overall results from the framing of the Sandy Hook shootings. When inspecting the local and regional articles, many frames were about community change. Of the articles that journalists framed for community change, 17 of them were local or regional articles. Throughout the month's timeline, community change frames were consistent through regional news. Overall, the local and regional articles had a community and rebuilding

Newtown theme. This theme also included stories about the children who died during the shooting. These articles focused more on how the community coped after the shootings and what the community did afterward.

Of the six articles published by *The Newtown Bee* in their special edition the week after the shootings, four of the articles were framed on community change, rarely ever mentioning anything about gun control or the mental health of the shooter. John Voket (2012) of the *Newtown Bee* wrote about the opportunities to donate financially to the victims and support community members. He wrote, “Since just after news of the shooting broke, many began pouring money into various funds, including the primary Sandy Hook School Support Fund established by the Newtown Savings Bank in partnership with United Way of Western Connecticut” (Voket, 2012). The *Bee* also gave mental health resources to community members in this special edition. The special edition included articles about acts of kindness and special interest stories about the survivors in Newtown (Hallabeck, 2012). Overall, the *Newtown Bee* and other local and regional publications were framed the same way throughout the month of the school shooting news cycle.

Even a month after the shootings, local news publications focused more on promoting a sense of community and future action that the community would take. In one of the articles published a month after, Hugh McQuaid (2013) from *CT News Junkie* wrote about the Sandy Hook Promise, the newly created non-profit group to prevent future gun violence at schools. This article featured a few quotes from the parents of the victims. Nelba Marquez-Greene, whose daughter, Ana Grace, was one of the victims, said, “This is a promise to do everything in our power to be remembered not as the town filled with grief and victims, but as the place where real change began. Our hearts are broken. Our spirit is not” (McQuaid, 2013). Although many articles

like this mentioned issues of gun control, the local publications framed more to use the community of Newtown to enact positive change from such horrific events.

### **National Coverage of Sandy Hook Elementary Shootings**

While local publications after Sandy Hook focused more on the local community, national publications initially focused on gun control and NRA power. Of the 16 Sandy Hook articles with the main frame of gun control, 12 were from national publications. Published the day of the Sandy Hook shootings, Ben Feller (2012) of the *Associated Press* wrote, “The tragedy, like previous ones have, reignited calls from gun control activists for laws restricting access to weapons.” As early as the day of the shooting, journalists framed their articles on gun control. One week later, journalists still framed gun control. Michael Daly (2012) of *The Daily Beast* wrote, “Let’s not betray the murdered children of Sandy Hook Elementary School the way we betrayed the murdered children of Cleveland Elementary School two decades ago.” Consistently, the story sways to gun control and how students have been “betrayed” by politicians because of it. One month after the shootings, gun control remained one of the key frames for national publications.

Five of the six articles that journalists framed on NRA power were from national publications. Any publications that framed NRA power occurred at least a week after the shootings. NRA power worked with gun control in the frames, but the ones labeled for NRA were the main frame. Published in *National Journal* a week after the shootings, Cory Bennett (2012) wrote about the new legislation Sandy Hook inspired, which would add an armed security officer at all schools. This legislation was the NRA’s response to how to stop future events like the Sandy Hook shootings from happening. *USA Today* writers Aamer Madhani and Jackie Kucinich (2012) wrote that the NRA CEO said “that future school shootings like the one in

Newtown, Conn., one week ago can only be prevented if schools have armed security guards, just as the Secret Service protects President Obama.”

The other frames found in the analysis of the Sandy Hook articles were mental health, popular culture, activism and school safety. The only additional frame not included in Holody and Shaugnessy’s (2022) research was heroism from the Sandy Hook shooting. Heroism was only found as the main frame in one of the articles, so this was not included in the main findings of the research. There were no significant patterns that would contribute to any research findings for these frames.

### **Local Coverage of Robb Elementary Shootings**

Framing in local and regional coverage of the Robb Elementary shootings was quite different from the early frames of the Sandy Hook shootings. The data collection resulted in 28 local and regional articles. Regarding framing, there was a shift in significant frames throughout the timing of the studied articles. Most of the articles published on the day of the shootings tended to frame on the topic of gun control. Writers contributing to *The Daily Sentinel* wrote about death tolls, details and how politicians responded to the shooting (Staff and Wire Reports, 2022). Many politicians mentioned how the shooter bought military-style weapons days after his 18th birthday. In *The Daily Sentinel* article, the journalists repeatedly mention the shooter’s guns and the impact of the shooting, calling it the “deadliest school shooting in Texas history” (Staff and Wire Reports, 2022). Many other articles published on the day of the shooting reaffirmed this unfortunate statistic. James Hartley (2022) of *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* published an article detailing every school shooting in Texas to date and the weapons used. Other articles published on the day of the shootings tended to highlight the unique problem Texas has with gun control. However, this was not the case as time progressed.

