

MORAL PANIC IN THE MODERN ERA: THE EFFECTS OF MORAL PANIC ON POLICY  
IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE FIELD OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

This study employed a grounded qualitative approach to explore the intricate relationship between moral panic and public administration policy in the subfield of law enforcement administration. Using a nationwide survey derived from the U.S. Major Cities Chief Association census, postsurvey interviews and employing document analysis and crime statistics, the research investigated the impact of moral panic-induced policy decisions on law enforcement agencies from 2018 to 2022. Social media emerged as a significant catalyst, fueling public outrage and facilitating political rent-seeking. The punctuated equilibrium theory highlights abrupt budgetary and policy shifts notably found in a surge of legislative initiatives in 2021. The study revealed that policies enacted under the shadow of moral panic exert detrimental effects on law enforcement staff morale and vacancy rates, which correlate with increased violent crime statistics. The findings emphasized the dynamic interplay between moral panic and policy outcomes, highlighting the influential role of political elites in decision-making processes, aligning with elite theory. These implications span theoretical, empirical, and practical dimensions, substantially contributing to public administration scholarship. The research offers a unique and comprehensive evaluation of moral panic-induced pressure on public administration policy, providing valuable insights for policymakers, administrators, and law enforcement agencies navigating the complexities of public policy amid moral panic.

*Keywords:* moral panic, public policy, rent-seeking, elite theory, punctuated equilibrium theory, media influence

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### **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my wife, Sheila, and my children, Victoria, Morgan, and Avery. You were always there through the emotional highs and lows; it is only through the support that you have shown that I have been able to move this far.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Advocacy coalition framework (ACF)

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)

Gay-related immune deficiency (GRID)

Intergovernmental relations (IGR)

Integrating Communication Assessment and Tactics training (ICAT)

Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA)

Moral panic (MP)

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

Police Executive Research Forum (PERF)

Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (POST)

Punctuated equilibrium theory (PET)

Street-level bureaucrats (SLB)

Uniform Crime Reporting program (UCR)

Use of force (UOF)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Between 2014 and 2022, the United States witnessed unprecedented demonstrations, protests, civil unrest, riots, and looting. Their pervasive influence set these events apart, transcending specific geographical boundaries and emerging in major cities and small communities. Many protests were civil and peaceful during which participants wanted to ensure they were heard and adverse actions did not overshadow their message. Others were violent, destructive, and counterproductive to social improvement because actions such as burning and looting neighborhood shops and destroying public and private property did nothing but hurt the communities involved.

This study uses the legal definition of civil disorder to gauge civil unrest. The legal definition of civil disorder as defined in 18 USC § 232(1) is: “any public disturbance involving acts of violence by assemblages of three or more persons, which causes an immediate danger of or results in damage or injury to the property or person of any other individual” (Civil Obedience Act of 1968, 1968/1994) Additionally, this study uses the terms civil disorder and civil unrest interchangeably.

In navigating the intricate landscape of responses to these harmful behaviors, this study not only sought to shed light on the varied approaches employed by different localities, encompassing proactive law enforcement mobilization and more reserved roles but also delved into the concurrent challenges political leaders face. Many find themselves entangled in a blame game with accusations ranging from perceived leniency on crime to accusations of detachment from the compelling calls for transformative change (Davis, 2020; Graham, 2019). These tensions often resulted in increased law enforcement presence or, in some instances, the



deployment of the National Guard to restore order through traditional civil disturbance quelling techniques, including the use of force (UOF).

The genesis of these protests predominantly revolved around the deaths of African Americans during interactions with White law enforcement officers. Allegations of disproportionate UOF by the police against minorities and the militarization of law enforcement were crucial concerns for many Americans. Unfortunately, the heavy-handed response of some law enforcement agencies to these protests further exacerbated the civil unrest, creating a cycle of escalation that spiraled out of control.

Part of the basis for allegations of biased enforcement were enforcement policies such as stop and frisk or broken windows practices, which directed police to question and/or search individuals without consideration of the legal thresholds of probable cause or reasonable suspicion. Alternatively, national policies such as three strikes, which significantly increase penalties for third-time offenders, and CompStat, which encourage police commanders to heavily focus enforcement action in specific geographical areas to reduce crime rates, lead to tensions between law enforcement and disadvantaged communities. Additional national policies such as the war on drugs and tough on crime cast nets across entire populations who perceive themselves as specific targets of such policy enforcement. Historical analysis may indicate that many police initiatives for crime reduction result from moral panic or the response to an event or perception of a group of people that conflicts with societal norms.

The goal of this study seeks to answer the question of how those who govern choose how and what is essential to a normative society. Exploring moral panic theory, this study sought to establish why those in political power make specific policies and how the societal reaction to

moral panic spurs policy elites into action in the form of policy development. Furthermore, do those actions effectively address the factors associated with moral panic?

To further dissect the academic question, the research question for this dissertation asks how moral panic may affect public policy in the field of law enforcement. In recent years, there has been a significant bleed-over of politics into the law enforcement profession in the United States. Political policies pushed down by the federal and state governments have gone as far as banning specific forms of restraint or defensive measures from being used by law enforcement officers. What happens when the politics-administration dichotomy, as coined by Wilson in 1887, becomes skewed? As it behaves today, the U.S. federal system is in significant peril. The blurring of lines between politics (the making of policy) and administration (the implementation) creates a situation in which planners influence operators without the subject matter expertise that guides professional operators.

Research has determined that there is no scholarly consensus about public administration's most critical foundational requirements. Although some cite administrative or operational pillars, there is no agreement on foundational requirements for public administration (Durant & Rosenbloom, 2016). As such, reviewing the published value and guiding-principle statements of some popular public administration organizations revealed specific threads that ran consistently between the groups (American Society for Public Administration [ASPA], n.d.; The Council of State Governments, 2023; International City/County Management Association, 2023; National Academy of Public Administration, 2021; National League of Cities, 2023). This chapter uses the amalgamation of each source to develop the cornerstones of public administration: leadership, ethics, influence, and action.

Such cornerstones are not only in the credos and codes of modern public administrative organizations but also supported by preeminent scholars in the field of public administration. Wilson (1887) stated, “Public administration is the detailed and systematic execution of public law” (p. 212). Such a statement alone indicates that Wilson seemed to purport that the profession of public administration should be one of action. In the same narrative, Wilson stressed the importance of ethics, “There is no danger in power, if only it be not irresponsible” (p. 213). Highly influential pre-World War II public administration scholar, E. Pendleton Herring (1936), referenced the burden of leadership placed on the public administration professionals when he said, “Upon the shoulders of the bureaucrat has been placed in large part, the burden of reconciling group differences and making effective and workable the economic and social compromises arrived at through the legislative process” (p. 7). When discussing the public interest and influencing change, the political philosopher Lippmann (1955) stated, “The public interest may be presumed to be what men would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally, and acted disinterestedly and benevolently” (p. 42). Therefore, scholarship has supported cornerstones of leadership, ethics, influence, and action as inherently required for the profession of public administration.

This grounded qualitative study assessed the impact of moral panic on public administration policy, focusing on the subfield of law enforcement administration as a model. By laying a foundation through a broad discussion on leadership, ethics, influence, and policy implementation, this research subsequently delves into the elements of moral panic. The study aimed to shed light on the phenomenon of moral panic and how it may impact various aspects of public administration, especially how it may influence policy development falling directly into

the field of public administration because the field is an amalgamation of many disciplines that serve the public interest (Gibson & Stolcis, 2006).

### **Background**

In the 1960s, Stephen Cohen (1969) observed that the youthful exuberance of two separate youth groups, “the mods” and “the rockers,” disrupted the social norms of several quiet English towns. In his observations, he noticed the population reacted in a manner that appeared to observers as disproportionate to the events. The reaction of the populace seeded the current theory of moral panic.

The small English seaside resort of Clacton, between 1964 and 1966, had become a destination for “the tougher adolescents” from some of London’s working-class neighborhoods (S. Cohen, 2011a, p. 23). During the Easter vacation season, minor scuffles between the two groups that frequented the area were followed by small-scale vandalism and fights between the two groups over the following days. The undersized police force used its limited tools to address the situation. The actions were seen as a threat to the resort town’s way of life, as evident in the narrative by Dr. George Simpson, the chairman of Margate Magistrates: “These long-haired, mentally unstable, petty little hoodlums, these sawdust Caesars who can only find courage like rats hunting in packs, came to Margate with the avowed intent of interfering with the life and properties of its inhabitants” (Lee, 2014, para. 19). The media in the following days and weeks flashed headlines of; “Mods v. Rockers Battles Flare Again SAWDUST CEASERS” (Daily Express, 1964), “40 Held in Battle of the Beach” (Suich, 1964), “Beach Crowds Take Cover From Battling Mods and Rockers-Wildest One Yet” (Sketch Reporters, 1964), “After Clacton, a New Battlefield, Wild Ones ‘Beat Up’ Margate 40 Arrested in All Day Clashes” (Mirror

Reporter, 1964). With such headlines, the British Home Secretary became involved and directed that firm action be taken (S. Cohen, 2011a).

In response, resort owners and other affected towns passed local ordinances targeting those identified as either a mod or a rocker. Arrestable ordinances such as curfews, the prohibition of motorcycles or scooters (often modes of transportation for these groups), and prohibitions of sleeping on the beach became legitimized through the courts. In one instance, “23 youths appeared in West Ham Magistrates Court, charged with using insulting behaviour” (S. Cohen, 2011a, p. 83). In Blackburn, two boys were charged with “using threatening behaviour” when they flicked rubber bands at people (S. Cohen, 1969, p. 479; Lucas, 1964). For subsequent holiday weekends, police patrols were supplemented by officers from other locations; the military was on standby with weapons, technology, and human resources if needed. Resort towns were shut down as out-of-town teenagers were denied entry into the town to prevent events of “yobs and roughnecks” causing problems in town (Lucas, 1964, p. 1).

With further study into the societal reaction to relatively or statistically small events, S. Cohen (1969), between 1967 and 1969, developed the theory of moral panic. Historically, when a population of governed find themselves concerned about their quality of life and the survival of their way of life, they have turned to a higher authority for help and guidance. Whether that higher authority is religious or government-based, when the governed feel there is a reason, they routinely call upon those in authority to soothe their fears.

On the other side of that dynamic theory is the contention that individual power brokers can stir up the governed in a manner that incites such panics. One of history’s most horrific examples is the anti-Semitic narrative of Hitler. The worldview espoused by this horrific individual used fear narratives about threats to the German way of life to stir followers into a

panicked frenzy capable of appalling humanitarian crimes, all through the power of words (Weir, 2018). Hitler was once rumored to say, “I am conscious that I have no equal in the art of swaying the masses” (Selb & Munzert, 2018, p. 1050).

In the United States in the 1950s, fears over desegregation and an intertwining fear narrative of anticommunism became rallying cries for many in both Northern and Southern states, echoed by numerous power brokers, creating a fear movement in the governed populous as the two became inseparable. At the height of the Cold War, supporters of segregation “insisted that racial equality would create discord within the United States, just as the Soviets desired, and that civil rights activists were tainted by communist affiliations” (Briker & Driver, 2022, p. 447). Therefore powerful segregationists perceived themselves as a front against the communists and, therefore, defenders of the American way of life. Briker and Driver (2022) stated, “Former Supreme Court Justice and Secretary of State James Byrnes, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover, and dozens of sitting governors and congressmen all linked anti-communism to segregation” (p. 452).

When those in authority, such as policymakers, determine that measures must be taken, through numerous means, as explored in later sections, they direct policy action to be taken. Often using agents of social control, actions are taken to enforce the policies. In the 1960s, S. Cohen’s example, law enforcement was the street-level embodiment of the policy action. Members of the military and local vigilante-type groups provided supplemental assistance to help maintain order and act as de facto law enforcement. All behaviors were authenticated through the judicial system, with the consensus being, “You’ve got to have the right line of authority to deal with this sort of thing” (S. Cohen, 2011a, p. 144). As evidenced through further

discussion, policymakers are not policy enforcers. As mentioned, political actions, policies, and agendas are enforced through social control agents who become the policy's face.

This study's substratum is the interrelation between social behaviors, policymakers' reactions, and political answers to restore normative decorum. Moral panic can significantly shape the political agenda, guiding policymakers' decisions and determining which issues receive immediate attention. Public administrators can gain insights into how exaggerated fears and anxieties drive policy responses by studying moral panic. This awareness allows policymakers to make more informed, rational, and evidence-based decisions, avoiding knee-jerk reactions to perceived threats. Public administration can thus adopt policies that effectively address the root causes of societal issues, promoting long-term social progress.

Between 2014 and 2020, events in which African Americans died at the hands of white law enforcement officers became a flashpoint for underlying tension between law enforcement and the public. The perception and the narrative that minorities were treated more harshly by law enforcement became a rallying point. For others, the perception of placing a higher value of life on one group of people over another group became the mantra (Maguire et al., 2016; McClanahan et al., 2021). Civil unrest, in which large-scale violence and property destruction occurred, became troublesome for many who perceived that normative behaviors were threatened. Consequently, there was an enormous burden on policymakers as warring factions sounded calls for action on either side of the argument. Thus, drawing clear lines of demarcation, one side called on the government to restore order, and the other called on the government to change how government policies are enforced.

As mentioned previously, during many large protests in many American population centers, individuals with a pulpit used their narratives to influence social change. Many

demonstrations were peaceful; however, violence, looting, and large-scale destruction erupted in some situations. Between January 2019 and January 2023, there were 46,524 protests classified as “peaceful or peaceful with intervention” (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 2019, p. 14; Raleigh et al., 2010). However, there were an additional 1,173 events plagued by “property destruction, violence, or mob violence” that were classified as “riots” by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project ([ACLED], 2023, p. 15; Raleigh et al., 2010).

Caught in the crosshairs between one side demanding change and the other side demanding restoration of order, the law enforcement officers who, historically, have been the enforcers of political policies, became the focus of the ire from one side and were directed to take action and restore order by the other side. The purpose of this study was not to determine who was wrong or right or what policy actions should have been taken; the purpose was to develop some understanding of how such significant calls for change created a “folk devil” out of the historic enforcers of the government’s will. A folk devil is a term coined by S. Cohen in 1969 as a description for an individual or group of people who can be singled out and blamed for issues or crimes afflicting society.

With that dynamic, such a conundrum requires examining how and why public policies are developed and implemented and how they are enforced. The problems become significantly more complex when layering into the dynamic the profession of law enforcement in which the men and women charged with enforcing governmental policies become targets of pushback for enforcing the same policies they are legislatively required to enforce.

During periods of moral panic, there is a risk of enacting policies with disproportionately strident and overreaching consequences. Calls for action grow louder in emotionally charged events such as crime waves or social unrest. Understanding moral panic can help public



administrators critically evaluate proposed policies and avoid adopting punitive measures that may have negative second-order consequences on communities. Public administration can strive for social justice and equitable outcomes by considering the long-term consequences of policy actions.

The underlying line of inquiry demands exploration into how the societal reaction to moral panic spurs policy designers into action in the form of policy development. Moreover, a definitive exploration of whether the policy elites' actions effectively address the factors associated with moral panic, with minimal impact from second-order consequences, is called for. Thus, why are new policies enacted and implemented at a specific time? To decipher the many layers of policy implementation, there is the need to peel the onion metaphorically. Primarily, policy implementation does not happen without the policymakers who direct the policy. Second, when discussing elite individuals, one must consider the ethical values and the personal-professional dichotomy each leader must face. In his tenure as an academic, former President Woodrow Wilson (1887) drew the line through politics and administration: "Policy does nothing without the aid of administration; but administration is not, therefore, politics" (pp. 209–210). Wilson argued for a complete separation of political and administrative matters, with a hierarchal structure focused on efficiency. Creating the politics-administration dichotomy, he ushered in specialization and expertise into public administration that distinguished itself as a distinct discipline and professional practice, and removed the burden of emotion from the execution of duty.

Although the individual motivation may or may not be altruistic, it may lose power and influence if it does not have support. This is much like the elite theory, often credited to Max Weber and Vilfredo Pareto and in the same historical philosophy as Machiavelli's "The Prince,"

in which a leader must take action to preserve leadership and enforce such decisions. Weber (1969) also drove the concept that to develop credibility, individuals must be seen as legitimate. In doing so, they must convince the populace that they can maintain authority. They must be seen as the responsible authority and “signal to threatening agents that the community is prepared for imminent danger” under their watch (McDermott, 2013, p. 12). Such signals, therefore, reinforce their position of authority in the eyes of others.

### **Situation to Self**

With almost 3 decades of law enforcement experience, my perspective as a public administration scholar is grounded in the real-world challenges of enforcing societal norms and navigating the consequences of ill-conceived public policies. This research was driven by a quest to understand the profound impact of moral panic on public policy, encompassing decision making, public perception, and institutional functioning.

Through professional interactions with diverse individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, I have witnessed how moral panic can unjustly marginalize specific groups, leading to misguided policy actions and a disconnect between bureaucrats and communities. This epistemological exploration sought to uncover how law enforcement, as the enforcement arms for the executive branch, can become the folk devil in the eyes of the public. Consequently, the political and social response often involves grandstanding and hasty policy decisions.

By comprehending moral panic’s implications, I aim to empower administrators with evidence-based, equitable, and effective policies, fostering the creation of resilient and inclusive communities. Through this study, public administration can navigate the challenges of moral panic with greater empathy and transparency, creating positive social impact and trust within communities.

### **Problem Statement**

The use of social control agents is a key characteristic of the moral panic response. However, what would happen if the agents of social control became folk devils? No known studies discovered by me in the academic literature have examined how moral panic has impacted public administration policy in the subfield of law enforcement administration.

The central problem researched by this study was how moral panic impacts public policy in the field of law enforcement. This issue has much to do with the “here today, gone tomorrow” impact of policymakers who make policy based on politics, resulting in a substantial problem for law enforcement because they become the face of unpopular policies as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1969). As of this study, no known studies from public administration or criminal justice scholarship have explored which factors influence how public policies implemented by public administrators impact the subfield of law enforcement when developed under the effects of moral panic.