As time progressed, local and regional article framing focused on law responsibility and school safety. Local and regional journalists focused on the problematic efforts of the police chief at least a week after the shootings. Tony Plohetski and Megan Menchaca (2022) of *Austin American Statesman* wrote about Pete Arredondo, the Uvalde school district police chief, and the incident commander of the law enforcement responsibilities for the shootings at Robb Elementary and how he did not follow standard procedures for an active shooter situation. The *Austin American Statesman* published this article just one week after the shootings. There was less focus on how the shooter acquired his weapons and more on what could have been done by police and officials to stop him.

One month after the shootings, there were more frames focused on law responsibility as it reached the legislature. Abby Livingston (2022) of *The Texas Tribune* wrote about bipartisan gun legislation passed through congress one month after the shootings. Local publications still focused on what was happening in congress to update residents. Although there were frames of gun control as well, there seemed to be a more significant focus on the missed efforts of police officials during the shootings. Niki Griswold and Chuck Lindell (2022) of *Austin American Statesman* wrote, “the head of the Texas Department of Public Safety told lawmakers Tuesday that the delayed law enforcement response to the gunman inside a Uvalde elementary school was an ‘abject failure’ that ignored lessons from previous school shootings.”

### **National Coverage of Robb Elementary Shootings**

The framing in the national coverage of the Robb Elementary shootings mimicked the results of local journalism. On the day of the shootings, journalists tended to frame overwhelmingly toward gun control. Consistently, journalists wrote about the story of Ramos purchasing assault weapons around his 18th birthday in the articles. Scott Bixby (2022) of *The*

*Daily Beast* wrote about the President's response to the shootings. Bixby (2022) wrote, "Perhaps more than any of his predecessors, Biden knows how impossibly narrow the path to meaningful legislative gun-control legislation can be." National journalists wrote articles framed on politicians' responses and how politicians would help gun ownership issues in America.

National journalists also often mentioned the NRA in early articles. Michael Mathes (2022) of *the International Business Times* wrote, "US gun lobby group the National Rifle Association (NRA) will hold its annual convention in Texas on Friday, days after a horrific school shooting in the state killed 19 children and two teachers." After the shootings, many wondered if Texas officials would move the NRA conference, but the event still happened as usual. Many of the day-of articles focused on this and other gun-control-related issues framed as to why the shootings occurred. Besides articles published on the day of the shootings, journalists rarely mentioned the NRA conference.

As time progressed, like in local publications, many national publications focused on law responsibility and the issues of the delayed police response in the schools. National and local journalists found this to be the most salient aspect of the shootings. Kevin Johnson (2022) of *USA Today* wrote about how the U.S. Department of Justice would soon review the police's delayed response in storming into Robb Elementary in an article published a week after the shootings. Brad Brooks and Daniel Trotta (2022) of *the International Business Times* wrote that police chief "Arredondo has come under heavy criticism for his role as on-scene commander of local law enforcement's handling of the shooting as it unfolded." One month after, national publications still focused on law and police responsibility.

Andrea Ball (2022) from *USA Today* wrote about how some Uvalde community members dealt with the pain and sadness a month after the shootings. Ball wrote, "At the school board

meeting, parents ask what the frightened students were thinking for 77 minutes inside bloody classrooms. They ask why the school district's police chief hasn't been fired and why he's still on the city council." The police chief was about to be sworn in as a city council member right before the shootings occurred. A month after the shootings, there were still many issues national and local press had with how the police handled the overall series of events, so journalists framed the articles that way.

### **Other Frames**

There were no findings of framing of race, family responsibility and partisan divide for either the Sandy Hook or Robb Elementary shootings. The reasoning for this is likely because these were some of the developed frames in Holody and Shaugnessy's (2022) research, meaning that journalists developed these frames during the Parkland shootings. They were never the main frame of these articles. These frames were likely there, but they were never the main frames of the articles studied. Otherwise, Holody and Shaugnessy's (2022) chosen frames did reflect the two researched shootings of this study.