Well-publicized focusing events from Ferguson, Missouri; Louisville, Kentucky; and Minneapolis, Minnesota, where minorities died at law enforcement’s hands, have understandably sparked national outrage with the demand for varying levels of police reform. Individual narratives include allegations of officer racism, corrupt law enforcement officers, or a system that encourages officers to be aggressive and overlooks these negative behaviors. As demands for change grow, the underlying question is: Through what mechanism can substantive change happen?

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this grounded qualitative method study was to investigate the far-reaching implications of moral panic on public policy within the United States, focusing specifically on its

impact as measured through law enforcement agencies. Moral panic is generally defined as a social phenomenon characterized by widespread fear, anxiety, and outrage over perceived threats to societal values, norms, or interests. It often involves the exaggerated perception of a specific group, behavior, or issue as a menace to the existing social order. This study aimed to unravel the complex interplay between moral panics, political elites, and policy decisions, drawing insights from elite theory (Mills, 1956), punctuated equilibrium theory ([PET], Jones et al., 1998), and moral panic theory ([MP], S. Cohen, 1969).

The study aimed to identify the key factors driving MP, analyze their impact on public administration policy development and implementation, and further explore the potential second-order consequences that may exacerbate societal divisions and negatively impact the public's perception of the enforcers of public policy. This study aspired to equip policymakers and public administrators with crucial insights by adopting a grounded qualitative approach involving in-depth data collection and analysis. These insights will promote evidence-based, equitable, and effective policies, ultimately contributing to fostering more resilient, inclusive, and cohesive communities in the face of MP and societal challenges.

The aim of this study was to explore the theoretical effect of MP in the modern environment. Calls to defund the police and federal UOF oversight, although existing previously, have had sporadic and highly compartmentalized support. However, since the tragic officer-involved deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, where minorities have died at the hands of police, there has been a much larger and louder call for change. Although this study was not intended to answer those calls, it was focused on whether the calls for implementing change in

the profession of law enforcement fit the classical S. Cohen (1969) theoretical model of MP as developed in the early 1970s.

This grounded work used various research methods to support the primary research question. The primary research question asked how MP affects public policy implemented within law enforcement. The first element of this question requires the establishment of MP and the designation of a focusing event. S. Cohen (2011a) established the following five factors of MP: (a) concern, (b) hostility, (c) consensus, (d) disproportionality, and (e) volatility.

This theory was moved forward by Jennings et al. (2017), who added that the key factor that distinguishes MP from other theories is that “moral panic [is] associated with trigger events that are viewed as being symptomatic of a wider condition” (p. 208). In spite of all the theoretical elements, there has yet to be a definitive tool to show empirical evidence of MP. Therefore, it was the research position that a statistically significant increase in the demands for policy actions against the folk devils (the perpetrators) evident through content analysis provides partial support for elements of MP.

Case studies of defund the police and police UOF reform data collection through content analysis, interview, and survey methodology were used. Primary data were collected using an open-ended, self-administered survey from specific law enforcement agencies to determine whether they have been subject to elements of defunding or elements of the UOF reform (Kelley et al., 2003). The follow-up (secondary) postsurvey interview was conducted through phone or video conference to obtain additional responses (Dillman et al., 2014).

Both defund the police and UOF reform present what can be considered textbook examples of a wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Common factors that make a problem wicked include subjective problems about people and politics; they also do not have a clear

answer or a defined stopping point and, because of lack of stakeholder consensus, are often deemed a catch-22. Because wicked problems affect stakeholders, there will always be a side that does not agree with the decision, policy, or direction. Additionally, solutions to wicked problems have “one shot at getting it right” and do not have the luxury of trial and error. Consequently, solutions to wicked problems are “notoriously susceptible to the so-called law of unintended consequences” (Ritchey, 2011, p. 1). MP can amplify the complexity of these problems, making it even more crucial for public administration to navigate through such challenges with a comprehensive understanding of the underlying dynamics. The study of MP equips public administrators with valuable tools to tackle wicked problems with sensitivity and prudence. The cases mentioned have everything to do with people and society and can create significantly polar reactions in stakeholders on either side of the decision, subjectively concluding that the decision was a failure.

This exploration intersects significantly with public administration, probing the implications for public administrators and addressing gaps in the public administration literature. By examining the theoretical underpinnings of MP in the context of law enforcement changes, this study provides valuable insights for public administrators, contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play and offering potential guidance for navigating related challenges in the field. Through the contribution of a nuanced understanding, this study enriches scholarly discourse in both the domains of public administration and public policy.

### **Significance of the Study**

As with any new research, the study adds value to the established body of literature. In this case, the topic is moral panic and its effect on policy in the field of public administration as measured through law enforcement agencies. Public policy development happens at upper levels

in the governmental hierarchy and is pushed down to the lowest level for realization. As the enforcement arm of the executive branch, law enforcement can viably be used as a barometer for the public tolerance of policies enacted by the legislature.

There are various theories that scholars have used to explain implementation; often, there are areas of contradictory and conflicting stances. Scholarly research has emphasized gaps in implementation theory where a noticeable gap exists in scholarly policy implementation research. Disconnects between the study of implementation and other policy sciences become evident through research. Policy development and implementation theory literature have portrayed the process of development and implementation sequentially in which one step leads to the next in an orderly fashion. The underlying question is the following: “How does the societal reaction to MP spur policy elites into action in the form of policy development, and does that action effectively address the causative factors associated with MP?”

Finally, the implementation process through law enforcement is unique. It cannot be explained by popular implementation theories, such as punctuated equilibrium, the multiple streams model, and the policy cycle model because the enforcers of the policies become the targets of such policies. This study underscores the importance of evaluating the multidimensionality of MP and the impact that this theory has on the field of law enforcement. The MP theory encompasses emerging events surrounding a group, a person, or a condition perceived to threaten normative societal values (S. Cohen, 2011a). This can be attributed to focused political or media attention, sensationalizing events, and creating a public call for action. This results in a wicked problem because law enforcement becomes the face of unpopular politics or unattainable policies based on snap policy judgments. Politicians use rent-seeking

behaviors and seize the opportune moment to capitalize on advantageous conditions and maximize political momentum. Policymakers then move to the next hot topic or alternative issue.

### **Research Questions**

Using the two case studies as foundations, the research aimed to show either support for or find plausible alternatives to support the MP theory. Using empirical testing built by Van Evera (1997) and moved forward by Bennett (2010), research either affirms or disproves causal inference.

Central Question: How does the theory of MP influence the evolution of public policy within the subfield of law enforcement administration?

Subquestion 1: To what extent might empirical evidence from 2014-2023 support the presence of elements contributing to MP?

The subquestion investigated the extent to which empirical evidence from 2014 to 2023 supports the presence of elements contributing to MP. By analyzing empirical data on social media discourse, news coverage, and public reactions during this period, the research shed light on the manifestation of critical MP elements, such as the identification of folk devils, the role of moral entrepreneurs, and the disproportionality of societal responses (S. Cohen, 2011b). Moreover, examining the interplay between traditional and digital media in shaping public perceptions elucidated the evolving dynamics of MP formation (Puryear et al., 2022; Walsh, 2019).

This research aligns with scholarly literature that emphasized the need to understand the social, political, and technological contexts that facilitate MP and the potential consequences for policymaking and social cohesion (Bowman, 2018; Hier, 2016, 2019). By assessing the presence



of MP elements in recent years, the study can contribute to ongoing efforts to promote rational discourse and evidence-based responses to societal challenges.

Subquestion 2: What discernible patterns characterize the adaptation of policies and procedures by law enforcement agencies in response to recommendations from authoritative bodies such as Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), New York University (NYU) Policing Projects, and legislative bodies?

The adaptation of policies and procedures by law enforcement agencies in response to recommendations from authoritative bodies is a complex and nuanced process. Research has shown that agencies often face challenges translating high-level recommendations into meaningful, on-the-ground changes (Mastrofski & Willis, 2010; Skogan, 2008). Organizational culture, resource constraints, and political pressures can shape how agencies interpret and implement new policies. The degree and nature of adaptation also appear to depend on the specific recommendations, the agency's context, and the broader political and social environment (The Policy Circle, 2023). This subquestion explored some of the external pressures that agencies are exposed to when faced with policy changes. For instance, recommendations from the Ferguson Commission prompted reforms in Missouri, illustrating the impact of external scrutiny on policy adaptation (Capellan et al., 2019). The literature suggested that agencies balance legal mandates with community expectations to foster accountability and transparency, aligning with principles of modern policing (Capellan et al., 2019; Caveney et al., 2019).

Subquestion 3: Through an in-depth analysis of specific events, what defining characteristics and impacts may be elucidated regarding the revisions made to UOF policies within law enforcement agencies?

The research subquestion sought to uncover the nuanced dynamics regarding the revisions made to UOF policies within law enforcement agencies. By conducting an in-depth analysis of specific events, such as high-profile incidents involving police UOF, I identified key characteristics and impacts of policy changes. This approach aligns with literature emphasizing the importance of understanding the context and circumstances surrounding the UOF incidents (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Furthermore, studies provided insights into best practices for UOF policies, highlighting the need for clear guidelines and training (PERF, 2022; The Policy Circle, 2023). By examining these characteristics and impacts, the subquestion aimed to uncover commonalities and trends agencies have experienced in UOF reform.

Subquestion 4: What are the emerging trends and varied perspectives regarding the influence of the Defund the Police movement on budgetary allocations and strategic priorities within law enforcement agencies?

The research subquestion explored the complex dynamics regarding the Defund the Police movement and its impacts on law enforcement budgets and priorities. This inquiry is highly relevant given the widespread calls for police reform and resource reallocation following high-profile incidents of police violence (Fegley & Murtazashvili, 2023).

The research shed light on how the defunding movement has influenced decision-making processes and resource allocations by examining emerging trends in budget changes and strategic shifts within agencies. This research subquestion aligns with scholarly literature emphasizing the importance of understanding the sociopolitical context regarding policing practices and the need for evidence-based reforms (Fegley & Murtazashvili, 2023; Su, 2022).

Subquestion 5: To what extent may high-ranking policy influencers create cascading effects on law enforcement administration policies and practices?

The research question addressed the influential role of high-ranking policy influencers in shaping law enforcement administration policies and practices. Studies by Skogan and Frydl (2004) underscored the significant impact of political leaders and policymakers on law enforcement strategies and priorities. Additionally, research by Bradford et al. examined the relationship between political ideology and law enforcement decision making, highlighting how political elites can influence policy agendas (Bradford et al., 2020; Greene, 1999; Meehan, 2000). By investigating the extent of cascading effects initiated by high-ranking influencers, the subquestion shed light on the dynamics of policy formation and implementation in law enforcement agencies, contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between political forces and administrative practices in public administration.

### **Definitions**

**Civil disorder/civil unrest.** Interchangeable terms defined as “any public disturbance involving acts of violence by assemblages of three or more persons, which causes an immediate danger of or results in damage or injury to the property or person of any other individual” (Civil Obedience Act of 1968, 1968/1994, para. 1).

**Folk devil or policy hero.** Terminology interchangeably used by S. Cohen (2011a) and proponents of MP theory to designate those who embody the problem or are viewed as ultimately responsible in the public eye.

**Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).** A police research and policy organization that provides technical services and policy recommendations at an executive level (PERF, n.d.).

**Use of deadly force.** “Any use of force that creates a substantial risk of causing death or serious bodily injury” (International Association of Chiefs of Police [IACP], 2020, p. 27).

**Use of force (UOF).** There is significant variance among sources on what entails, and many agencies use the definition of “The amount of effort required by police to compel compliance by an unwilling subject” (National Institute of Justice, 2020, para. 2). UOF is highly subjective to new technologies and local court precedence. As of yet, there is no universal definition of UOF. Although some agencies consider the brandishing or display of force (drawing a firearm, baton, or spark display on an electronic control device) as a reportable UOF, others do not. However, for this research, the definition is a combination of deadly force and less-lethal force, not including the guiding force used on an unresistant handcuffing subject. All actions by law enforcement must be consistent with the reasonable officer standard (*Graham v. Connor*, 1989).

**Use of force reporting.** Agency-specific requirements for documenting the UOF.

**Use of less-lethal force.** According to the IACP (2020), “Any use of force other than that which is considered deadly force that involves physical effort to control, restrain, or overcome the resistance of another” (p. 2).

**Violent crime statistics.** Statistics collected through the uniform crime reporting program (UCR) and the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), consisting of the offenses of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (FBI, 2022).

**Wicked problem.** A complex and ill-structured issue that defies straightforward resolution because of its interconnectedness, ambiguous boundaries, and diverse perspectives. Unlike tame problems that can be solved using conventional problem-solving methods, wicked problems lack clear solutions because they involve multiple stakeholders with conflicting interests, dynamic variables, and unpredictable outcomes (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

## Summary

There are noticeable gaps in how and why public policy is implemented within law enforcement. There is limited information about implementation outside of the research by Bardach (1977). However, Bardach contended that complexities of implementation politics cause significant threats to implementation, referring to the politics associated with implementation as “highly defensive” with policymakers trying “to avoid responsibility, scrutiny, and blame” (p. 37). The challenges associated with the development of policies continue well into the implementation phase, and the political maneuvering becomes even more exorbitant.

The prevalent policy development and implementation theory literature portrayed the process of development and implementation in a sequential manner (Hupe & Saetren, 2015). This is rarely a fact because there is no single approach to policy implementation or policy development (Howlett, 2018; Howlett et al., 2015). Two prominent frameworks in the implementation process are the multiple streams model and the policy cycle model, both of which have failed to “keep pace with political realities” (Howlett et al., 2015, p. 275). They fail to consider that public administration and policy implementation are social processes balancing rational man theory and rent-seeking behavior factors (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; Simon, 1996).

Politics studies power and those who impose their views and values on others; the federalist system is based on a hierarchy established long ago. Although the U.S. Declaration of Independence explicitly stated that the United States would not serve under a ruling monarch, based on the representative system, those elite individuals influence the rules under which citizens must abide. Implementation theory historically has been a mixed bag of dominant schools of thought. However, one constant is that those with the political power make the rules.

Conceptually, the making and implementing of policy (formal societal rules) should be a very straightforward process. In reality, it is messy, convoluted, and politically charged (Bardach, 1977). Then comes the issue of how the policies are enforced after they are developed or changed.

Building upon the foundational insights provided in this chapter, which underscored the significance of leadership, ethics, implementation, and the phenomena of MP, this study turns its focus to a comprehensive review of the dominant scholarly literature on policy development and implementation in Chapter Two. The dominant theories associated with the research project are also examined in this chapter. Subsequently, in Chapter Three, the study describes the chosen grounded qualitative research framework, employing a grounded research analysis to delve into the impacts of MP on public policy within the realm of law enforcement.

This research examines the responsibilities inherent in disseminating narratives by political leaders that may encompass factual ambiguity. The subsequent analysis delves into the dichotomy of politics and the core values of public administration (Plant, 2018; Voegtlin, 2016). This exploration culminates in an examination of the Defund the Police movement, aiming to ascertain whether the MP associated with contemporary law enforcement and the rent-seeking policies pursued by political leaders have resulted in safer community environments. The pivotal theories to wield significant influence in this study included MP theory, PET, principal-agent theory, and game theory. This research was intended to enrich the scholarly discourse on public administration policy implementation, conflict theory, and public discourse.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

In this study, the effect of MP on public policy in the field of law enforcement was evaluated. The following literature was collected to review the relevant policy development and implementation scholarships. The review focused on finding the commonalities and differences between dominant theories in the scholarship.

Policy development and implementation knowledge are crucial to establish how public administration policies impact law enforcement. The scholarship is not a unified science; there are several rival factions within the field. Although specific theories can be challenged, policy and implementation research is crucial to this research work if it is to be of value to the field of public administration and hold practical value for public administration professionals. Although many may challenge specific theories, there appears to be a consensus that a process is involved in policymaking and implementation. As policy studies blossomed in the mid to late twentieth century, many new frameworks emerged with varying effects and explanatory value. The following narrative reviews the core policy development and implementation literature, starting with the foundational theories and influences on policy development and implementation. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of policy failures.

This study used peer-reviewed studies, articles, and dissertations sourced through database searches in JSTOR, ProQuest, and Academic Search Ultimate accessed through Liberty University. Additionally, keyword searches through Google and Google Scholar were used to find source data. Articles preliminarily identified as relevant were included in a secondary review for applicability based on relevance to implementation and policy development.

Additionally, the initial search was limited to sources from 2017 to 2024. Once suitable applicability was established, a snowballing methodology was used to expand the search criteria and find other vital sources and documents. As a continuation of source vetting, the article abstracts were read to assist in establishing suitability for inclusion. Thus, a substantial list of sources was developed, and articles were included or removed based on the full article content's applicability.

The following narrative weaves together commonalities between various aspects of policy development and implementation. Primarily, this chapter explores the external or social drivers of policy development and implementation through dominant theories of PET, elite theory, and MP theory. Second, this research synthesizes scholarly literature on the policy executive's internal motivation to make policy changes. Third, this research reviews and contrasts common theories in policy implementation, looking at what happens after the policy is developed. Last, this chapter concludes with a discussion on implementation failures.

### **Theoretical Framework**

With a distinct focus on the intricate connections between public administration and public policy, explicitly accentuating the role administrators play in implementation, this study aimed to contribute novel insights to the existing literature in this field. Acknowledging and exploring the symbiotic relationship between public administration and public policy highlighted the dynamic interplay. By clarifying the pivotal responsibility of administrators to translate policies into actionable initiatives, the research underscored the practical significance of public administration in the policy cycle.

In 1959, Lindblom penned a cornerstone article that has guided public policy thinking for over 60 years. In this seminal resource, he explored the decision-making process employed by



public administrators, arguing that attempts to assess every course of policy action critically would be doomed to failure (Dahl & Simon, 1957; Lindblom, 1959). Simon (1955) coined the word “satisfice,” pointing out that decision makers satisfice rather than maximize because of the dearth of available data and options, thus choosing an action that is good enough. Lindblom built on that concept and applied it to public policymaking, noting that the broad swath of public policy can result in numerous second-order consequences that administrators must value weigh to determine a course of action. Value weighing includes “successive limited comparisons” (Lindblom, 1959, p. 33), which was eventually termed “incrementalism” (Mintrom, 2016, p. 654), using concepts of bounded rationality and satisficing as a policy and decision-making process (Dahl & Simon, 1957; Lindblom, 1959; Mintrom, 2016; Simon, 1955).

Lasswell (2018) set out the core stages of decision making in his foundational work, *The Decision Process: Seven Categories of Functional Analysis*, originally written in 1956. Lasswell contended that the policy sciences should not be viewed linearly but through various lenses and approaches. Such work expands on his earlier works that identified situational factors, such as the who, when, and what in the study of policy development (Lasswell, 2018; Ronit & Porter, 2016).

Using the theoretical mapping from Lasswell, Lindblom, and Simon, this research explored additional dominant theories that have significant overlap and can be directly related to how public policy is implemented within the field of law enforcement. The following three theoretical frameworks built the foundation of this project: elite theory, PET, and MP theory. Each theory could be used to explain public administration policy development, and because law enforcement is the public embodiment of enforcement for the executive branch, law enforcement

policy and practices. However, using the theories in a complementary manner instead of independently created a more robust basis for this project.

Federalism, the principle of separation between federal and state governments in which the states are both subordinate to the federal government at times and sovereign at other times, is the basis of the U.S. government system (Rubin, 2001). The framers of the U.S. Constitution deliberately made a split system of checks and balances, allowing the federal government only those powers granted from the states, and in turn, the states received powers from the citizens of those states. The 10th Amendment (U.S. Const. amend. X) specifies “[t]he powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” Therefore, the federal government is constitutionally limited on what can be mandated to the states. By jurisprudence, issues related to crime, family, or education fall under the sovereign powers of the states (*United States v. Lopez*, 1994).

This separation of powers was an intentional measure to restrain the federal government from becoming tyrannical. Such a system is cumbersome and requires cooperation between national, state, and local levels of government to accomplish tasks. As local governments depend on state funds, states depend on federal funds. Congress can attach conditions on states through the spending clause in return for federal funds. Federal funds can be up to 32% of state revenue (Gordon, 2023). Consequently, intergovernmental relations (IGR) have become a tenuous balancing act at all levels in which one level has the potential to impact the actions of the other levels significantly.

In the context of this study, the following review shows how the practice of American law enforcement is subject to the whims of those who make policy. It is not up to the police to choose which policies are fair, constitutional, or enforced; that is the role of the courts, and

usually only after a policy has been implemented, enforced, and challenged. Law enforcement is the enforcement arm of the executive branch of government, and as such, it grants officers and many law enforcement executives limited discretion over enforcement. When the policy elite are spurred to activity at the demands of the public, they may promise action to correct the issue. To maintain and encourage a civilized society, executives pass legislation, which in turn becomes the job of the law enforcer to execute. Temple (2004) stated, “The police have their powers for the purpose of upholding the law, and the highest law they are sworn to uphold is the United States Constitution” (p. 13).

### **MP Theory**

As a foundation for this study, S. Cohen (1969), outlined the framework for a MP theory, which was later refined and expanded into the contemporary theoretical version. In his finished theory, S. Cohen, building from Jock Young’s (1971) study of drug use, contended that MP occurs through the propagation of narratives, individuals whose actions or presence stimulate a population’s fear of the degradation of normative social order (Frederiksen & Harboe Knudsen, 2021). MP is often propagated by individuals in a position of influence delineating a cause and effect out of proportion with the actual events or threats, essentially packaging the fear narrative for gain (Andrade et al., 2020; S. Cohen, 2011a).

S. Cohen’s (1969) MP theory emerged from the 1960s societal reaction theory, also called label theory (Lemert, 1974). Societal reaction theory contends that an individual’s behavior and identity may be significantly influenced by the terms used to classify them (labels). This holds that behavior perceived as deviant is only deviant because it is labeled as such (Ben-Yehuda, 1986). S. Cohen did not approach this study from the point of view of the deviant but instead tried to find why society labels individuals and reacts in the manner it does.

In his theory, S. Cohen (1969) contended that MP occurs through the propagation of narratives by individuals of influence about people or groups whose actions, or mere presence, fan a population's fear of the degradation of normative social order (Frederiksen & Harboe Knudsen, 2021). Studies found that the rhetoric by highly influential politicians such as the president of the United States or the English monarch can carry a significant weight toward fanning the effects of MP (Hawdon, 2001; Jennings et al., 2017).

The development of MP came about after S. Cohen (1969) observed the over-the-top response of the media and social control authorities reacting to relatively mild indiscretions of youth tourists in the English resort town of Clacton at the end of the 1960s. As mentioned previously, two conflicting groups of youths, the mods and the rockers, challenged the public perception of normative social behaviors by essentially behaving like teenagers (S. Cohen, 2011a). Challenging the Durkheimian traditions of customs, rituals, and behaviors followed in "polite society" creates a concern over behavior or the "concern on the part of certain social actors that an established value system is being threatened" (Garland, 2008, p. 11). Garland (2008) made the point that this separation between morally acceptable behavior and deviant behavior can be attributed to conflictual cultural wars or generational perceptions of acceptable behavior.

The theory of MP was moved forward by Jennings et al. (2017), who added that the critical factor that distinguishes MP from other theories is that "moral panic [is] associated with trigger events that are viewed as being symptomatic of a wider condition" (p. 208). Consequently, false stories are repeated as a precise representation in MP episodes. If repeated in the echo chamber of social media or isolative information sources, the false narratives grow as trending stories, thus beginning a "digital spillover," where traditional media outlets pick them

up (Hier, 2019, p. 385). Supporting Bernays's (2019) contention that the media "merely accept, reflect and intensify established public opinion and are, therefore, responsible for the uniformity of public reaction" (Chapter 2, p. 2). This spillover creates a landslide of coverage that can amplify the perception of deviance and challenge the normative values of society.

The targets of MP, the folk devils, become regarded as the enemy of social norms or "the legitimate and deserving targets of self-righteous anger, hostility, and punishment" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, p. 35). Often used to modulate societal values, MP entrepreneurs use agents of social control to modulate the behaviors of folk devils (S. Cohen, 2011a; David et al., 2011; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Hier, 2019; Marsh & Melville, 2011).

A significant aspect of MP is what is seen as "the fundamentally inappropriate reaction by much of society to certain relatively minor events and conditions" (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, p. 22). As such, the phenomenon of MP refers to "the exaggerated responses from the media, the police or wider public" toward activities or events of a particular group of individuals (Marsh & Melville, 2011, p. 2). MP theory, according to S. Cohen (2011a), contends that there are elements that encompass what a MP is and how it is created by establishing the following five factors in MP: (a) concern, (b) hostility, (c) consensus, (d) disproportionality, and (e) volatility (S. Cohen, 2011a).

### ***Concern***

In the context of MP, concern is when the public worries about potential or imagined threats resulting from a group or category of individuals' behavior (actual or imagined). Young (2009) added that the "existence of a moral panic lies in their relationship to fundamental structural and normative problems of social order" (p. 14). Therefore, a high-friction environment threatening social normative concepts is ripe for MP.

Any number of sources can provoke concern; the media in modern history has been a primary player in garnering concern over individual group behaviors. News headlines often make bold statements and set forth a call for action, creating sensational awareness (Critchler, 2009; de Lint & Dalton, 2020; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). Using what is commonly termed the fear narrative, the fear-mongering media builds the public appetite for more information, often by presenting only bullet points (de Lint & Dalton, 2020). The exposure generates fear and concern and creates intense media coverage. Pereira Rosa (2018) stated, “In moments where reality is constructed based on our fears, it is likely that the narrative appeals to society’s deeper doubts” (p. 193).

This suggests that often the media layers the narrative of MP, in which they build on each other and draw on preexisting narratives to reinforce current views (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; S. Cohen, 2011a). The relation between MP and the culture of fear can be manipulated to scapegoat outsiders through narrative layering (Falkof, 2018). The “spiral of signification” terminology is often used to summarize how the layering of such narratives brings the issue to the forefront of public consciousness (Hall, 1978, p. 222). In such layering or spiraling, each subsequent event (or story of the event) grows in egregiousness, creating high levels of concern (Garland, 2008).

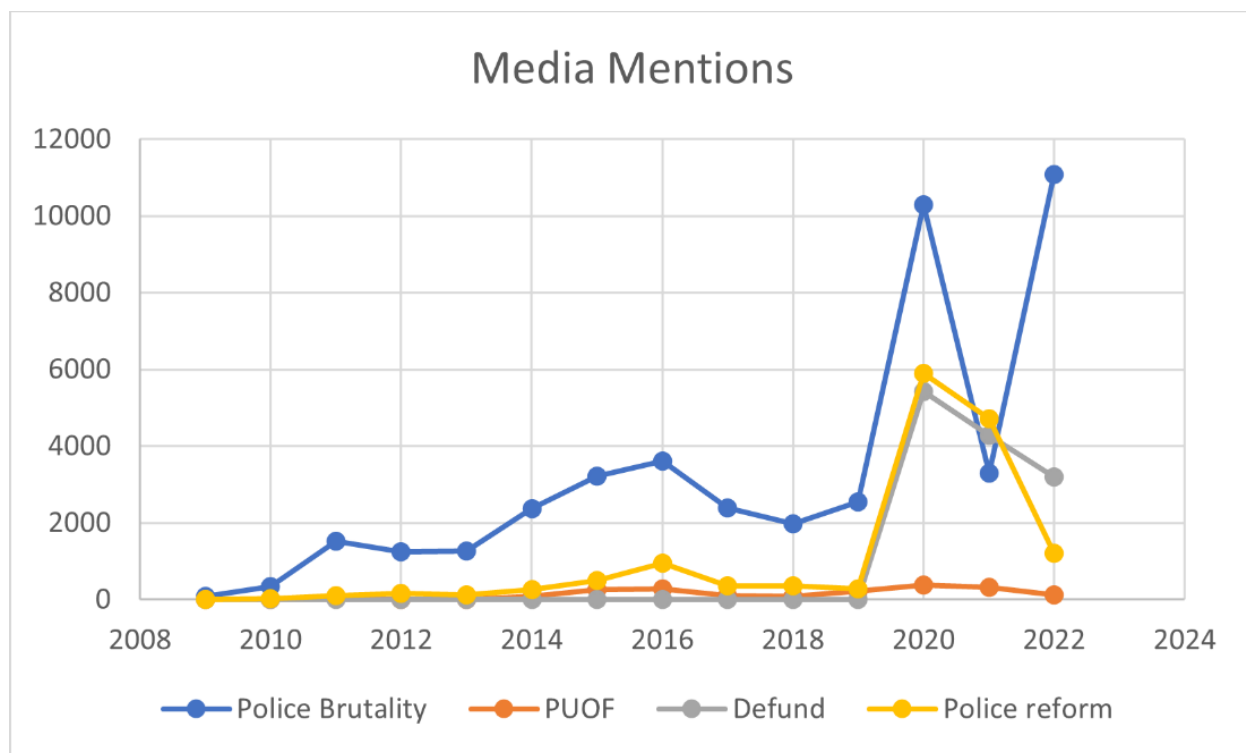
Another significant source of concern is the church. This is not to say religion, but the absolute power of the church as the moral compass and social center of many historical societies. In the medieval times, the church’s power often rivaled the monarchy’s power. When the church deemed that heresy was an issue, the result was the Inquisition. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) cited the medieval witchcraft trials as a historical version of MP. The church stoked such fears of the devil and the individuals who consorted with the devil that thousands of people were tortured

and put to death upon a mere accusation of witchcraft, often participating in church-sanctioned trials that proved such guilt.

Falkof (2018) highlighted the nexus of media and social control, showing that common deviant ideas are often founded on ideologies. As mentioned previously, one method for provoking concern is using mass media. As shown in Figure 1, there were significant spikes in media mentions of the terms police brutality, police use of force, defund the police, and police reform. As a cluster, the spikes occurred in 2015, 2016, and 2020, and police brutality alone spiked again in 2022. The increased attention in 2015 and 2016 may be attributed to the FBI clearing the involved officer of wrongdoing in the August 2014 shooting death of Michael Brown and the subsequent public unrest. The increased media narrative in 2020 can be attributed to the death of George Floyd during an arrest and the death of Breonna Taylor, who was shot by police during a criminal warrant service. These punctuations created a mass media feeding frenzy that resulted in increased coverage.

### ***Hostility***

According to MP theory, there must be a scapegoat, a subject, a group, or a class of individuals who can be chosen or stand out as different from the controlling populace who serve as the focus. According to Falkof (2018), the layering of the fear narrative creates hostility toward the folk devil or the target of concern. As the levels of anxiety and fear intersect, a protective communal hostility envelops. This would indicate that risk and responsibility are subjective and prone to manipulation through a dialectical relation or remoralizing society (Hier, 2015). Hostility hinges on emotion and interpretation associated with risk management and envisioned collective harm.

**Figure 1***Media Mentions of Specific Terms per Year*

*Note.* Data from <https://www.archive.org>, (January 15, 2023) using search terms police brutality, police use of force (PUOF), defund the police (defund), and police reform. Limited to English-speaking, nonprint news sources.

Victor (1998) emphasized that MP is a form of collective behavior characterized by sudden increased concern and hostility in a segment of society against a perceived threat with widespread rumors and accusations about dangerous deviants. Using the viewpoint that the term deviant is solely a social construct means there must be a perception of deviance according to the normative society. Imaginary deviants can result in pigeonholing any person into the category as the terminology for evil acts is fluid and open for interpretation. False or exaggerated accusations are necessary for MP because someone must be publicly identified and labeled.



### *Consensus*

Without deviance, there would not be MP. However, deviance cannot be achieved without an audience. MP requires the existence of public concern about an issue or a perceived problem (G. Morgan et al., 2010). Hall (1978) interpreted the perception of the threat and consensus as “speaking with one voice” (p. 16). Fundamental to the dynamics of consensus is the notion that there needs to be a legitimization of the dominant voice decrying the evils of the deviants (McDermott, 2013). An individual with limited status crying foul rarely garners the support needed for MP. However, an individual in a position of influence who has convinced others that they are the legitimate protector of the moral authority has a greater ability to muster consensus.

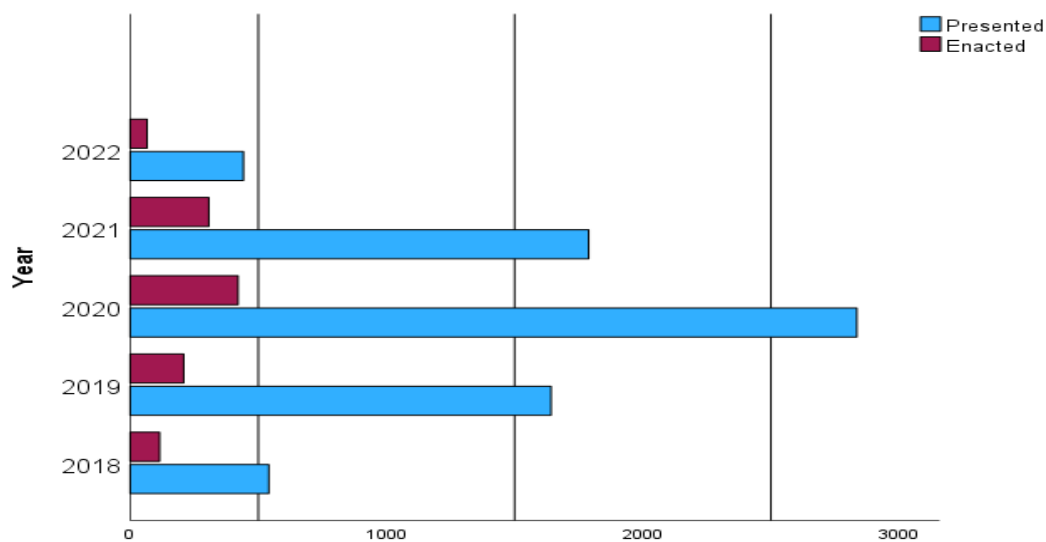
Much like the layering of the narrative mentioned previously, the undertones of concern build upon each other, culminating in the widely held perception that a significant deviance must be addressed. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009) contended that deviance is the “centerpiece of moral panic” (p. 128). Extreme fear will ebb and surge with time; however, deviance and thus the consensus of what deviance is, is temporal. Deviant behavior varies for each sector of society from group to group.

Such consensus is fanned and publicly displayed through what many call policy-elite, political-elite, policy entrepreneurs, or moral entrepreneurs (Ben-Yehuda, 1986; S. Cohen, 2011b; Daly, 1995; Joosse, 2017). Political leaders, those of influence, or charismatic leaders often stand for/against something creating a folk devil as the target of ire, historically, using analog media sources such as newspapers or digital media such as radio or television. However, using modern social media, issues can quickly and selectively travel through the cyber-public sphere and change how events are witnessed (Cricher, 2009; Hier, 2019).

Garland (2008) emphasized that the media is a prime beneficiary of; because exposure sells, revealing the political benefits of creating or maximizing on MP have not been lost in the political realm. Political rhetoric associated with flexing political muscle through tough-on-crime initiatives is standard in the political arena (Hawdon, 2001). In a circular relationship, politics and the media feed off each other in support of the previously mentioned concept of narrative layering (Daly, 1995). Political behavior concerning events of high media coverage can result in event maximizing, as evident in Figure 2, which shows the number of legislative initiatives introduced between 2018 and 2022. The number of law enforcement-based legislative bills grew exponentially during the peak years of civil unrest surrounding law enforcement. This supports the contention of Garland, Hawdon (2001), and Daly (1995) that as media mentions increase, as was represented in Figure 1, so does the political action.