## ANALYSES AND CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps, local and national journalists prepared to report on the shootings at Robb Elementary like the ones at Sandy Hook. Journalists did just that in early articles. As Miller and Broussard's (2019) research suggested, each shooting should be treated as its own form of crisis communication. Thus, there tends to be a formula in how these shootings are covered by the media. In the beginning of the news coverage for Robb Elementary, national articles were framed for gun control, just as journalists had done in the past. This is how national journalists for the Sandy Hook shootings also framed their stories. However, once journalists realized and learned about how poorly police officers handled the situation, national and local journalists focused less on guns and more on the way that people could have stopped the shooter sooner. When there was this prominent frame of law responsibility, journalists focused all their efforts on uncovering the truth and placing blame on the police. This is also referred to as the blame frame (Muschert and Janssen, 2012). After school shootings, journalists will seek answers to find the blame after shootings.

After the first week of media coverage of the Robb shootings, national and local media focused on the issues that the Uvalde police and focused on that, putting gun control on the back burner. National and local publications found their story about this shooting. Every school shooting is different, along with different frames, and in the case of Robb Elementary, frames switched toward the police after the first week. As individuals, people look for who and what to blame. After the Robb Elementary shootings, journalists transferred blame to the local police and police chief. The Robb Elementary shootings showed the blame frame at work (Muschert and Janssen, 2012). National and local journalists constantly look for the blame of shootings as soon as they happen. Is it mental health or is it because of guns? Or will the journalists find something



else to blame? For the case of Robb Elementary, the blame was on the police and law intervention. The blame shifted for national and local journalists after the day of the shootings because of these findings.

Gun control was a frame for local publications for the Robb Elementary shootings as early as the day of the event. This early local framing of gun control was not the case for the Sandy Hook shootings. Sandy Hook local journalists focused on the community aspect rather than the bigger picture. This is consistent with the concept of local journalists writing about rebuilding their community and the stories of those who were killed. This change is likely because journalism about school shootings is now more common than in 2012 when Sandy Hook occurred. In the ten years following Sandy Hook, journalists covered many more school shootings locally and nationally. Journalists have likely been desensitized of school shootings and their overall impact on communities.

Local publications also took more time to cover the Robb Elementary shootings. For example, *Austin American-Statesman* reporter Tony Plohetski drove two and a half hours from Austin, Texas, to cover the shootings in Uvalde (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023). Early reports from the shootings quoted only two injuries. So, unless regional journalists felt compelled to figure out more information, it took longer for journalists to cover the Robb Elementary shootings than in Newtown. This was one of the main differences of the studied shootings. The Sandy Hook coverage area had a much more established and funded local journalism area than Uvalde. With the Uvalde shootings, it took longer for regional and national journalists to get to the area. This could also be why the local journalists focused less on community change in the beginning of their coverage. Because most of the local journalists were not from the Uvalde area, they had less of a need to focus on the community impact of the shootings. On the contrary, journalists like

John Voket reported on the Sandy Hook shooting that happened right in his own community (Miller & Broussard, 2019). Local journalists who covered the Robb shootings had less of a stake in the Uvalde community.

There are many other possible reasons why gun control was a more prominent frame at the beginning of the Robb Elementary articles. When Sandy Hook happened, it had only been 13 years since Columbine. Social media was less prevalent, and modern technology was still rising. Reporting on school shootings can have a process to it. It seemed like local and national journalists focused on gun control on the day of the Robb Elementary shootings just like they would any other shooting. Social media constantly changes news cycles (Miller & Broussard, 2019). Plohetski of the *Austin American-Stateman* utilized Twitter for many of the early updates on the Robb Elementary shootings (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023). On the day of the shootings, Plohetski (2022) tweeted at 7:07 p.m., “The death toll among children at Robb Elementary has risen to 18, top state officials have been notified Tuesday night.” This was one of Plohetski’s first tweets about the shootings that would take up the next few weeks of his career. Plohetski used Twitter for other breaking news updates as time passed, such as giving people updates on politicians and where memorials were located. Although Twitter was around in 2012, Americans did not use Twitter as they did ten years later for the Robb Elementary shootings.

Many journalists covered the initial story of Salvador Ramos buying the murder weapons on his 18th birthday. This story drove the initial frames of gun control nationally and locally in Uvalde. On the day of the shootings, this is what national and local publications used to embellish and frame their news stories. Journalists also covered the types of weapons he used and where he used them.

Gun control could have also been more prominent in the early coverage of Uvalde because of the current president's hard stance immediately after the shootings. In President Biden's initial speech on the day of the shooting, he makes a clear stance on his opinions of gun control. President Biden (2022) said, "As a nation, we have to ask: When in God's name are we going to stand up to the gun lobby? When in God's name will we do what we all know in our gut needs to be done?"