**Figure 2**

*Nationwide Law Enforcement Related Legislation - Introduced Versus Enacted*



*Note.* Data from all states using search limiters of presented and enacted. From “Policing Legislation Registry,” by Wilson Center for Science and Justice, 2023 (<https://www.policinglegislation.law.duke.edu>).

Increased media coverage, narrative layering, grassroots movements, and rent-seeking behaviors of some political elites created a firestorm of discontent directed at law enforcement, who, in previous MP, have been considered the enforcers of culturally normative behaviors. Through explosive media and social media coverage, the layering of singular incidents created an endemic perception of abuse of power and corruption in law enforcement. This process involved categorizing law enforcement on a national scale as folk devils, thereby projecting them as outward-facing manifestations of a more profound and systemic issue.

### *Disproportionality*

MP distinguishes itself from other forms of concern by its inherent disproportionality in response (S. Cohen, 2011a). Five overarching categories of disproportional response were identified by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009): “exaggerated harm, invented figures, proliferation of tall tales, comparisons across conditions, and changes over time” (p. 87). Reflecting on historical events like the medieval witch hunts, the red scare in the United States (Storrs, 2015), Hitler’s anti-Semitic purges, allegations of criminal satanic cults kidnapping children in the mid-1980s on the West Coast (Laycock, 2015), the 1968 panic over Jewish store owners abducting teenage girls for forced prostitution (Victor, 1998), the U.S. war on drugs (Hawdon, 2001), concerns over racial integration in the United States (Badger, 1997), or the worry about Elvis Presley and his corrupting influence on youth through his dancing (Bertrand, 2007; Mercer, 1956) these examples highlight historical instances of MP with responses that far exceeded any actual threat.

In more contemporary contexts, the Columbine school shooting serves as a relevant example. Although the event warranted legitimate moral concern, the blame shifted toward the goth culture, and moral outrage centered on figures like Marilyn Manson (Griffiths, 2010).

Headlines such as “Classmates Describe Shooters as Obsessed With Goth World: ‘Trench Coat Mafia’ Members Treated as Social Outcasts” (Vanderbeken, 1999) and “Giggling Goths Out for Revenge” (McCulloh, 1999) encapsulated the exaggerated response. Another instance was the panic associated with HIV/AIDS, initially termed gay-related immune deficiency ([GRID], N. King, 2012). In the 1980s, HIV transmission was primarily linked to homosexuality, leading to the demonization of anyone identifying as homosexual. Media coverage further amplified this narrative until better scientific understanding emerged in the 1990s. In both cases, the concern and subsequent responses were disproportionate.

The magnitude of concern regarding moral deviants and their perceived impact on society often surpasses empirical verification (Victor, 1998). Contentiously, the concept of disproportionality resists empirical challenge (Young, 2009). Garland (2008) raised the crucial question, “proportionate to what?” (p. 22), suggesting that actions may align with the issue of concern or that the issue of concern itself may be more significant than previously acknowledged or studied. Scholars in MP have further debated this measurement challenge, including Hier (2008) and de Lint and Dalton (2020). However, Young (2009) presented a counterargument through the paradox of disproportionality, suggesting that the response may indeed be somewhat proportional to the anxieties of the populace.

### ***Volatility***

One of the characteristics of MP, according to S. Cohen (2011a), is that the volatility of the reaction can be sudden. This was supported by predominate MP scholars Goode and Ben Yehuda (2009) when they stated that often MP are like fads that “erupt suddenly and usually unexpectedly” (p. 48), often fading just as quickly. With temporary outbreaks of exaggerated concern, this is not to indicate that results of MP volatility, such as legislation changes or

recognition of issues fade, only the exaggerated concern and the flash reactions (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2013).

Using another approach, Garland (2008) measured volatility by the media's coverage of the incident of concern. According to Daly (1995), "Crimes that occur least often are the most likely to be reported in the media" (p. 9). An issue or event with high salience would be covered repeatedly and via numerous media outlets whereas a less volatile situation would have reduced coverage. However, this argument, although efficient for after-the-fact analysis, creates an interesting dynamic during the formative stages of MP, begging the question: is the volatility of MP (in this instance) increased by the media coverage, or is increased media coverage because of the volatility, thus establishing an interdependent relationship between the two. Using this line of inquiry would support looking at volatility as more of a sense of urgency or immediacy (de Lint & Dalton, 2020).

Central to the definition of MP is that a condition, episode, person, or group of persons fall outside of accepted societal norms or values (S. Cohen, 2011a). The challenge facing M.P. is establishing who determines what social values to modulate. The definition of deviance is unique to each society or community based on normative community standards. As an example, the outlook on drug use challenges one to question whether the individual addicted to opioids is addicted because they have a chronic illness, or perhaps they are that way because they are simply a criminal.

Historical examples abound of power brokers using law enforcement, the military, vigilante squads, the church, legislation, or social ostracization to control those seen as deviants. Falkof (2018) contended that in many cases, the folk devil may be much different than initially indicated or not even present during the targeted event. Using the example of the medieval witch

trials, numerous individuals were killed or tortured for supposedly having supernatural powers and consorting with the devil. The church set the normative values of the time, and those who fell outside those values became suspect or ostracized (Falkof, 2018; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009). This action spurred the modern terminology describing the baseless persecution of an individual or group as a witch hunt. Alternatively, a more modern example is when the call to arms was sounded after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and a suspicious eye was turned toward anyone of middle eastern descent, and there were many mob-style attacks on American Muslims or those perceived as of Muslim descent.

In contrast, Horsley (2017) dismissed MP as a “conspiracy theory” based on a “monolithic social order” (p. 93). However, calling something a MP does not dismiss it as a conspiracy or indicate that the issue does not exist but only “that the issue is highly angled to fit a certain political discourse” (Frederiksen & Harboe Knudsen, 2021, p. 231). This drove S. Cohen’s (2011a) later theory that there are both “good and bad moral panics” (p. 237). When exploring the interventionist nature of social policy, good and bad MP episodes can easily be understood.

With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, picking out bad MP is easy. Examples include the concern of the young being drawn into the practice of satanism through games such as Dungeons and Dragons or through heavy metal or rap music (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Laycock, 2015; Waldron, 2005). In such cases, the manufactured fear of the effect was blown well out of proportion. Thus, exploring what S. Cohen (2011b) dubbed good panic, the definition of what makes up a good panic becomes murkier. Political issues regarding private morality can be looped into this category. For example, historical issues such as segregation, contemporary

issues of same-sex marriages, and gender issues such as sexism can be evaluated in the context of good MP episodes because of the benefits of bringing them to national attention.

The terms good and bad can become ambiguous in their interpretation and are highly subjective to the interpreters' world view and beliefs. The terms constructive and destructive could provide greater clarity in distinguishing between the two extremes of MP. Evaluating MP using a sliding scale with the poles of constructive and destructive can help clear any confusion that S. Cohens' (2011b) good/bad dichotomy produces. Recognizing that the perception of constructive and destructive are arbitrary and highly aligned with the observer's worldview, some generalizations can be made. The term constructive MP can be interpreted to cover what S. Cohen called good MP with the additional caveats of providing a benefit for large groups of people, creating positive change, concentrating resources to address specific issues, or any other number of actions that substantially improve the root cause of an issue. Examples of constructive MP include starting a national-level conversation about a specific problem, driving policymakers' attention toward specific issues, and creating substantive changes to normative social behaviors, prompting public support and positive social change. On the other side of the continuum, replacing the concept of bad MP is destructive MP. In these cases, the results of the MP actions do not result in substantive positive change, unduly impact large groups of people, divert needed resources from other essential programs, or do not produce change at all.

Historically, MP is the proverbial flash in the pan; many produce little residual policy impact other than tokenism. However, in the modern interconnected world, there is an audience at the touch of a button, thus giving it an increasing, more sustained impact. Policy executives can maximize trends in public sentiment in a self-promoting manner. This creates a significant issue because one of the cornerstone results of MP theory is poorly planned and implemented

policies that have been rushed into action based on popular demands. The transient nature of policy executives mixed with MP-induced policies creates a dynamic for law enforcement when they are faced with a situation in which they are required to act and behave in a manner that may or may not be popular and may be considered racist, prejudicial, or discriminatory enforcement action. This becomes a hot point in public discourse.

### **Sources of MP**

According to S. Cohen (2011b), MP has evolved beyond crimes against social norms and now encompasses highly political endeavors such as environmentalism or the war on terror. There is even debate about whether MP is merely a term used to denote political correctness. MP can manifest in ideological forms, such as religion or environmentalism, and individual concerns, such as sexual violence or feminism, with varying political strategies. Notably, when moral crusaders seize upon exposure, it often serves to advance their personal, professional, religious, or political agendas by legitimizing their positions as moral superiors (S. Cohen, 2011b; Garland, 2008; McDermott, 2013).

MP can be categorized into three foundational sources: grassroots, interest group, or elite-engineered/elite-generated (Critcher, 2009; David et al., 2011; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Victor, 1998). The grassroots model contends that MP swells from the public, whereas the media and moral crusaders then spread and bolster MP in response to the public movement. According to Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009), the interest group generated is MP's dominant model. In addition, Krinsky (2013) explained, "Rule creators and moral entrepreneurs launch crusades, which occasionally turn into panics, to make sure that certain rules take hold and are enforced" (p. 8).



The elite-engineered model is a deliberate manipulation that occurs when “the richest and most powerful members of the society consciously undertake campaigns to generate and sustain concern, fear, and panic on the part of the public” that is a concern to the elite group but not generally a public concern prior to such manipulation (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009, p. 62). This perspective aligns with the idea that MP is intricately linked to the mechanics of power policymaking. Holding that policymaking requires a state and societal framework enhanced by MP, “at its core, moral panic is a calculation of risk and together with governance can shed light on the undercurrents of ... policy” (Puplampu, 2020, p. 170).

The popularity of social media has amplified the effectiveness of the grassroots model. According to Fridman et al. (2021), “Research shows that media coverage plays a significant role in determining the extent to which we take threats seriously” (p. 2). Druckman (2021) stated, “The speed with which misinformation can spread is unprecedented” (p. 639). Social media users curate their information sources, often excluding dissenting opinions from their feeds (Argyris, 2021).

As a tool of social media, visual content “like memes, videos, photos, posters, and emojis are processed faster, accepted without being questioned, and remembered for a longer period than text posts” (Argyris, 2021, para. 3). This can be used to the advantage of the producer of such multimedia data when images evoke emotions. The saying “a picture is worth a thousand words” holds. The echo chamber effect becomes magnified as information sources are reduced (Pfeffer et al., 2013). Many social media sources do not generate unique knowledge; instead, they repeat what has already been published. The reliance on a single data source controlled by social media users can result in significant damage. Moral crusaders understand this and leverage the power of online firestorms, which can spill over into other media sources (Hier, 2019).

Unlike in the past when the elite controlled the narrative through traditional media sources, the social media echo chamber now allows deviants to contest moral boundaries (Ungar, 2001).

Tying in the MP, PET and elite theory become elementary as modern conversations happen at the speed of the internet. Although the adage “if it is on the internet, it must be true” is far from accurate, the potential for information to spread and go viral is undeniable. Once it enters the social media echo chamber, all the elements necessary for MP can quickly develop. Politicians and media sources constantly vie for attention-grabbing headlines, so shortcuts are often taken when verifying information before its redistribution.

### **Elite Theory**

Using a quote from George Orwell’s (1956) allegorical novel *Animal Farm*, “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others” (p. 122). Elite theory asserts the existence of a ruling minority in societies, comprising a select group of power holders controlling essential sources of influence, whether in the form of specific resources, sway, or political decision-making powers (Mills, 1956). This theory holds that there are “political elites” that, as individuals, belong to a small, “relatively cohesive, and stable group with disproportionate power to affect national and supranational political outcomes on a continuing basis” (M. A. Peters, 2018, p. 3). As power becomes centralized, government decisions become focused in the hands of a statistical minority of powerbrokers.

Elite theory is deeply rooted in historical principles of oligarchy with lineage to Aristotle, who wrote of departmentalization and delegation of authority in a polity (Aristotle, 1999). However, the theory is traditionally buttressed by the independent lines of reasoning of Max Weber (1864-1920) or Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923). Although both appeared to have similar

lines of logic and developed their versions in parallel, there was no historical indication that they ever met or knew of each other's works during development (Lopez, 2013).

Weber (1969) built his elite theory concept on the pillars of power and dominance using bureaucratic administrative apparatuses and coercive force, and Pareto distinguished the ruling class into two categories, the Leonine or the Vulpine. Whereas the Leonine (translated as a lion) gains position with dominance through strength, the Vulpine (translated as a fox) positions its power with domination through persuasion and skill, much in line with the Machiavellian political philosophy. The modern elite theory has branched into two primary avenues of scholarship. NeELITISM generally views democracy as a deceptive illusion and follows the logic of Pareto. Demo-ELITISM is supported by Weber's writing about democracy as "a method of leadership" (Korosenyi, 2018, p. 48). The diverse perspectives within elite theory, as outlined by Weber, Pareto, and contemporary scholars like Korosenyi, laid the groundwork for an intricate examination of elite class dynamics.

Higley (2017) differentiated the elite class into a stratification in which there is the classic Pareto version of the "elite class" as well as a much larger "second stratum" that contains the pool of elites, who would be recruited and brought into the elite class (p. 27). Accepting Higley's theoretical scholarship would indicate a much higher level of influence through a hierarchal framework. This confusion could be explained by the distinction between the "narrow elite," which consists of "fewer than a hundred thousand people and perhaps only ten thousand," and the "broad elite," made up of the top 5% of adult Americans "located in managerial positions, the professions, and content-production jobs in the media." (Higley, 2017, p. 28; Murray, 2012, pp. 17–22). Irrelevant of what tract of elite theory one may subscribe to, a common thread is that the "governing authority is exerted by 'deputies' who transmit the preferences of constituents into

policies, or authority is exercised by ‘proxies’ charged with articulating the people’s general will” (Korosenyi, 2018, p. 42). Through such an exploration of the nuanced stratification of the elite class, a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics within elite theory continues to unfold.

Following along with the Weberian concepts of bureaucracy, in which elites are not born but made, Hoffman-Lange (2018) maintains the German conceptual line that there is a distinction, but it is based on the selectorate, whereby “delegation elites are selected directly or indirectly by the members of a polity or an organization in elections. Career elites are selected by superiors or by specific decision-making bodies in organizations” (p. 53). This framework intertwines with Higley (2017), supporting the concept that a second level is brought into the proverbial fold and integrated into the elite class. This theoretical concept expands the theory outside the political arena, applying it to any number of power brokers and influencers who maintain significant sway in society.

Using elite theory, it is intuitive to point out that a small number of individuals hold a substantial amount of influential power. Supported by the federalist system of government and enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, citizens choose individuals to act on their behalf and in their interest through the right of franchise. Those chosen individuals possess a proportionally higher political power than the average citizen. Additionally, history has presented numerous influential families, such as the Rockefellers, Kennedys, or the Vanderbilts, who continue to hold significant influence through politics, finances, or a mixture of both.

Moving elite theory into the modern era, the impact of social media has created a subgroup of individuals labeled as influencers. Statistics showed that in 2021, 81% of the U.S. population used social media, and 70% of those indicated that they use social media daily

(Auxier & Andreson, 2021). Individuals create a following on these platforms based on created or curated content, short informal conversations, or recorded activities. Although such influencers may not have traditional pull like that defined by elite theory, they can hold sway over large groups of individuals because of attributed qualities of “relatability and authenticity”; they appear to have high appeal and trustworthiness (Nouri, 2018, p. 16).

Elite theory directly applies to this research project by showing that some people have a disproportionate voice in influencing policy and practices. One example is the ability of wealthy individuals to influence policy by funding political campaigns of a specific party to influence that party’s ideals and beliefs. Billionaire George Soros, who, through his Open Society Foundations, has donated \$1.16 billion since 2016 directly to political campaigns and other “groups and individuals that promote [their] values,” exerts high levels of influence (Open Society Foundations, n.d.-a, n.d.-b., para. 1). As such, he has the financial wherewithal to substantially influence political power by funding one party over another, and this elite influence is achieved without ever being voted into office. Some individuals have a much more significant influence on the policy development process, whether through the development and implementation of formal regulations or through the mobilization of like-minded individuals for action on a specific cause.

## **PET**

Baumgartner and Jones (1991) put forward the notion of PET in what is arguably the most intuitive theory about policy development. Building from Simon’s (1955) bounded rationality and incremental decision making, Baumgartner and Jones sought a means to explain how policymakers, with a status quo bias, would suddenly shift their attention and jump into policymaking action. The policy agenda is typically governed by stable networks of elites or

policy influencers who maintain an equilibrium consensus once reached. It was ascertained that in response to a focusing event, policy elites would react by stepping out of policy stasis for short periods of policy changes (Jones et al., 1998; Weible & Sabatier, 2018).

PET literature discussed two broad reasons for such sudden jumps in action, often referred to as punctuations. Disproportionate information processing and institutional friction are major punctuations that often contribute to PET policy changes (Fernández-i-Marín et al., 2019; Flink, 2017). The limited ability of policy designers to process all available and incoming information is supported by Simon's (1955) rational choice model. Decision executives often have to satisfice to make timely decisions. This can lead to an unintentional policy under- or overreactions if decisions are based on incomplete information (Flink, 2017).

Conversely, according to Jones et al. (1998), the policy image is how the decision makers view the situational facts or the policy reaction, impacting how quickly a policy moves forward. This complements the over/underreaction studied by Maor (2012, 2014), who contended that such reactions by the power elite are intentional and primarily out of self-interest. Through self-interest and satisficing, politicians exposed to public opinion may be highly susceptible to media or other forms of influence, thus increasing the risk of external factors becoming major decision criteria (Falkof, 2018).

The second reason for punctuation is the increased or reduced amount of friction. Friction can be described as barriers to policy change such as administration changes, changes in controlling factions of decision making, and budgetary or social exceptions (Flink, 2017). This is supported by Jensen (2011), who recognized that policy designers can shift attention to or from focusing events for political gain by exploiting political party competition. Jensen used the terms *nonaverse* or *averse* to discuss the controlling parties' proclivity to embrace or shun the change

that the focusing event created, showing how attention shifting can lead to significant policy changes because of the political costs of action or inaction. Beyer et al. (2018) dubbed these “institutional barriers and political inertia” (p. 42).

For this study, the concentration was on the immediate impact of punctuations and not the change in friction. Policy entrepreneurs can use highly publicized focusing events, creating an opportunity to maximize exposure while the iron is hot. Therefore, using natural exposure to publicly show support for a policy or build a perception of action resulting in a positive public image.

The punctuations associated with the tragic officer-involved deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, where minorities have died at the hands of police, have resulted in public outrage. A recent frenzy of national and worldwide media coverage of American law enforcement created what could be considered policy overreaction and political rent-seeking behavior, and many local, state, and federal politicians putting forward new law enforcement reform and funding bills. Many such bills are poorly researched or conceptualized, with many politicians adding to the bill to associate their name by “piling on” to demonstrate political worth (Bardach, 1977, p. 84).

The tying together of elite theory and PET moved this research forward by having significant explanatory power on who makes the policy and implementation changes and why they happen after a significant focusing event. The polarity of the modern political system in the United States has created a vacuum in which politicians are either in the news or irrelevant and subject to losing their office in the next election. Prior sections explained the motivations propelling power brokers into action. The following section delves into the societal impetus for

collective mobilization, examining the concept of a focusing event and its transformation into a prevalent topic that captures the attention of the political elite.

### **Theoretical Challenges**

Challenges and concerns have been leveled through the evolution of MP theory. One line of study that has created significant insight into MP is the motivation of the claim maker. The public claims a charismatic leader or a moral entrepreneur can stir the waters of a social movement, fanning a MP (Garland, 2008; Pereira Rosa, 2018; Victor, 1998). Fillieule (2013) indicated that social movements are the key to MP, asserting that MP was not driven by conservative factors as previously theorized but instead could be driven by any number of campaigns. Another critique is that MP (taken literally) closely covers crowd behavior studies. Fillieule stated, “MPs are characterized by speeches, sermons, preaching, negotiations, arguments, debates, legislation, law enforcement priorities, agenda setting and the like, all focused on moral issues” (p. 3).

Horsley (2017) contended that MP capitalizes on the gullibility of the audience “even to the extent that it could be located in the widely condemned stable of conspiracy theory” (p. 86), insisting that MP rests on a foundation of social order promoted by elites that does not stand the test of time. Instead, Horsley held that MP is a means of top-down control by elites through purposeful manipulation of public concern and fears and is a “nostalgic invocation of a modernist world” that operates outside of modern realism (p. 93). Horsley’s argument is supported by the fact that many modern societies are highly divergent in perceptions of behaviors, what is acceptable, and which modern public reactions would fit into an MP theory. In comparison, a polarizing MP theory is more applicable to modern societies (Zielinska &



Pasamonik, 2021). Based on the modern pluralistic society, folk devils to one group may not be considered as such to another.

Walsh (2019) explored the concept that the folk devil, in fact, may be the provocateur. As the provocateur, they relish in causing the MP. As the engineer of alarm, the agent thrives on the sensational media coverage and ensuing panic. Walsh contended that by accepting the focus from the actors to place blame on others, when in some acts, the actors are the cause and want to be the focusing event, exposing the agency and motivation. This contention contrasts with S. Cohens' theory (1969), which contends that the folk devil is a victim of coverage.

While supporting the overall MP theory, Garland (2008) added two additional requirements to strengthen the original theory—primarily the acceptance of the moral dimension of the social reaction, and secondly, the concept that the deviant conduct is somehow symptomatic of much larger issues. Garland asserted that the two additional requirements are necessary because they lead to the underlying cause or “namely, the concern on the part of certain social actors that an established value system is being threatened” (p. 11). In addition, Garland expanded on S. Cohen's (1969) model that the reaction in MP does not have to be single-sided but can be divided with both sides reaching a group consensus and contending that the opposing faction is wrong.

Critcher (2009) challenged routine MP analysis, contending that it should be causally connected “to sociological and cultural theory, especially risk theory, discourse analysis, and moral regulation” (p. 17). Thus, the display of moral behavior is conditioned and enforced by normative cultural traditions. This creates a causal chain between the state as the definer and enforcer of normative, therefore moral behavior, and thus the moral regulator. Leaning heavily on Hunt (1999) and Hier (2002, 2008), Critcher contended that a MP is an exceptional form of

generated moral awareness through moral regulation. If that is the case, then MP is an extreme form of moral regulation and much less volatile than previously thought because it is a definite manipulation of the populace and a means of subjugation.

Ungar (2001) asked at which point MP manifests as a collective action. This was spawned from Victor (1998) when he defined a MP as “a societal response to beliefs about a threat from moral deviants [which represent] a collective form of behavior characterized by suddenly increased concern and hostility in a significant segment of society” (pp. 542–543). This was supported by Ungar when he argued that in the absence of obvious evidence of public involvement (riots, protests), using the media as a barometer of collective action lacks substance because of elite influence and the ability to drive media coverage, holding that sensationalism does not equate to MP or evidence of collective action. Although a strong point, the influence of social media has a calming effect on these arguments.

### **Related Literature**

The following section provides a thorough examination of leadership dynamics in public policy. It explores leader communication, ethics, influence, and action, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of leadership within public administration. The discussion navigates through historical perspectives, ethical considerations, and the rational actor model, emphasizing the pivotal role of leadership in shaping policy outcomes. Additionally, it delves into the influence of social media on public perception and collective behavior, highlighting its significant impact on contemporary political discourse and decision-making processes. Overall, this section lays a foundation for understanding the complexities of leadership and its implications for effective policy governance.

## **Leadership–Who Directs Policy?**

Public policy is directed by those individuals to whom the public has entrusted the daily running of the government through franchise. Those in policy authority positions are elected to such positions by the people, but through various actions, they have convinced followers that they are worthy of such positions of trust. Depending on who is discussing the phenomenon, leadership is widely studied, but many nuances are highly contested in academic scholarship.

This study employed a discussion framework centered on general leadership actions and behavior categories. The foundational pillars of public administration, namely leader communication, leader ethics, methods of leader influence, and leader action, provided the structural basis. This study examined these four critical domains, explaining the leader’s strategic approaches in persuading supporters of the appropriateness of their envisioned goal and establishing their merit for followership. Additionally, the research delved into a concise exploration of specific actions undertaken by leaders to substantiate their leadership qualities to followers. Given that policy leaders often rely significantly on their interpretations of appropriate actions in specific circumstances, the study underscores the necessity for them to convince themselves and persuade others of the soundness of their chosen course of action.

### ***Leader Communication***

At its most basic definition, leadership can be defined as using influence (formal, social, or otherwise) to direct others toward a common goal. Ideally, to move a group of individuals toward a goal, they must first know exactly what that goal or end state looks like. According to Barrett (2006), “Leadership communication is the controlled, purposeful transfer of meaning by which leaders influence a single person, a group, an organization, or a community” (p. 5). There are various levels of leader communication; however, the ideal state of leader communication is

the controlled and purposeful transfer of information from the leader to the follower. There are multiple parts of political communication: the message the leader wants to convey, what the follower wants to hear, what the leader does or says, and what the follower hears or observes. Like the spokes on a bike wheel, if the structure of the communication cycle falls short, the road to the end state could be rather bumpy.

To successfully transfer policy goals or meaning from leader to follower, it is essential to match the appropriate leadership style to the situation (Barrett, 2006). Over 2,000 years ago, Aristotle argued that there are three artistic proofs or basic modes of persuasion used in communications to convince followers, (a) logos, (b) pathos, and (c) ethos (Benoit, 1990). Logos uses the logic of an argument, and pathos is based on emotions or trying to connect the feelings of a follower to the goal of the leader. The artistic proof of ethos is of concern for this section of the study. According to Barrett (2006), “Ethos is an appeal based on the perceived character of the sender of the message” (p. 6).

As Posner and Kouzes (1993) found in their leadership research, “if people are going to follow someone willingly ... they first want to assure themselves that the person is worthy of their trust” (Barrett, 2006, p. 13) because people are primarily concerned with whether the leader can proceed based on social value and ethically normative behaviors. Moorman and Grover (2009) stated, “The decision to follow is a decision made in conditions of uncertainty where followers must decide, based on a belief about future outcomes, whether to commit to a leader and engage in his or her leadership efforts” (p. 103). Trust and respect must be at the bedrock of efficient leader-follower communication (Obi, 2018).

A leader of importance and an ethical leader may not be the same. Although leaders can be transformational in their impact, they may also act unethically, abuse followers, and

contradict espoused values (Hoch et al., 2016). One could argue that some of history's most transformational leaders were also some of the most ethically corrupt and morally despicable individuals. Without the influence of Hitler or Stalin, the world would not have experienced the full leadership capabilities of Churchill and Roosevelt. It does not stretch the imagination to realize that those individuals commanded significant influence, both in followers and those who opposed the power of those individuals, and the apparent difference is ethics and morality.

### ***Ethics of Influence***

Ethics can be viewed as a strictly human concept of behavioral restrictions individuals put upon themselves and expect of others in solidarity with fellow society members (Niebuhr, 2021/1932). Therefore, in the contention that the individual is a morally responsible body, one would hold that personal and professional ethics complement each other. Ambition alone does not negate ethics, and history is rife with individuals who were both ambitious and ethical. According to Menzel (2017), "Men and women of ambition continue to seek power and act out their lives, driven by self-interest properly understood" (p. 1). Wilson (1887) pushed for the sterilization of public administration, removing ethics and morality in exchange for efficiency, resulting in "but a moral preparation for what is to follow. It is clearing the moral atmosphere of official life by establishing the sanctity of public office as a public trust" (p. 210). Thus, Wilson held that by removing ethics or personal feelings from the execution of public duties, the administrator could efficiently and effectively carry out the duties in a manner that was both fair and consistent, a position embodied by the Weber ideal type (Höpfl, 2006).

Conversely, some have contended that public administration has four distinct levels of ethics. Those levels are personal morality, professional ethics, organizational ethics, and social

ethics, which are, for all intents, separate from each other (Shafritz et al., 2017). As such, they each play a role in shaping the individual and their approach toward public administration.

The founding fathers understood the desires and weaknesses of man. In *The Federalist* #6, Hamilton (1787, as cited in Project Gutenberg, n.d.) warned that “men are ambitious, vindictive and rapacious” (para. 2). Madison (1788, as cited in Project Gutenberg, n.d.) agreed and wrote in *The Federalist* #51, “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition” (para. 4). Madison further wrote, “In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself” (Project Gutenberg, n.d., 6, 51 section). Consequently, presenting the motivation and showing the purpose and goal of the government of the United States are inseparable from the values of democracy and the ethical frame described in the preamble. Accepting that political leaders are, first and foremost, humans subject to the temptations of power, glory, or money, the founding fathers framed such documents to prevent unethical actions.

Former President Eisenhower stated, “The supreme quality for a leader is unquestionable integrity” (Van Wart, 2014, p. 280). Accounting for the situational parameters that may change during stressful leadership events, one will routinely fall back on the stable traits that are a part of every individual (Obi, 2018). Authentic leaders are intimately aware of their strengths, weaknesses, motivation, values, and moral perspectives and act to reflect those characteristics (Palanski & Yammarino, 2009). As such, they convey a positive ethos and model behaviors that followers want to emulate.

On an equal level of importance to verbal communication is whether the leader’s actions and behaviors confirm or contradict the verbal message. This is also known as leader integrity.

The congruence between words and actions tells of the leaders' motivations and values (Duggar, 2011; Palanski & Yammarino, 2009). If leaders do not display integrity in their actions, the chance is that few followers will be influenced by their words (Kalish & Luria, 2021). In addition to the behavioral traits discussed, the leader must display intellectual flexibility. Being an agile leader who publicly accepts and learns from successes and failures can enhance the trust between leaders and followers (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

Alternatively, there are some factors that, if employed at the wrong time for the wrong reasons or in the wrong manner, can negatively affect the leader-follower relationship; traits such as dominance, aggression, and power-seeking behaviors also tend to impact the leader-follower relationship negatively (Kausel & Slaughter, 2011). Rational choice theory indicates that individuals make decisions rationally based on instinctive judgment, their perceptions of right, wrong, or what is needed in each situation (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997; Simon, 1955).

### **Influence – Political**

Only 9% of Americans find members of U.S. Congress to have a high (7%) or very high (2%) rating of honesty and professional ethics, measurably less than car salespeople and just above telemarketers (Brenan, 2023). Given these findings and applying rational choice theory, one might expect to see a higher turnover of new leaders in government rather than multiterm incumbents. However, influential leaders are adept at balancing the positive traits and practices while minimizing the negatives, appealing to the heart (pathos), mind (logos), and soul (ethos) of the follower. Individuals who can convince others that their viewpoint is the greatest method of promoting public good have a greater chance of being politically successful (McDermott, 2013).

### ***Action***

The fourth, and arguably one of the most logical pillars of public administration, is action. Public administration has no values as a profession; what may be acceptable of public administrators in one society may not be uniformly accepted in other areas of the world, and “it merely reflects the cultural norms, beliefs, and power realities of its society” (Shafritz et al., 2017, p. 7). However, professional administrators in the United States have publicly adopted the values to “advance the public interest, promote the interests of the public and put service to the public above service to oneself” (ASPA, n.d., section 1). Therefore, the call to “Serve the best interests of the people” is a fundamental requirement (International City/County Management Association, 2023, Tenet 4). Public administrators should strive to create “a just, fair, and inclusive government that strengthens communities and protects democracy” (National Academy of Public Administration, 2021, p. 2).

Public administrators and policy leaders have the ability and the responsibility to take action when needed and appropriate. Taking appropriate action may have a calming effect on MP situations. In a brief example, at the time of this study, another law enforcement fatal event occurred in Memphis, Tennessee (Sainz, 2023). Tyre Nicholson, an African American male, was apprehended by five African American police officers and subject to a police UOF event that could rightly be described as a mob beating. As a result of his injuries, Nichols died 3 days later in the hospital. In this instance, the local public administrators took immediate action, such as starting termination and criminal proceedings on the officers involved and releasing the videos of the event to the public. Although this was an egregious event, and there have been protests, they were primarily peaceful and could not be classified as civil unrest. It could be theorized that the



proactive and unified actions by the appropriate level of public administrators averted large-scale civil unrest and destruction.

In a counterexample, on April 12, 2015, arrestee Freddie Grey was found listless in the back of a police transport wagon when it pulled into the jail. Grey was unresponsive and taken to the hospital, where he was in a coma until his death 7 days later (ABC News, 2015). In 2015, body camera usage was not prevalent, so there was minimal video evidence. Involved officers held that no misconduct or excessive force was used to subdue Grey, and there were no issues with the transport that would have resulted in injuries. On May 1, 2015, States attorney Marilyn Mosby stood at the city hall of Baltimore and announced criminal charges against the six police officers whom she determined were involved. Mosby, the Baltimore Police Department, and the police union were not unified, becoming a point of contention. On the day of the funeral, large-scale civil unrest overtook areas of Baltimore (den Heyer, 2020). The law enforcement response was riddled with ineffective leadership based on the public administrators' directives to take a "soft approach," directives to not arrest, not engage, and not don protective riot gear (PERF, 2015, pp. 4–5). As a result, 13 million dollars of property damage took place with minimal interaction from public officials (Sanderlin, 2022).

As public administration professionals, it is incumbent upon those in leadership positions to act when appropriate. As demonstrated, professional action or inaction can create a significant ripple effect. Public leaders, appointed or elected, by their position, have accepted the burden or are responsible for taking action. The ASPA (n.d.) code of ethics states that public service officials have the duty to "uphold the Constitution and the Law" (Code of Ethics section). In the case of Baltimore, public administration officials failed to act and uphold this solemn tenet, and the citizens of Baltimore paid the price.

## **Influence - Individual**

### ***The Rational Actor and Rational Choice***

Rational choice theories, also known as the rational actor model of decision making, purport that human behavior and actions result from individuals making conscious, logical, deliberate choices and subscribing to a “form of psychological egoism (at least in economic matters), which is the view that humans act solely out of self-interest” (Hooker, 2012, p. 1460). Scholars have explored the possibility that psychological egoism is linked to decision ethics because all decisions have consequences. A policy leader may modulate between behaviors based on the need or the current political climate, employing either the trustee or delegate model behavior. This would be consistent with the rational actor model because a policy leader must choose from the available alternatives.

The rational actor theory model does not explain or explore how individuals develop their “subjective priors, or in other words, their beliefs” or their individual preferences (Gintis, 2018, p. 97). Individuals have a “time-, state-, and social context-dependent preference function over outcomes and beliefs concerning the probability that particular actions lead to particular outcomes” (Gintis, 2018, p. 96). The decision maker places significance on the result of the decision based on their value system. Intrinsic morals, character virtues, personal reputation, or social values all have external influences on a decision maker. However, as a decision maker individually, professionally, or spiritually matures, the rational actor modifies their values and beliefs. Therefore, the previous point that asks whether decisions are tied to ethics must also contend that what a decision maker once valued or considered ethical may change.

The impact of the rational actor model on leaders reemphasizes the value of continual leader-follower communication. An astute leader would perhaps pragmatically return to two

artistic forms of persuasion: logos and pathos. Because of ever-evolving follower values, leaders must modulate their form of persuasion. The appeal of rationality and logic (logos) can sometimes decide follower engagement. Alternatively, there may be times when the strict appeal to the follower or group emotions (pathos) may be the only path to continual engagement. Historically, without significant media coverage, pivoting the approach or appeal would have been complex; however, with social media's popularity, the distribution of new messages has become much more manageable.