Politicians, especially the president, have the power to influence media coverage. Politicians after the Robb shootings could be one of the reasons that journalists used the gun control frame so early. President Obama took a much less political stance on the day of the Sandy Hook shootings. Instead, Obama took a different approach and began his speech by saying, "We've endured too many of these tragedies in the past few years. And each time I learn the news, I react not as a President, but as anybody else would -- as a parent" (Slack, 2012). Not ever mentioning the word "gun," Obama took a much different approach than Biden. Although national publications still focused on gun control and NRA power in the Sandy Hook articles, there was more overall sentiment toward community change and children's safety. Also, the gun control frames did not come as soon for the Sandy Hook articles as they did in the Robb shootings. As a result, politicians have the influence to affect immediate media coverage following these shootings. Politicians are a prime example of social institutions affecting news reporting (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014). Social institutions like the government have the power to influence journalists and the way that they cover the news.

Additionally, there were fewer differences in national and local reporting when there was a main frame. As seen in the reporting of Sandy Hook, journalists in local and national publications framed their articles quite differently. However, when there was a more prominent,

more salient frame, such as the responsibility of the law and police, like for Robb Elementary, this frame was at the forefront of most of the following journalism locally and nationally.

Looking at the time frame chosen for this study, most articles published one month after the shootings had less impact on the overall results. Additionally, there were generally fewer articles to discuss one month after the shootings. This further reaffirms the findings in Chyi and McCombs's (2004) study that suggested the life span of reporting a school shooting is one month long. If this research were to continue, suggestions would be to look at two and three weeks after the school shootings since the month-after date did not produce as many results.

Likely, there would have been more frames about mental health and popular culture had the research scope been widened and looked at more than just the main frame of each article. Both Robb and Sandy Hook shooters had an unknown history of mental illness that family members and teachers did not address before the shootings. There has also been a significant amount of research on the effect of video games on mental health and one's level of violence. However, these findings usually come much later than a month after a shooting. The Office of the Child Advocate released their investigation of Adam Lanza's deteriorating mental health in 2014, two years after the Sandy Hook shootings. There is still no released investigation on Salvador Ramos's mental health. Mental health frames will likely be included in future coverage of school shootings, long after a month has passed. Likely, there would also be more frames on mental health and popular culture if opinion pieces were included in the research.

Surprisingly, race was never a main frame of any of the articles for the Robb or Sandy Hook Elementary shootings. The victims of each of these shootings look quite different. Most of the Sandy Hook victims were white, while most of the Robb victims were Hispanic. Robb Elementary contains a majority Hispanic population, but, likely because the shooter was white,

there was no framing about race, although most of the victims were non-white. Over 53% of the homes in Uvalde speak Spanish regularly, so it was surprising that race did not play a factor in any of the main frames for the Robb Elementary shootings (Plohetski & Garcia, 2023). Why did journalists not focus on the fact that the victims of the Robb Elementary shootings looked different than victims of other shootings? It is surprising that race was not a main frame of articles, especially nationally. Past research suggested that media bias influenced the amount of news coverage that gun violence victims of color received (Pelled et al., 2021). Conservative and moderate outlets tend to give less coverage to victims of color. This could be one of the reasons that journalists following the Robb Elementary shootings had less visibility for the victims. Considering the number of Hispanic victims, future research could be done on the effect of media bias and the journalism of the Robb Elementary shootings.

There was an overall lack of visibility for victims after the Robb Elementary shooting. It seemed like journalists forgot about them as time went on in their reporting process. When there was a prominent over-arching frame, there was more disregard for the victims in the news coverage. For example, in the national journalism of Sandy Hook, national journalists focused on the main frame of gun control and NRA power. There was less of regard for victims and feature of their stories. On the contrary, local journalists for the Sandy Hook shootings had higher visibility for victims and their stories. Local journalists for Sandy Hook focused on community reform and rebuilding a broken city, while highlighting many of the victims of the shootings. For both national and local journalism of the Robb Elementary shootings, information on the victims is lacking throughout all coverage. Journalists seem to forget about those who were killed during the shootings and narrate their own version of the events of the shootings.

There is plenty of advice to take from this research for future stakeholders of school shootings. Although there is no guidebook to dealing with school shootings, there are ways to best prepare for these events. Miller and Broussard (2019) do so in their chapter about the crisis communications surrounding the Sandy Hook shootings. Public information officers in a school system should be trained on how to handle national and local journalists in times of crisis. Because school shootings happen more frequently, the best thing that public information professionals can do is be prepared. They should always stay media trained and have a playbook on what to do in the case of a school shooting. It is best to know what to do in the worst-case scenario circumstances. Local journalists like Tony Plohetski and John Voket should continue to educate Americans on how their journalism affected these shootings. Local journalists should know that their journalism can have a major impact. National journalists should know that their journalism affects the most people, and the way that they portray information on school shootings is particularly crucial because it pertains to adolescent life. Lastly, all journalists should remember the true tragedy of school shootings: the victims. Journalists should tell victims' stories and honor them, rather than only telling the narrative of how they were killed.