### ***Social Media Impact***

According to the world's third largest software developer, SAP AG, from the beginning of time until 2003, humans produced 5 billion gigabytes (5 exabytes) of data; in the year 2011, it only took 48 hr to produce that much data; in 2013, the time frame was reduced to 10 min (Glassmeyer/McNamee Center for Digital Strategies, 2013). Data is being created every second, every day. Daily, 2.5 quintillion ( $2.5 \times 10^{18}$ ) bytes of data are created, and most of the data are user-generated through multimedia platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and other forms of social media. In 2015, over 100 million photos were uploaded to Facebook per day, and 72 hr of videos were uploaded to YouTube every minute (Glassmeyer/McNamee Center for Digital Strategies, 2015).

The domination of the airwaves with political rhetoric during the 2020 election battle was all-encompassing. Major television networks, newscasters, and print media appeared to take political sides in the election battle. Consequently, candidates' supporters also drifted toward particular networks for information. Fridman et al. (2021) stated, "Research shows that media coverage plays a significant role in determining the extent to which we take these threats seriously" (p. 2). Media coverage between red-leaning or blue-leaning networks was shown to

impact how Americans viewed the COVID-19 outbreak and the credibility of the politicians (Jurkowitz & Mitchell, 2020).

Blatant bias, often called polarization, is associated with various news sources and is a well-studied phenomenon that has held scholarly interest because of the media's ability to influence collective consciousness (Hamborg et al., 2018). In 1923, Edward Bernays, referred to as the father of propaganda, stated that "while the individual newspaper reader does not give a very considerable portion of his day to this occupation, many persons find time to read more than one newspaper every day" (Bernays, 2019, Chapter 2, p. 1). Bernays emphasized that the public does not work in the field of politics or public administration; their opinion is primarily dictated by the information they consume.

Druckman (2021) stated, "The speed with which misinformation can spread is unprecedented" (p. 3). The dominance of social media and the ability to isolate news feeds created what has been termed an "echo chamber" (Pfeffer et al., 2013, p. 123). Social media consumers can choose whom to include in their groups and what information they receive, even choosing not to allow contrary opinions to be viewed in their feeds (Argyris, 2021; Karell et al., 2023). Social media allows users the ability to block out all but the most like-minded opinions, creating a wind tunnel of what may, at best, be a lack of intellectual flexibility and, at worst, a complete and total deluge of misinformation.

The echo chamber effect becomes magnified as information sources are reduced. Social media sources are not producers of knowledge or information and only repeat what has already been published. When a social media user controls the sources of their credible information, creating a "filter bubble," the damage that can occur because of sole reliance on a single data source is substantial (Pfeffer et al., 2013, p. 122). Lazer et al. (2021) explained,

Data suggests that Facebook is a major source of information regarding COVID-19, comparable with CNN or Fox News. Further, we find that those who are most reliant on Facebook for information have substantially lower vaccination rates than those who rely on other sources. (p. 4).

Using the basis of bounded rationality (Simon, 1955), it is a logical step to conclude that a rational person can only absorb so much information. Therefore, news information that is easily digested has more staying power than news that is presented in a complex manner (Yang, 2021). Using implied logic, it would stand that an individual who already has a base knowledge and belief on a subject digests data that confirm their belief system faster than contradictory information, thus creating a form of confirmation bias in the consumer. The ability of social media to pick and choose what media sources they obtain information from can create gatekeeper bias and thus reinforce the echo chamber effect.

As a tool of social media, visuals “like memes, videos, photos, posters, and emojis are processed faster, accepted without being questioned, and remembered for a longer period than text posts” (Argyris, 2021, para. 3). This can be used to the advantage of the producer of such multimedia data when images evoke emotions. The saying that “a picture is worth a thousand words” holds.

The use of social media has also created the phenomenon termed by scholars as an online firestorm, defined as “the sudden discharge of large quantities of messages obtaining negative word-of-mouth and complaint behavior against a person, company, or group in social media networks” (Pfeffer et al., 2013, p. 118). This online collective behavior is usually linked to what is perceived as moral misconduct with large volume calls for change with “intense indignation” calling for change and targeting a specific company, person, or group (Johnen et al., 2017, p.

3141). They are often termed as “social media backlash,” “collaborative brand attacks” (Johnen et al., 2017, p. 3142), a “shitstorm,” or “flaming” (Einwiller et al., 2016, p. 1179). Another approach is labeled “canceling”; there is a large-scale disassociation from a specific target of ire who has offended social media consumers (Velasco, 2020, p. 6). The sudden backlash that hits at the nerve of normative societal fears signaling that behaviors are being pushed past the comfort zone of many, or the sudden widespread call for moral indignation because of a focusing event and perceived violation of societal normative behavior would be historically termed a MP (S. Cohen, 2011a; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009).

With the prominence of social media, there is a noted decline in the impact of the traditional media gatekeepers and an elevation of “users with elite status” on social media platforms (Karell et al., 2023, p. 323). A recent example of situations in which narratives released via social media have been “robustly associated with protest participation” would be the January 6, 2021 March to Save America also commonly referred to as the 2021 Capital Riots (Van Dijcke & Wright, 2021). Research has shown that participants used Parlor’s social media platform to organize protests to “halt the official certification of the 2020 U.S. presidential election,” using unvalidated narratives of organized election fraud (Van Dijcke & Wright, 2021, p. 3). Social media posts identified “particular enemies and posited ideal scenarios,” building on like-minded animosity and creating an urgency of action (Munn, 2021, para. 4), all categorical indicators of MP (S. Cohen, 2011a). The shift in media dynamics, particularly the rise of social media and the diminished influence of traditional gatekeepers, sets the stage for an exploration of the concept of MP.

## Moving Forward

Using the dominant theories of PET, elite theory bolsters the explanatory power of MP theory. This study examined the implications of MP on public policy within public administration using law enforcement as a model, drawing a clear connection from a focusing event to MP, which prompts the power elite to take notice and subsequently act. An amalgamation of elite theory, PET, and MP theory served as a strong foundation for this study. It is expected that MP will have a significant impact on public administration policy in the subfield of law enforcement. However, it is crucial to critically explore other factors that may also play a substantial role in public policy implementation even if they have not been explicitly addressed in previous theories. The following sections delve deeper into a comparative analysis of development and implementation scholarship.

This study explored how policies are developed and implemented; therefore, it is highly relevant to understand the actor motivation for implementation. Buseti and Dente (2016) recognized that policies are often developed through a group effort. The literature identified six broad mechanism-based categories: actor certification, blame avoidance, brownie points, repeated interactions, focusing events, and attribution or threat. Using such categories, the authors contended that by finding what triggers implementation support for specific policies, designers may focus on the mechanisms to implement policies successfully. Maor (2021) contended that policy responses may be intentionally undertaken when political executives are vulnerable to voters. Often, in national security or criminal justice, politicians produce intentional overreactions with the need to show aggressive stances (Maor, 2012). The process of translating policies “into action is often a political one subject to a variety of pressures from a variety of political actors in the system” (Canon & Johnson, 1998, p. 3). In the next section

regarding rent seeking, the dynamics of policy translation into action persist as a central theme, navigating the complex interplay of actors and pressures within the political system.

### **Rent Seeking**

The concept of rent seeking, brought forward by economist Gordon Tullock (1967) and labeled by Krueger (1974), occurs when people from either side of the political coin (politicians or constituents) seek rent by trying to obtain benefits through the political arena. Initially solely examined in the economic realm, rent seeking has also carried over into the public administration field. Under this context, rent seeking can be viewed as a bidirectional relationship between votes and promises (or policies; Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; Choi & Storr, 2018).

There are levels of rent-seeking behaviors ranging from political promises to corruption, such as bribery and graft. Bombardini and Trebbi (2011) found a direct relationship between the political influence of elected officials and the number of funding contributions they receive from special interest groups. Influence peddling such as this is common and accepted in modern government circles. This study did not include rent-seeking that is against the law and deemed corrupt but more in the Machiavellian vein of thought; the only genuine concern is the acquisition and maintenance of power.

Examining the behavior of public officials uncovers a tendency for individuals whose careers are subject to public opinion to seize opportunities to showcase their competence and demonstrate their value, aiming to secure their current positions or even attain higher-status roles (Grubbs et al., 2019). This behavior occurs when individuals seek something valuable, such as votes, programs, or support, by allocating favor or disfavor and is a form of rent-seeking (Mitchell, 2018). Using the concept of moral grandstanding, Grubbs et al. (2019) contended that such actions are primarily done to improve one's professional status or social standing. This is



supported by the findings that prestige and dominance are common strategies for gaining social rank, but only prestige has a lasting effect (McClanahan et al., 2021). In one study, prestige-motivated grandstanding was positively linked to political polarization (Grubbs et al., 2020). Another form of grandstanding comes in the form of populism or seeking dominance using fear and intimidation tactics and speech, which is becoming even more popular in the political arena (Petersen et al., 2021).

An alternate form of rent seeking comes in the form of value of access (Ray, 2018). In this form, rent-seeking lobbyists or other interested groups provide something of value to elected officials or policy decision makers. In return, the policy executive provides time or attention to the interests of the groups. Worthy of consideration, the procured rent may be in the form of direct contributions to a politician's election campaign or influence in voter sway. Examples include lobby groups or large corporations seeking concessions to move into certain political jurisdictions.

Rent seeking is also a function of ideological leanings whereby a Bayesian value system can influence the support of policy outcomes (Congleton, 1991; Congleton et al., 2009). Therefore, "ideology and ideological conviction affect the conclusions ... that voters draw from political messages" (Congleton, 1991, p. 68). The act of rent seeking from the policy executive can also be termed grandstanding or status-seeking. This tactic is when political elites or other individuals who have risen to prominence can reaffirm their social ranking (dominance or prestige) by letting others know through demonstrations of their successes (McClanahan et al., 2021). In doing so, they demonstrate to others what they already have done or will be able to do for them (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009). Dominant groups work to generate and maintain support for their claims of authority, reaffirming that the public is interactive in rent-seeking.

There seems to be a common thread in synthesizing actor motivations from the sources listed above: political point making is a significant driver under this policy development style. The rent seeking behaviors and political grandstanding for professional gain are significant factors in policy development, begging further inquiry as to whether the policy is the answer to a real problem or a publicity stunt for a manufactured problem and spotlighted for the policymaker's benefit. However, a common weakness among these sources lies in projecting actors' true motivations because determining their genuine intentions can present significant challenges.

### **Actor Motivation/Actor Certification**

There are numerous challenges associated with policy actions; however, one major challenge is understanding what motivates the authority to take policy actions. PET and MP provide insight on a superficial basis as far as external motivation but not from a personal motivation level. Lundin and Öberg, P. (2013) completed a quantitative study using original data from local politics in Sweden, empirically analyzing how much weight public administrators put into expert analysis when preparing policy advice and politicians when deliberating policies. Results showed that politicians' reliance on expert advice is directly proportional to public attention whereas administrators rely on expert advice to a greater extent as the political pushback increases. The study broke down expert input into expert knowledge (systematically collected data) and expert opinion, creating a variance in defensibility. Findings confirmed previous knowledge showing an inverse relationship between expert advice usage and politicians as party disputes increase (Weible et al., 2010).

Whereas the use of expert advice may vary across applications and particular issues, So (2018) conducted a study in the United Kingdom, using game theory to empirically show the

tendencies of politicians to drastically change policy positions to appease or energize a voter base. Using regression analysis, the author showed that policy switching for party leadership benefit is common when votes are lacking, showing a much higher probability of drastic policy switches after losing a ruling majority. These findings sit contrary to the findings from Calvo and Hellwig (2010) that contend such policy swings are part of “party strategies ... due to party system effect” (p. 40) and not as a means to energize voters.

An empirical test developed by Soroka and Wlezien (2018) showed a thermostatic response tracking communication across popular media platforms. The study linked positive/negative media coverage and policy responsiveness, reinforcing the fact that politicians and policymakers use rent-seeking behavior to maximize personal benefit (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; So, 2018).

Daugbjerg and McConnell (2021) combined concepts of rent-seeking behaviors and purposeful policy formation as a means to disproportionately impact the targets of policies. They contended that forms of disproportionality can present as intentional or nonintentional. Intentional disproportionality refers to situations in which the policymaker deliberately overreacted or underreacted when addressing a situation and found that politicians have weaponized such events to influence public opinion or damage opposing parties. This is consistent with the findings that political survival requires such behaviors as rent seeking and vote maximizing, which can be accomplished through policy over- or underreaction (Chamlee-Wright & Storr, 2009; Daugbjerg & McConnell, 2021; Maor, 2012; 2014; So, 2018).

As an aside, the impact of some policies or implementation efforts creates nonintentional second-order consequences but is directly a result of specific policy actions. Howard (2007) discussed the law of unintended consequences as part of a much larger conversation. In this

discussion, the point was made that ineffective policy was not the same as unintended consequences. Consequences in this context result from intentional action or intentional inaction. Howard used the example of introducing kudzu as a means of erosion control in 1920, which years later resulted in millions of dollars of damage in southern states as an unintended consequence. As a current example, in 2019, New York lawmakers passed legislation eliminating cash bail for most misdemeanors and nonviolent felony charges. As a direct result, many arrested criminals were precluded from being required to pay a bond and instead, as soon as they were booked in jail, they were released on promises to be on good behavior and to appear in court. As a possible second-order consequence, 93% of New Yorkers indicated they felt that crime is a serious problem (Siena Research Institute, 2023) because New York City has seen a 41.5% increase in major crime statistics since January 2021 (New York Police Department CompStat Unit, 2023).

### **Groupthink Policy/Brownie Points, Repeated Interactions**

The interoperability of the current government model in the United States presents a challenging dynamic in policymaking and implementation. Rarely is a single entity involved in implementing public programs or policies (B. Peters, 2014). Instead, numerous entities are involved in implementing the new governance push, public-private partnerships, and overlapping affiliated government agencies. Using a literature review, B. Peters (2014) contended that policies no longer encompass only one program thread, but multiple threads attached to multiple same-level agencies that count on each other for success. Hence, the recurrent engagements in give-and-take negotiations foster political logrolling, affirming the maintenance of positive relations and ensuring sustained cooperation among agencies (Buseti & Dente, 2016; Thrasher, 2015).

Czapiewski (2013) researched the advocacy coalition framework (ACF), building from the intellectual foundations that Weible and Sabatier (2018) and Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1994) created in the early 1980s as a synthesis of top-down and bottom-up implementation. Czapiewski added to the discussion, explaining that in the ACF, the function of beliefs within the political system is highly relevant and leads to political change. Policymakers' individual political beliefs are the leading cause of political behaviors. The literature showed that deep core and policy core beliefs are the primary components of ACF. Individuals with homogeneous beliefs create a unified pull for the issue, contending that change is driven by groups of people, not organizations (Weible & Sabatier, 2018).

Literature has stated that policy formation and decision making are independent stages. Howlett et al. (2014) suggested combining aspects of the "policy stage/cycle" and "multiple stream processes" to create a more robust model (p. 430). Diving deeply into multiple stream processes, examining three, four, and five-stream models, Howlett et al. contended that the traditional three-stream approach developed by Kingdon (2002) lacked explanatory power in the policy process. Compared to the traditional three streams agenda-setting model in which each stream was considered independent, the five-stream approach has greater explanatory power by considering political influences and steering whereby each stream has multiple convergences or coupling (Howlett, 2018; Kingdon, 2002). This model embraces the concept that multiple actors and threads of influence combine in modern governance's interoperability, as Busetti and Dente espoused (2016). Analyzing these sources, an issue that immediately comes to light is another term for groupthink, mob mentality. When multiple actors or homogenous groups combine, synergistic energy drives the group toward the perceived goals. Social identity theory shows that in groupthink scenarios, there is a hesitation to speak up counter to the group for fear of being

ostracized; if one counts on repeated interactions, this could become magnified (Hogg, 2016). Another aspect specifically affecting the policy elite is legislative log-rolling. In log-rolling events, one elite supports the initiative of other politicians in exchange for a return vote for something of interest to them. In a quid pro quo vote, politicians trade on issues of little impact to the politician in support for votes on issues of greater relevance later (Thrasher, 2015).

By exploring the complex motivations of actors, this analysis highlighted the multifaceted nature of policy development and the potential influence of rent-seeking behaviors, grandstanding, and mob mentality; demonstrating the need for further investigation into whether policies are genuinely rooted in addressing real problems or whether they serve as strategic positioning to boost the profile of policymakers. Recognizing the limitations in uncovering actors' true motivations presents inherent barriers to fully understand the underlying drivers behind policy development. Consideration for how such groupthink may affect sound judgment was never even mentioned in previous articles. Without a balancing opinion, there is a greater possibility that judgment mistakes will happen; a bad idea is still bad regardless of how many people agree with it.

### **Dominant Themes in Policy Development and Implementation**

The previous section of this study synthesized scholarly literature covering the social causes of public policy development and implementation, followed by a discussion about the internal or peer-related motivation for political elites to move policies forward. The following section synthesizes the literature on how policy development and implementation are moved forward. This is specifically relevant to this research because once developed, the interpretation and enforcement of such policies fall within the scope of law enforcement. Snap judgments, political rent seeking, MP, or personal interests can create policy under- or overreactions with

second-order consequences that have not been fully explored before development, as may be the case in actions such as policies that defund the police or dictate police UOF reform.

### **Causal Chain**

Finding a common thread in successful policy development and implementation, Capano and Howlett (2019) used a qualitative study to argue that following a causal-mechanistic chain of reasoning and planning can improve policymaking and implementation. They held that many policy designs have been developed with poorly conceived instrumentation “based on weak causation or a ‘heuristic’ framework,” resulting in avoidable policy failures (p. 142). Using a forward-looking cause-effect framework, a deep understanding of the policy targets and how the policy will encourage changes in behavior significantly improves policy development and implementation. This concept was also supported by van der Heijden et al. (2019) who studied how a causal-mechanistic chain was used and applied in conjunction with other dominant development theories on policy development and implementation success.

The scope of Capuno and Howlett’s (2019) research underscored correlation rather than causation. Although relationships can be identified, this study refrained from asserting direct causality and acknowledged that observed associations do not necessarily imply a causal link. Whereas policy development and implementation face challenges, when poorly conceived, there may be instances in which such policies still achieve intended outcomes. The study adhered to rigorous academic standards by maintaining this distinction, emphasizing the importance of cautious interpretation and avoiding unwarranted conclusions.

### **Policy Implementation**

President Andrew Jackson, angry with the Supreme Court, lamented that Head Justice “John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it” (Longaker, 1956, p. 341).

Highlighting the struggles that once developed, under any dominant framework, the policy must be interpreted and put into action. Themes, theories, and implementation models run the spectrum from those that are highly detailed and mapped out to those that leave the implementation up to the interpretation of bureaucrats. Scholars in the implementation field, McCubbins and Schwartz (1984), likened the different approaches to the difference between police patrols and fire alarms. One approach (fire alarm) is laser-focused and directed, and the other (police patrol) is a general approach, leaving the implementation to others (West, 2016). The proposition of the fire alarm/police patrol dichotomy presents a compelling framework to emphasize both implementation's advantageous and detrimental outcomes. Kingdom (1990) viewed implementation as the key concept in public administration. An essential part of government contends that it carries ethical requirements and a responsibility to safeguard democratic principles, social justice, and equality. Moreover, it is grounded in the separation of powers espoused by Woodrow Wilson (1887) as the politics-administration dichotomy.

Howlett et al. (2015) contended that independent frameworks apply only to particular cases. There has yet to be one generalizable framework across most implementation cases, which are often only variations on a theme and have created a proclivity for an after-the-fact explanation of implementation. Using a follow-up study, Howlett (2018) held that using policy process theory and adjusting standard processes creates an amalgamated explanation that better fits into implementation activities. However, such a stance conflicts with other implementation leaders who noted two specific generations of implementation, contending that such earlier research was sloppy and incomplete with dualities and tensions between not only applicable theories but also in the generations of research sounding the call for a more robust scientific approach (Hupe & Saetren, 2015; van der Heijden & Kuhlmann, 2018). Nevertheless, the



scientific approach should not become so focused on either policy formation or policy implementation that the other suffers; both policy formation and implementation should be viewed as complementary categories of the same issue (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

### **Principal–Agent (Street Level)**

The lowest level of implementation is at the street level. In a highly influential article that evaluated the impact of managers, supervisors, coworkers, and politicians on the implementation by street-level staff, May and Winter (2007) identified the common phenomenon of a breakdown between policy vision and the policy as implemented. Using a primary source study, the extent and source of divergence from stated policies, they held that there are well-known breakdowns or disconnects between higher-level goals when translated to lower-level implementation. The study showed that the impact of local politics and the behavior of the local politician have a more significant influence on implementation than the behaviors of the federal politicians. If the local political figures supported divergence, the street level was more likely to act contrary to national policy. Direct manager influence was only weakly correlated with divergence. This is consistent with Davidovitz and Cohen (2021a, 2021b), whose studies found that political involvement impacts street-level policy implementation, creating social equity issues because one party usually benefits at the expense of another.

Contrary to the principal-agent approach mentioned, Verschuere (2009) found that instead of individual politician impact, there may be a more significant influence based on the agency and its specific task; the research recommended that “ongoing interaction, reciprocal input, and mutual deference between elected officials and administrators” (p. 37) indicate that the political influence is being applied at the agency level as opposed to the street level. However, it is still politically influential and relevant in an implementation continuum.

Although each of the researchers mentioned evaluated the impact of principles on agents' behavior in implementation, Lipsky (1969) moved forward with the theory that the street-level bureaucrat (SLB) was vital to policy implementation. The SLB is defined as "the men and women who, in their face-to-face encounters with citizens, represent the government to the people," such as police, teachers, and lower-level judges (Lipsky, 1969, p. 1). At this level of implementation, such agents are rarely a part of the planning process; therefore, SLBs are often faced with interpretative tasks that require significant discretion on how policy is implemented.

When too much policy change happens at once, referred to as "policy layering" (Hacker, 2004, p. 245) or "policy accumulation" (Adam et al., 2019, p. 2), in response to external stimuli, the possibility of organizational overload becomes more likely (Adam et al., 2016; Knill et al., 2023). Scholars contended that employees are less likely to comply with the rules when faced with rapid rule growth, contradictory policies, and directives that are overly complex or do not make sense (McLaughlin, 2018).

When using public service motivation (Perry, 2000) as an anchor point, when the frustration of changing rules and policies reaches certain levels, SLBs may disengage to the detriment of their communities. Such disengagement may result from the perception of lack of support, expectation uncertainty, fear of liability, or as a means of protest. As held by Gilson (2015), SLBs operate in the "space between legal rules" or definitive directives (p. 387). As the closest level of government to the public, SLBs significantly influence how the final policy is implemented and how it appears to the consumer.

### **Behavioral Motivation**

As a new avenue of development and implementation scholarship, some researchers have looked into the behavioral motivators behind policy design and compliance. Leong and Howlett

(2020) contended that the previous way of evaluating design and compliance has traditionally been viewed through a utilitarian lens. The new behavioral motivation research urged policymakers to find what motivates compliance positively, showing that greater levels of compliance can be positively correlated to policy designs that integrate the core beliefs and norms of the target audience. In a study evaluating the cause and effect of SLBs, citizen interactions, and perception of fair treatment, de Boer (2020) found that compliance is often a matter of sociable trust in both the motives and legality of the actions. Policies seen as overaggressive or unbalanced essentially create pushback and noncompliant behaviors, thus circling back to the core beliefs and norms of the target audience.

### **Policy Success/Failure Measurements**

Using the stages model of the policy process, in which implementation occurs at the end of the process, Hupe and Hill (2015) moved forward with the concept that some view implementation as less critical, therefore overlooking the dimensions of politics, ambiguity, and conflict. The authors contended that such a top-down approach creates the impression that formation is more important than implementation. They found that development and implementation should be explored as interrelated items, and the outside actor influences on implementation are highly relevant if policies are seen as a success or failure.

Groome (2021) discussed policy failure avoidance methods at one point, implying that politicians often resort to “paying lip service” to popular agendas (p. 43). Using a political rent-seeking approach, unbalanced policy solutions tend to pursue narrow agendas based on political loyalties. However, lack of political consensus and ambiguous procedural directives are often confused with other forms of failure. At each level of policy implementation, there are macro decisions that, if not explicitly defined, can add up to failures. Groome found that there must be

clear implementation directives to increase policy success in a traditional top-down policy process. According to Canon and Johnson (1998), “The actual impact of the policy is rarely what its makers intended” (62). A finding consistent with Begley et al. (2018) posited that the success or failure of a policy should be viewed through the intentions of the policymakers via three criteria: aims (goals), targets (specific outcomes), and processes (intended mechanisms). Even though policies rarely have complete successes or failures, there are ways of measuring and analyzing success or failure.

### **Summary**

The literature review centered on this study’s three foundational theoretical frameworks. MP, PET, and elite theory were the significant drivers of this study. The proverbial invisible hand in policy development has a weighty influence on how public policy affects public administration. Although existing theories expose the mechanisms behind policy formulation, this chapter highlighted the intricate dynamics that come into play while translating policies into practice, emphasizing that policies do not materialize in isolation but are subject to influences and frictions throughout the implementation process. Moreover, it suggested that directives or actions from policy executives exert significant influence on implementation dynamics, underscoring the importance of understanding these factors in comprehensively analyzing policy outcomes.

Bernays wrote at the beginning of the 20th century, “No idea or opinion is an isolated factor. It is surrounded and influenced by precedent, authority, habit and all the other human motivations” (Bernays, 2019, Chapter 4, p. 5). Some human factors referenced could be categorized as self-promotion, the self-preservation of politicians, or the enforcement of perceived social normative values. The underlying current of scholarship for this study asked,

what happens when the historic enforcer of normative behavior becomes the collective foci of contention? This study develops importance by examining the impact of such contention and the movement for policy actions. Political face-saving behaviors and elite steering of MP create a folk devil out of compliance tools.

Using MP to understand the political and public behaviors associated with the punctuations, some significant tie-ins and challenges should be explored. Using the criteria explored by S. Cohen (1969) as well as Goode and Ben Yahuda (2009, 2013), the events that have evolved since the death of Michal Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, appear to fit well into the category of MP. Contrary to Hupe and Saetren (2015), who contended that development and implementation are linear processes, Canon and Johnson (1998) held that policy development and implementation are messy and influenced by numerous outside forces and social processes. This study argued that MP is supported by elite theory and PET. Using this amalgamation of theories significantly explains public and political actions that influence law enforcement, such as defunding the police and police UOF reform.

The previous narrative has covered a broad spectrum of policy development and implementation concepts and how such development and implementation are measured. As derived from the review, numerous competing frameworks and theories exist about what drives good policy and how to achieve the best means of implementation. However, in the policy development area, the critical theme repeated is that politicians or policy developers frequently have alternate agendas. Such rent seeking may be through political grandstanding for the media, rewarding party or individual loyalty, or through policy steering and logrolling. A golden thread that runs through each development framework reviewed is that there is a process for developing

policies. Understanding exactly what the process is, is highly dependent on one's perspective or chosen development faction.

Chapter Three includes a detailed discussion of this study's method and data collection. The thematic variables captured center on the case studies. Comparing these variables, I showed a linear relationship between MP and ineffective policy. It was my theory that as the indicators of policy change because of MP increase in strength, indicators of policy effectiveness such as reduced crime rate, reduction in complaints, reduction in reportable UOF incidents, reduction of injuries, and consistent arrest statistics become evident, thus indicating a negative relationship between MP and the impact on law enforcement. If the opposite proved true, and the variables increase or decrease proportionally, the indication would be that MP, at least in these cases, correlates with public policy in law enforcement positively.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

Narrowing down and explicitly defining the purpose of a research study is of primary importance in academia and scholarly research (G. King et al., 1994). This study uniquely explored MP's implications on public administration policy, specifically focusing on law enforcement as a model. This line of inquiry allowed for a comprehensive examination of public administration, considering that law enforcement agencies represent a highly visible layer within the hierarchical authority of the state bureaucracy. In this study, the profession of law enforcement is synonymous with "the management of public affairs or the implementation of public policies" (Shafritz et al., 2017, p. 6). Law enforcement administrators and other public administrators must balance internally and externally oriented administrative activities bracketed by constraints of new policies, constitutional guarantees, and legal precedence to influence positive outcomes that fall squarely into the public administration category. The law enforcement officer is frequently the control agent designated by policies to carry out the executive branch's will, becoming the public face of populism politics. As SLBs, the law enforcement officer is often the early litmus test of the success or failure of public policies (Bardach, 1977; Lipsky, 1969).

MP theory encompasses emergent events regarding a group, a person, or a condition perceived to threaten normative societal values (S. Cohen, 2011a). Research is needed to highlight the connection between the chaos associated with MP that drives public perceptions, thus policy agendas, and the subsequent implementation of public policies within law enforcement. This study aimed to address this gap in the existing literature. The following sections outline the study's design and methodology.

## Design

This study used a qualitative research approach based on the principles of grounded theory and process tracing methodology. Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is a systematic and iterative method of inquiry that seeks to generate theories supported by empirical data. By immersing in the data and allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically, grounded theory enables researchers to uncover more profound insights into complex social phenomena such as MP (Collier, 2011; Creswell, 2015). According to Collier (2011), “Process tracing is an analytic tool for drawing descriptive and causal inferences from diagnostic pieces of evidence” (p. 824). Although stopping short of causation, process tracing was used to focus on tracing the correlations between the theory of MP and the changes in agency practices. The study aimed to provide valuable insights into the implications of MP on public administration policy within the subfield of law enforcement.

Using the deductive process tracing method, this research systematically examined data to trace the correlations between MP theory and the changes observed in law enforcement agency practices. Using process tracing, the goal was to establish a plausible causal link or at least a strong correlation between MP regarding law enforcement, the subsequent changes in UOF policies, and agency funding. The core of this process tracing was qualitative based on data distilled from surveys, interviews, and document analysis; however, incorporating quantitative observations of crime rates and mean agency staffing vacancy to serve as counterfactuals allows for testing whether the findings make sense based on the data. This aligns with the essential aspect of process tracing, which involves using empirical testing to affirm or disprove causal inferences.



The core of process tracing is often qualitative; however, quantitative observations have frequently been used to support findings or act as counterfactuals, as evident in Brady's (2010) study on elections and voting in which he challenged studies based on whether the results make sense. Brady critically evaluated a previous study about the impact of the media on the 2000 election in Florida, concluding that the results reported by researcher John Lott (2005) claiming that 10,000 votes were not cast because of media reporting results early, could not have been valid because the results did not make sense based on the question. Brady's study demonstrates an essential aspect of process tracing, the use of counterfactuals or plausible alternatives (G. King et al., 1994). Using empirical testing built by Van Evera (1997) and moved forward by Bennett (2010), researchers can either affirm or disprove causal inference. Therefore, the primary research question asked how MP affects public policy implemented in law enforcement, and process tracing may have the most significant explanatory power either by proving or disproving the effect.

Epistemologically, this study was grounded in a pragmatic perspective, emphasizing the importance of practical outcomes and actionable insights from empirical research. Pragmatism acknowledges the contingent and context-dependent nature of knowledge, recognizing that truth claims are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they arise. One of the significant strengths of this design is the ability to triangulate data, increasing the validity of the findings (Denscombe, 2010). Another strength is that qualitative data adds a richness of explanation to research, "putting the meat on the bones" (Bryman, 2006, p. 106). Therefore, by adopting a pragmatic epistemology, this study bridges the gap between theory and practice, offering empirically informed recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars in the field of law enforcement.

Using the two case studies as foundations, it was anticipated that research would show support for or find plausible alternatives to support the theory of MP. This research aimed to supplement correlational inference using empirical testing built by Van Evera (1997) and moved forward by Bennett (2010). Therefore, the primary research question asked how MP affects public policy implemented in law enforcement; process tracing has the most significant explanatory power either by proving or disproving the effect. In looking at the primary question, some subresearch questions must be answered before answering the main research question.

### **Case Studies**

Employing a collective case study methodology, this research comprehensively explored the impacts of two pivotal instances of policy change in law enforcement, the Defund the Police movement and the concerted efforts to reform police UOF practices driven by political pressures. Rooted in a grounded design, the study began with a rigorous qualitative data collection and analysis phase. This foundational exploration sets the stage for a subsequent phase incorporating qualitative and spatial data collection and analysis methodologies. Prioritizing qualitative inquiry, enriched by integrating spatial data, the research examined the multifaceted impact of MP thoroughly. Established by a grounded methodological framework, such an approach underscores the commitment to nuanced exploration and interpretation, essential for understanding the complexities inherent in the studied phenomena (Creswell, 2015; Robson & McCartan, 2016).

### ***Defund the Police***

The Defund the Police movement, although over a century old, came to the attention of the masses after the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in May, 2020 (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022). There are varying views and contentions about what precisely this movement seeks;

some believe that all law enforcement should be abolished, building an entirely new system, and others take a less aggressive approach, seeking to reallocate funds and responsibilities to social programs (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022; Cummins, 2022; Jacobs et al., 2020). In response to public pressures to defund, some major cities, such as Los Angeles and New York, have cut reallocated funding from their police departments by \$150 million and \$1 billion, respectively (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022; Holder et al., 2020).

Qualitative data obtained in the survey phase was used to make a before-and-after empirical comparison using the change in funding and changes in violent crime statistics as variables of interest. The final part of the design encompassed a critical analysis of localities that have defunded the police to determine what new policies or practices were implemented and the effect on the violent crime rate. In this instance, collecting and triangulating data from the questionnaires, causal analysis, and crime statistics helped pinpoint the impact of MP on public administration policy within the subfield of law enforcement through a theory construction process.

### ***Police UOF Reform***

The police reform movement in the United States has placed a strong emphasis on addressing issues concerning the UOF by law enforcement, particularly the application of force against minority communities (Boudreau et al., 2022). The movement has pushed for updates to the legal frameworks governing police UOF, including banning certain practices like chokeholds and no-knock warrants and increased transparency in record keeping (Garrett & Slobogin, 2020; Shane, 2016). Moreover, this movement has advocated for a range of reforms aimed at reining in the UOF by police officers. Policy proposals have included lowering the criminal intent standard required to prosecute officers for UOF incidents as well as limiting or abolishing the doctrine of

qualified immunity, which shields officers from civil liability in circumstances not clearly defined by statute or legal precedence (Garrett & Slobogin, 2020). Furthermore, proponents of this initiative have sought to grant greater investigative powers to the U.S. Department of Justice, giving it greater oversight of police misconduct and brutality (Boudreau et al., 2022; Garrett & Slobogin, 2020). Advocates have argued that comprehensive legislative action is needed to drive meaningful, nationwide reform of police UOF practices (Goldsmith, 2005).

In this case study, survey and interview data were used to establish whether the participating agency has changed its UOF policy and if so, why it changed. Collecting use-of-force statistics to include any reported officer or suspect injuries are considered variables of interest in a before-after empirical comparison. In this instance, the collection and triangulation of data from the questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis helped pinpoint the impact of MP on public administration policy with law enforcement through a theory construction process.

### **Research Questions**

Central Question: How does the theory of MP influence the evolution of public policy within the subfield of law enforcement administration?

Subquestion 1: To what extent might empirical evidence from 2014-2023 support the presence of elements contributing to MP?

Subquestion 2: What discernible patterns characterize the adaptation of policies and procedures by law enforcement agencies in response to recommendations from authoritative bodies such as PERF, NYU Policing Projects, and legislative bodies?

Subquestion 3: Through an in-depth analysis of specific events, what defining characteristics and impacts may be elucidated regarding the revisions made to UOF policies within law enforcement agencies?

Subquestion 4: What are the emerging trends and varied perspectives regarding the influence of the Defund the Police movement on budgetary allocations and strategic priorities within law enforcement agencies?

Subquestion 5: To what extent may high-ranking policy influencers create cascading effects on law enforcement administration policies and practices?