This research indicates that there is less of a difference between national and local journalism for school shootings when there is a main overarching frame. In the journalism of Robb Elementary shootings, national and local journalism remained consistent with one another. Both national and local journalists focused on gun control and NRA power on the day of the shooting. As time progressed for both, journalists focused on police and law responsibility. Because of this main overarching frame of the failure of police officers, there were less differences between national and local coverage. I believe that this is because police responsibility emerged as the most significant frame for both national and local journalists. This

also works together with the blame frame, as journalists continue to find the blame for these shootings as soon as they occur. Or this could be because of how things have changed in the ten years that divided the shootings and the rise of social media. In the ten years that divide the shootings, there is also an increased likelihood school shootings will happen. Journalism grew significantly in the ten years that divided the Sandy Hook and Robb Elementary shootings, as did media framing, especially regarding school shootings.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limiting the research to articles published the day of, one week after and one month after, the research was limited to three days of publications. Had the research included more days, the frames could have been altered some. Additionally, selecting 50 articles for each showing over a month only gives a small bit of the overall coverage for each shooting. A longer period and larger selection size of articles might lead to other frames.

There were no *Newtown Bee* results for the day of the shootings at Sandy Hook because the *Bee* is a weekly publication that releases on Fridays. The Sandy Hook shootings occurred on a Friday, and the publication later released a special edition, which is why the *Bee* was not included until one week after the shootings.

*Uvalde World Leader News* was not included on Access World News. This publication is more of a small local publication in Uvalde and has few resources. So, many of the local publications include the *Austin-American Statesman* and *Texas Tribune*. The lack of *Uvalde World Leader News* did not affect the overall results.

### Future Research

The focus of future research would be to do a deeper dive into the reporting of the Robb Elementary shootings. As this shooting was as recent as 2022, there was a lot to uncover from this shooting. It would also be interesting to investigate social media's effect on school shootings and how it can influence activism in horrific crises like school shootings. As seen in this research, Twitter can now provide easy and quick updates, but how does this affect print journalism?

Initially, this research was created to investigate the comparisons and differences between mass shootings in America and other countries. It would be interesting to compare this



journalistic process in other countries and if the American media affects why school shootings happen more consistently in America than in other countries. Because of this, it would be interesting to investigate.

It would also be interesting to look at a historical approach to framing school shootings. Mass shootings like Columbine and Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School could be added to the data collection to extend this historical research.

To do a full analysis of mass coverage and framing of school shootings, research could be continued by widening the scope of the dates and adding additional shootings.

## APPENDIX A. RESEARCH OF SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date published</b>	<b>Title of Article</b>	<b>Word Count</b>	<b>Framing</b>
<i>Hartford Examiner</i>	Hartford, CT	Day Of	Newtown, Ct. school shooting update: Multiple fatalities with gunman dead	1619	School Safety
<i>CT News Junkie</i>	Hartford, CT	Day Of	Hartford Mourns With Newtown	775	School Safety
<i>Ridgefield Press</i>	Danbury, CT	Day Of	Church open for prayer tonight	983	Community Change
<i>Voices</i>	Woodbury, CT	Day Of	School Shooting Leaves 27 Dead in Sandy Hook	1145	Community Change
<i>The Daily Beast</i>	National	Day Of	What We Know So Far About Connecticut School Shooter Adam Lanza - He wore all black and carried two handguns plus a .223-caliber rifle. He may have been developmentally disabled. Kevin Fallon pieces together details about the man who allegedly killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School.	693	Gun Control
<i>Life Examiner</i>	National	Day Of	CT school shooting updates: 20 children gunned down by son of teacher's aide	542	Gun Control
<i>Associated Press: US News Online</i>	National	Day Of	Tearful Obama calls for action after shooting	957	Gun Control
<i>Slate</i>	National	Day Of	How To Talk to Your Kids About the School Shooting - Be honest, but not too honest. How To Talk to Your Kids About the School Shooting	825	Community Change
<i>Atlantic:</i>	National	Day Of	Has There Ever Been a Fatal Shooting at a Public Elementary School?	698	Gun Control

<i>USA TODAY</i>	National	Day Of	Tales of Sandy Hook heroism, young and old	559	Heroism
<i>USA TODAY</i>	National	Day Of	Connecticut shooting: They were just children	679	Mental Health
<i>News &amp; Politics Examiner</i>	National	Day Of	Hollywood exploits Newtown school shooting tragedy	555	Gun Control
<i>The Wire</i>	National	Day Of	What They're Saying About Gun Control After the Newtown Shooting	1386	Gun Control
<i>National Journal</i>	National	Day Of	Much Grief, but Little Action From Congress on Guns	844	Gun Control
<i>USA TODAY</i>	National	Day Of	Cuomo Calls For Crackdown On Guns	589	Gun Control
<i>The Stamford Advocate</i>	Stamford, CT	Week after	Survivor of Cheshire crime offers advice	631	Community Change
<i>Associated Press State Wire: Connecticut</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Classes consolidated for Newtown students' return	742	Community Change
<i>Associated Press State Wire: Connecticut</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	A week after school massacre, new details emerge	992	Gun Control
<i>Associated Press State Wire: Connecticut</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Newtown first responders carry heavy burdens	1249	Community Change
<i>Associated Press State Wire: Connecticut</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Bells toll for victims one week after shooting	1166	Community Change
<i>Associated Press State Wire: Connecticut</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Few memorials to forgotten victim: Gunman's mother	1170	Mental Health
<i>Connecticut Mirror</i>	Hartford, CT	Week after	At the Newtown Bee: Reporting, while grieving	1429	Community Change
<i>Connecticut Post</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Six Sandy Hook children ran to neighbor's house	834	Community Change
<i>CT News Junkie</i>	Hartford, CT	Week after	NRA Chief Blames Media, Calls For Armed Police In Schools	802	NRA Power

<i>Hartford Courant</i>	Hartford, CT	Week after	OPENING THEIR HEARTS, WALLETS \ - FROM EVERYWHERE, DOLLARS, GOOD DEEDS POUR INTO NEWTOWN	1535	Community Change
<i>Hartford Courant</i>	Hartford, CT	Week after	East Windsor Gun Shop Raided	552	Gun Control
<i>The Newtown Bee</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Newtowners Cope In The Aftermath Of Sandy Hook School Tragedy	1028	Community Change
<i>The Newtown Bee</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Acts Of Kindness Rain Down On Newtown	675	Community Change
<i>The Newtown Bee</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Opportunities To Give Support To Sandy Hook Victims, Survivors Are Many - Agencies Caution Donors	2093	Community Change
<i>The Newtown Bee</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Counseling And Support For Newtowners	1087	Mental Health
<i>The Newtown Bee</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Teams, Organizations Honoring Newtown Victims	662	Popular Culture
<i>The Newtown Bee</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Week after	Community Comes Together For Diversion At Youth Academy	949	Community Change
<i>CityLab</i>	National	Week after	Gun Buybacks After Newtown: It's a Race to Schedule Them	545	Gun Control
<i>Business Examiner</i>	National	Week after	NRA response to Sandy Hook tragedy: Video games, movies to blame, not guns	529	NRA Power
<i>The Daily Beast</i>	National	Week after	Another Massacre's Gun Law Lesson, From Stockton, Calif., Survivors - A gunman on a 1989 schoolyard rampage shocked the nation and Congress into action. Then legislators poked holes in the assault-weapons ban—and betrayed the victims.	1407	Gun Control

<i>Life Examiner</i>	National	Week after	Sen. Feinstein calls NRA press conference 'a cynical distraction'	522	NRA Power
<i>National Journal</i>	National	Week after	The Evolution of the NRA's Defense of Guns	909	NRA Power
<i>National Law Review</i>	National	Week after	After Sandy Hook Shootings, NRA Campaign Clout Still Formidable	794	NRA Power
<i>News &amp; Politics Examiner</i>	National	Week after	Heartbroken' First Lady pens open letter to parents about Newtown tragedy	524	Activism
<i>USA TODAY</i>	National	Week after	Where tears shower a season of joy - How do we mark a holiday defined by life, children?	1624	Community Change
<i>USA TODAY</i>	National	Week after	NRA says all schools should have armed security guards	591	NRA Power
<i>Associated Press State Wire: Connecticut</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Month after	Newtown debates future of school where 26 died	899	Community Change
<i>Connecticut Mirror</i>	Hartford, CT	Month after	A month after Newtown, gun-control advocates pick up the pace	865	Gun Control
<i>The Bulletin</i>	Norwich, CT	Month after	Requiem Honors Newtown Victims - More than 250 Musicians Fill Church to Give Tribute Concert	581	Community Change
<i>Associated Press State Wire: Connecticut</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Month after	Conn. group launches anti-violence initiative	850	Gun Control
<i>Connecticut Post</i>	Newtown, Conn.	Month after	Forum discusses future of Sandy Hook school	683	Community Change
<i>CT News Junkie</i>	Hartford, CT	Month after	Sandy Hook Parent: 'I Do Not Want There To Be A Next Time'	999	Community Change
<i>PR Newswire</i>	National	Month after	Citizens Of Newtown Urge Americans To Join Them And Make The Sandy Hook Promise - Victims' Families and Neighbors Call for Common Sense Solutions in response to Sandy Hook School Shooting	717	Community Change

<i>Reason</i>	National	Month after	How False Urgency Produces Stupid Gun Laws	685	Popular Culture
<i>Targeted News Service</i>	National	Month after	PETA to Obama/Biden: Stop Hunting Justification in Gun Control Debate	635	Gun Control
<i>US Fed News</i>	National	Month after	MAYOR BLOOMBERG DELIVERS OPENING ADDRESS AT JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY SUMMIT ON REDUCING GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA	3245	Gun Control

## APPENDIX B. RESEARCH OF ROBB ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SHOOTINGS

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date published</b>	<b>Title of Article</b>	<b>Word Count</b>	<b>Framing</b>
<i>The Daily Sentinel</i>	Nacogdoches, TX	Day Of	At least 19 children die in Uvalde school shooting, the deadliest in Texas history	866	Gun Control
<i>Denton Record-Chronicle</i>	Denton, TX	Day Of	19 children and 2 adults dead in Uvalde elementary school shooting	1131	Gun Control
<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	Fort Worth, TX	Day Of	Uvalde shooting is the deadliest school shooting in Texas history	536	Gun Control
<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	Fort Worth, TX	Day Of	Texas lawmakers relaxed gun laws in the years before Uvalde school shooting	585	Gun Control
<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	Fort Worth, TX	Day Of	Uvalde, Texas school shooting: What do we know about the gunman and his family?	1299	Gun Control
<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	Fort Worth, TX	Day Of	3rd- and 4th-graders, 2 teachers identified as victims killed in Uvalde school shooting	2439	Community Change
<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	Fort Worth, TX	Day Of	With kids not safe at school, Warriors coach has 'had enough' after Texas shooting	1228	Gun Control
<i>Midland Reporter-Telegram</i>	Midland, TX	Day Of	Reaction to the Uvalde school shooting	719	Community Change
<i>Texas Tribune</i>	Austin, TX	Day Of	At Least 19 Children and 2 Adults Dead in Texas Elementary School Shooting	1107	Community Change
<i>Associated Press News Service</i>	National	Day Of	Texas governor: 15 killed in school shooting; gunman dead	604	Community Change

<i>Associated Press News Service</i>	National	Day Of	14 children killed in Texas elementary school shooting	809	Gun Control
<i>Associated Press News Service</i>	National	Day Of	Sen. Murphy begs for gun compromise after Texas shooting	683	Gun Control
<i>The Daily Beast</i>	National	Day Of	President Joe Biden After Texas School Massacre: 'Where in God's Name Is Our Backbone?'	856	Gun Control
<i>International Business Times</i>	National	Day Of	Pro-gun NRA To Hold Convention In US State Where School Shooting Killed 21	1086	NRA Power
<i>International Business Times</i>	National	Day Of	Police 'Wrong' Not To Breach Door During Texas Shooting	985	School Safety
<i>International Business Times</i>	National	Day Of	Texas Police Face Scrutiny Over 'Late' Massacre Response	1049	Law Responsibility
<i>National Review</i>	National	Day Of	Nineteen Students, Two Adults Killed in Texas Elementary School Shooting	1020	Gun Control
<i>Slate</i>	National	Day Of	19 Students, 2 Adults Killed in Texas Elementary School Shooting	526	Gun Control
<i>Austin American Statesman</i>	Austin, TX	Week After	Uvalde school massacre - Congress mulls red flag laws. Do they work? - Measures allow confiscation of firearms from at-risk people	1547	Gun Control
<i>Austin American Statesman</i>	Austin, TX	Week After	Uvalde says goodbye to the first of 21 victims of Robb Elementary School shooting	854	Community Change
<i>Austin American Statesman</i>	Austin, TX	Week After	Uvalde school police chief not fully cooperating with probe into school shooting, DPS says	813	School Safety
<i>Courier of Montgomery</i>	Conroe, TX	Week After	Shooting shakes Sandy Hook	1839	Community Change



<i>County</i>					
<i>Fort Worth Business Press</i>	Fort Worth, TX	Week After	U.S. Justice Department will review Uvalde response as furor mounts over law enforcement actions	505	School Safety
<i>The Houston Chronicle</i>	Houston, TX	Week After	MASSACRE IN UVALDE; A heartbreaking start to summer break	689	Community Change
<i>The Houston Chronicle</i>	Houston, TX	Week After	'A heart to lend': Outpouring from elsewhere swells crowds at Uvalde's rituals of grief and mourning	731	Community Change
<i>Houston Defender</i>	Houston, TX	Week After	How to cope with trauma after a mass shooting	796	Mental Health
<i>Texas Tribune</i>	Austin, TX	Week After	Narratives, and blame, shift again as dysfunction engulfs shooting probe - The Texas Department of Public Safety said a local police chief had stopped cooperating. It also walked back a statement that a teacher had propped open a door used by the shooter to enter the school.	1145	School Safety
<i>Texas Tribune</i>	Austin, TX	Week After	Uvalde's "back-the-blue" values collide with outrage over police response to Texas' worst school shooting - The conservative, predominantly Hispanic town has long supported law enforcement. But some wonder how — or if — the heavily criticized response to the shooting will change that.	2004	School Safety

<i>Texas Tribune</i>	Austin, TX	Week After	Uvalde buries 10-year-old Amerie Jo Garza, the first of many funerals to come - She wanted to be an art teacher. Her favorite color was purple. She was laid to rest three weeks after her birthday.	1333	Community Change
<i>Associated Press News Service</i>	National	Week After	TIMELINE: Texas elementary school shooting, minute by minute	1095	Community Change
<i>Associated Press News Service</i>	National	Week After	Very angry': Uvalde locals grapple with school chief's role	1129	Law Responsibility
<i>Associated Press News Service</i>	National	Week After	Uvalde grieves, says goodbyes at visitations, funerals	1129	Law Responsibility
<i>Associated Press News Service</i>	National	Week After	Probe could shed light on police time lapse in Uvalde deaths	877	Law Responsibility
<i>Associated Press: US News Online</i>	National	Week After	Texas police: Teacher closed propped-open door before attack	505	School Safety
<i>The Daily Beast</i>	National	Week After	Uvalde School Chief Ghosted Probers—but Showed Up for City Council Swearing-In	1369	Law Responsibility
<i>The Daily Beast</i>	National	Week After	Uvalde Mourners Honor the Garcias, a Couple 'You Could Turn To With Anything'	859	Community Change
<i>International Business Times</i>	National	Week After	Town Of Uvalde Begins To Bury Its Dead In Wake Of Texas School Massacre	871	Law Responsibility
<i>NPR: Web Edition Articles</i>	National	Week After	What we know about the victims of the Uvalde school shooting	2067	School Safety
<i>USA Today</i>	National	Week After	State's Rangers investigate police response, timing	536	Law Responsibility
<i>USA Today</i>	National	Week After	DOJ to review delayed police response to school shooting	525	Law Responsibility

<i>USA Today</i>	National	Week After	Seeing a future through the eyes of children - Kids shouldn't have to run, hide from gunmen	835	School Safety
<i>USA Today</i>	National	Week After	Anxious teachers rethinking profession	1622	Gun Control
<i>Austin American-Statesman</i>	Austin, TX	Month After	Firearms access debated at Capitol - Victim's sister begs state lawmakers to take action	1033	Gun Control
<i>Bastrop Advertiser</i>	Bastrop, TX	Month After	DPS director: Law enforcement response was 'abject failure'	1537	Law Responsibility
<i>The Texas Tribune</i>	Austin, TX	Month After	Texas congressman Tony Gonzales, who represents Uvalde, breaks with House Republicans to vote for gun bill	684	Law Responsibility
<i>Fort Worth Star-Telegram</i>	Fort Worth, TX	Month After	In the wake of Uvalde, Fort Worth developing warnings for danger near child care centers	1613	School Safety
<i>Houston Chronicle</i>	Houston, TX	Month After	MASSACRE IN UVALDE; In 'honor' of her sister	760	Gun Control
<i>Houston Chronicle</i>	Houston, TX	Month After	Session for gun legislation is urged	889	Gun Control
<i>Kerrville Daily Times</i>	Kerrville, TX	Month After	Tactical unit trains at area schools	610	School Safety
<i>The 74</i>	National	Month After	340,000 School Door Locks in Texas to be Checked in Response to Uvalde Shooting	729	School Safety
<i>Above The Law</i>	National	Month After	Uvalde PD Continues Stonewalling, Hires Private Law Firm To Block Release Of School Shooting Recordings	898	Law Responsibility
<i>USA Today</i>	National	Month After	Uvalde shooting One month later - Despite moments of silence, there's so much left to say - When residents	2483	Law Responsibility

			talk about the tragedy, they do it in pieces		
<i>The Texas Tribune</i>	Austin, TX	Month After	State Sen. Roland Gutierrez sues DPS for not releasing Uvalde shooting records	461	Law Responsibility

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