### **Setting**

The primary setting for this study was an open-ended, self-administered survey to collect data from specific law enforcement agencies to determine whether they have been subject to defunding or elements of the use of force reform (Kelley et al., 2003). Follow-up (secondary) postsurvey interviews were conducted through phone or video conference to clarify information (Dillman et al., 2014).

Online surveys offered several advantages over traditional survey methods, making them a compelling choice for this research. First, they allowed faster data collection than paper-based or telephone surveys. Second, online surveys increased access to diverse and geographically dispersed populations. Therefore, online surveys allowed access to larger and more diverse sample populations cost-effectively, flexibly, and expediently (Braun et al., 2020; G. King et al., 1994; Wright, 2006). Online surveys allowed a combination of open and closed questions, adding a depth of data for collection. Additionally, because the question potentially asked professionally sensitive information, the anonymity offered through online surveys allowed a better disclosure of data without placing the survey participant in a compromising position professionally (Braun et al., 2020; Denscombe, 2006). Surveys have notable disadvantages; primarily, the responses are based on the knowledge or memory of the respondent and may be subject to response bias or lack of response (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

Postsurvey interviews were chosen over other interview choices because they can enhance data quality and allow for clarification of responses. Follow-up interviews can establish rapport and encourage more open and candid responses from participants (Oltmann, 2016). Research has found that postsurvey interviews can help mitigate noncommittal answers, enhancing data reliability and providing a deeper depth of data (Dillman et al., 2014; Schonlau & Toepoel, 2015). After completing the surveys, participants were invited to brief interviews; however, only five agencies consented to participate in the subsequent interview phase. The limited response rate to postsurvey interviews may be attributed to apprehension stemming from the sensitive nature of the research topic. Participants may have perceived interviews as compromising their anonymity, thus impacting their willingness to engage further.

Additionally, within politically sensitive environments such as law enforcement, executives' professional prospects, including budget allocations, promotions, and job security, often hinge on local political dynamics. Consequently, participating in recorded interviews may have been perceived as professionally risky. Furthermore, logistical challenges emerged because only 15 direct contacts were available among the 21 agencies that completed the online survey. The remaining six agencies completed the survey after the invitation was sent to a general agency contact email, so there was not an individual to contact for follow up, underscoring the multifaceted barriers to soliciting participant engagement in politically charged and organizationally sensitive contexts.

### **Participants**

The sample of law enforcement agencies was selected from the Major Cities Chief Association (MCCA) U.S. membership list. This professional association has vetted the member agencies to ensure that they are primary law enforcement in their jurisdiction, with enough

resources to have large staffing demographics (in most cases over 1,000) as well as serve a residential population of 1.5 million or greater (MCCA, 2020).

The MCCA is a prominent advocate for major metropolitan police departments in the United States, representing law enforcement leaders in large urban areas. Collaborating with Congress and law enforcement officials, the MCCA aims to shape policies and legislation to enhance public safety, provide resources, and drive reforms. According to the MCCA website, a central mission is to ensure adequate funding and resources for state and local police departments to protect their communities effectively (MCCA, n.d.-a). Through lobbying efforts in Congress, the MCCA seeks increased appropriations for grant programs supporting officer training, equipment procurement, and wellness initiatives (MCCA, n.d.-b).

Gun violence and violent crime are legislative focal points for the MCCA, which employs comprehensive reports and data analysis to highlight trends and advocate for legislative solutions such as the Gun Violence Prevention and Safe Communities Act (MCCA, n.d.-a). The MCCA offers guidance and best practices to law enforcement agencies on strategies for reducing violent crime, such as the *Violent Crime Reduction Operations Guide* (Flynn & Silletti, 2018). The MCCA collaborates with law enforcement leaders to promote police reforms, providing expert testimony and recommendations to U.S. Congress on proposed reforms, including issues like qualified immunity and facial recognition technology. Furthermore, recognizing the persistent threat of terrorism, the MCCA actively shapes legislation related to counterterrorism programs and initiatives. Through its advocacy and expertise, the MCCA has emerged as an influential voice in the legislative process (118th Congress -House of Representatives, 2023), providing data-driven insights and practical recommendations to policymakers striving to craft effective laws ensuring community safety.

In addition to the MCCAs prominent position in policy formation, the MCCA was chosen because its membership comprises police chiefs of major metropolitan agencies. Police chiefs are key decision makers and policy influencers within their agencies. As public administrators, they have a perspective and experience that provides insights into the factors shaping policies, practices, and priorities (Wolf, 1977). Chiefs have a broad strategic view of their agencies' operations, challenges, and future direction (Blair, 2024). By targeting police chiefs as participants, research studies gain critical insights into the leadership perspectives, organizational dynamics, and real-world contexts that shape policing policies and practices. Their involvement increases the relevance, applicability, and potential impact of research findings within law enforcement agencies.

Agencies of such immense size usually have comparable command and control structures, including public relations, media relations, policy, and research divisions, which are receptive to applicable research. Furthermore, to reduce liability, many large agencies voluntarily engage in state or national accreditations that mandate policies, practices, and reporting that align with best practices in law enforcement (Abner et al., 2023). Therefore, participating agencies would have similar policies and reporting procedures, enabling an effective and efficient comparison (Teodoro & Hughes, 2012).

The large agency size and highly diverse residential populations ensure a heterogeneous sample for the diversity of public and professional points of view. Finally, the like agency size and sizeable residential population reduce the skewing of crime rates. Whereas the "effective strength of law enforcement agencies" impacts crime rates (Nolan, 2004, p. 547), this sample minimizes this because studied jurisdictions have comparable agency staffing. Crime rates are calculated by the number of reported crimes divided by the population, then multiplied by



100,000. If jurisdictions with significantly fewer residential populations were used, a reported crime would have a higher statistical impact than a jurisdiction with a higher population. This sample reduces that possibility because of similar population statistics.

The added benefits of choosing this membership list are that the size of the agencies and associated service responsibilities are compatible. Therefore, the available data were ripe for a mixed-mode survey design, as discussed by Dillman et al. (2014), who suggested collecting the most responses in the most efficient manner possible before moving to a more resource-dependent mode (p. 13). The membership population of the MCCA as of March, 2023 included 79 agencies across the United States and Canada. The 11 MCCA members from Canada were excluded because of possible variances between the regulatory and legal systems of the United States and Canada, leaving a census of 68 member agencies providing a significant sample for analysis. For this research, the entire U.S. census of the MCCA was contacted to participate in the survey, reducing the possibility of sampling or selection bias.

Pilot testing to pretest the survey instrument for effectiveness and face validity was conducted using a sample of 15 active police law enforcement executives (representing the ranks of captain, major, and lieutenant colonel), one agency attorney, one public information officer, and two academic doctors (one a retired federal law enforcement officer and the second an experienced researcher in public administration). This small sample used for the pilot test represents the likely rank/tenure and experience level of those who would respond to the survey for agencies. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that the questions from the survey were easily understood and meant the same thing among all respondents. Additionally, a pilot study reduces unnecessary repetitiveness, ensures brevity and precision in language, and exposes possible bias in the questions before the large-scale survey distribution (Gideon, 2012).

## **Procedures**

Survey documentation was submitted to Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review on August 18, 2023, before any data collection (see Appendix A). A review of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) code of ethics was completed, and these guidelines were followed and integrated into all parts of this study. Among the primary ethical responsibilities is the responsibility of researchers to avoid practices that “may harm, endanger, humiliate, or unnecessarily mislead participants and potential participants” (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2021, p. 1). A review and approval to proceed with the study were received on October 26, 2023; a copy of the IRB approval IRB-FY23-24-469 is included in Appendix B. The structure of the survey and interviews remained consistent and authentic to the American Association for Public Opinion Research code of ethics and the Liberty University IRB requirements.

### **Informed Consent**

All participants were provided with an introductory letter (see Appendix C) which provided a link to the survey, and the first question of the survey was attached to the consent to participate in the study information sheet (see Appendix D). All participants had to acknowledge that they had read and consented to participate in the study. This was documented by a check box on the survey, which, if checked, would allow the participants to move forward with the survey; if consent were not received, the survey would move directly to the final slide, thanking them for their time.

### **Privacy**

All participants were informed that their responses to the survey and interviews would remain confidential to the greatest extent possible. The agency identification was only known to

me, and no participant personal information would be collected. To maintain promised participant anonymity, each agency was assigned a simple pseudonym based on geographic location and alphabetical order of the participants in the location (e.g., Southeast 1 = [SE1], Southeast 2 = [SE2]).

### **The Researcher's Role**

This grounded research design incorporated qualitative and spatial data collection approaches. In the qualitative aspect, I recognized the “importance of identifying [my] personal values, assumptions, and biases” that may affect research in the realm of public administration (Creswell, 2008, p. 180). With almost 3 decades of experience as a law enforcement officer in a large county in Northern Virginia, my insights extend beyond policing and encompass the complexities of the public administration system.

Throughout a 28-year career, I have served as both an enforcer of policies and an advocate for the public's well-being. This unique perspective within public administration allows a nuanced understanding of how MP influences policy decisions and administrative implementation within law enforcement agencies, shedding light on its broader implications on public institutions and governance. I bring an insider's understanding of the challenges policymakers and public administrators face when navigating societal reactions to MP. As public administrators grapple with the demands of maintaining social order and addressing public concerns, it is vital to consider the potential biases that may influence policy decisions. My insights into the delicate balance between enforcing policies and addressing public perceptions offer valuable perspectives for public administrators seeking to make evidence-based, equitable, and effective policies.

My perspective as a public administration scholar is grounded in the real-world challenges of enforcing societal norms and navigating the consequences of ill-conceived public policies. This research was driven by a quest to understand the profound impact of MP on public policy, encompassing decision making, public perception, and institutional functioning. Through professional interactions with diverse individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds, I have witnessed how MP can unjustly marginalize specific groups, leading to misguided policy actions and a disconnect between bureaucrats and communities. This epistemological exploration sought to uncover how law enforcement, as the enforcement arm of the executive branch, can become the folk devil in the eyes of the public. Consequently, the political and social response often involves grandstanding and hasty policy decisions.

Approaching this research with such experience, I accepted that I bring personal bias to the perceptions of MP. This bias was acknowledged and mitigated, because it had the potential to influence the study results (Galdas, 2017). Maintaining researcher reflexivity by ensuring awareness of such biases and the influences of the biases on research is paramount in increasing research rigor (Mackieson et al., 2018).

I explored the dynamic interplay between MP, political elites, and policy decisions, unraveling how MP shapes the political agenda and influences public administration. By analyzing policy development and policy impact through a public administration lens, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how MP exaggerated fears can lead to hasty and ill-conceived policy actions.

As an academic in the field of public administration, I recognized the ethical considerations inherent in conducting research within the context of law enforcement. Ensuring confidentiality and privacy while minimizing potential risks for participants remains a top

priority (Creswell, 2008; Fujii, 2012). Before undertaking this research, one of the participants was previously known to me through professional exposure. I did not allow this familiarity to impact the research, promised anonymity, or ethical standards. Addressing these ethical concerns strengthens the credibility and relevance of this research for public administrators, policymakers, and the broader academic community.

In conclusion, this grounded study sought to enrich the field of public administration by exploring the far-reaching implications of MP on public policy. My background in law enforcement, combined with a focus on public administration, provides critical insights into the complex relationship between MP, policy decisions, and governance. Therefore, it was necessary to fill identified gaps in the literature and inform public administrators and academics. Serving as an officer over the past 28 years has exposed me to bias related to the effects of MP-induced policies. By acknowledging potential biases and maintaining researcher reflexivity (Kleinsasser, 2000), this research contributes valuable knowledge that empowers public administrators to develop policies that promote resilient, inclusive, and evidence-based solutions for the benefit of society as a whole.

### **Data Collection**

This study employed a qualitative research approach anchored in grounded theory and process tracing methodology. Grounded theory, pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), offers a systematic and iterative method for research, aiming to develop theories rooted in empirical data. Through the data, themes, and patterns developed organically, grounded theory facilitates a nuanced understanding of complex social phenomena like MP (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Epistemologically, the study adopted a pragmatic perspective, emphasizing practical outcomes and actionable insights from empirical research (D. L. Morgan, 2014).

Pragmatism acknowledges the contextual and contingent nature of knowledge, recognizing that truth claims are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they are situated.

This research employed document analysis, surveys, secondary data spatial analysis, and postsurvey interviews to create a robust research framework. Because of the manner of data collection and analysis, this research was completed in sequential phases, each developing foundational support for the following phases.

### **Phase 1: Document Analysis**

Phase 1 began with me conducting document analysis and gathering base knowledge to fully understand the MP phenomenon. Such a background provided a solid foundation for the research that was to follow. Social, analog, and digital media sources, online search patterns, and the United States State of the Union Address were analyzed to find commonalities and trends supporting or refuting MP. This research phase was required to be completed first to determine whether the elements of MP, as defined by S. Cohen (1969, 2011a), could be supported.

Document analysis was a supporting factor in all subquestions to bolster the study's academic rigor. Content analysis, a subcategory of document analysis, is a research method used to systematically analyze and quantify qualitative data such as text, images, or audio/video recordings. It involves breaking down the data into smaller units, coding and categorizing them and identifying patterns and themes (Krippendorff, 2018; Stan, 2010). Content analysis is commonly used in grounded qualitative research (Stan, 2010).

A collection of web documents and resources were used in this research phase. Initially, nationwide media sources were studied through the internet resource archive.org, an internet archive library funded by the National Science Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Council on Library Information Resources, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. As

noted by Ben-David and Huurdeman (2014), this source lends itself to numerous research scenarios. This is supported by Gratzinger (2021), who stated that using this searchable database of televised news media broadcasts, available since 2009, was invaluable to communications research.

Using this resource, an exhaustive content analysis focused on English-speaking, U.S.-based news sources. Using a keyword search, data were captured using variants and combinations of the following words: police, UOF, brutality, excessive, reform, defund, and misconduct. The first search used the years between 2010 and 2023 as search parameters, yielding 517,054 results. A review and analysis of such media mentions categorized by dates showed notable spikes around focusing events.

Second, the web resource Google Trends, a free, publicly accessible online portal of Google was used. This search engine resource is commonly used in infodemiology studies to gather data on human behavior (Mavragani et al., 2018). Google Trends analyzes internet search patterns on Google-affiliated sites, approximately 3 billion daily searches, easily searchable by spatial and temporal values (Nutti et al., 2014). Trends searches are limited to basic keyword data, but because of the volume, they are considered academically significant (Jun et al., 2018).

The analysis used Google Trends to focus on English-speaking, U.S.-based internet searches. Using keyword searches, data were captured using the following phrases: defund the police, police reform, and police UOF. The search used January, 2016 through January, 2023 as search parameters. Whereas the trends data do not delve into the actual number of searches, they do show search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time.

The third document data source was the annual Presidential State of the Union address. Transcripts of the annual State of the Union address were obtained from The American

Presidency Project (University of California, Santa Barbara, n.d.). Transcripts from addresses from 2014 through 2023, encompassing annual speeches by President Barack Obama, President Donald Trump, and President Joe Biden, were used. Presidential rhetoric has been shown to be highly influential in public value concepts and discourse (Jennings et al., 2017; Sowińska, 2013). Consistent with research by Teten (2003), only the State of the Union address was analyzed because of the constitutionally mandated requirement and consistent audience. Other speeches, such as campaign speeches, adopt a populist approach but change after elections (Wasike, 2017). The State of the Union address places the individuals on equal ground.

Using the transcripts, each one was searched using the following keywords: police, crime, use of force, reform, funding, death, and brutality. Once those keywords were identified, a follow-up review of in-context content was conducted, meticulously reviewing each transcript to ensure consistency and accuracy. A count of keywords and the mentioning of trigger events was compiled and documented, separated by speech, date, and speaker. Speeches from 2014 through 2017 were ultimately not reported in this study because of a lack of documentable rhetoric of interest in those speeches.

### ***Document Analysis***

Because no empirical test indicates MP, this research needed to provide enough correlative data to support the assertion that MP was present during the study framework. If the elements of MP could not be established, the remaining research would become irrelevant. To develop a basis for this study, the first element of this question required the establishment of MP and the designation of a focusing event. S. Cohen (2011a) established the following five factors of MP: (a) concern, (b) hostility, (c) consensus, (d) disproportionality, and (e) volatility.



Within the framework of MP theory, concern denotes public apprehension regarding perceived or anticipated threats, whether real or exaggerated (S. Cohen, 2011a). Conceptually, concern precedes fear along a Likert scale, reflecting a continuum of emotional response. This conceptualization demonstrates the progression from initial apprehension to heightened emotional states, providing a nuanced understanding of how societal responses evolve within the context of MP.

The second factor of hostility, as delineated in MP theory, directs attention toward individuals or groups perceived as embodying the perceived societal problem or facilitating its propagation. Hostility manifests in societal attitudes and actions directed toward these perceived instigators. S. Cohen (2011a) introduced the term folk devils to characterize individuals or groups who are scapegoated or vilified in response to perceived threats. These folk devils serve as symbolic representations of societal anxieties and fears, often becoming targets of moral outrage and collective hostility. S. Cohen's designation of this label highlighted the role of media and societal narratives in constructing and reinforcing perceptions of deviance and culpability, contributing to the amplification of MP dynamics.

Within the framework of MP theory, consensus emerges as a pivotal component, exerting significant influence on the trajectory of perceived threats within society. Consensus entails widespread agreement among various segments of society regarding the existence and severity of a perceived threat (S. Cohen, 1969). Consensus typically arises in response to heightened public discourse and media coverage, amplifying concerns and perceptions of risk (S. Cohen, 2011b). Individuals of influence, such as political leaders, community leaders, or prominent media figures, play a crucial role in stimulating consensus by articulating the urgency of addressing the purported threat and advocating for collective action. Consensus mobilization legitimizes the

perceived threat, galvanizes public sentiment, and precipitates calls for intervention or remedial measures, thus shaping societal responses to the perceived threat. This dynamic highlights the influential role of collective perceptions and public discourse in driving the escalation of MP phenomena.

Disproportionality, in MP theory, denotes the exaggeration or amplification of perceived threats beyond what may be their actual magnitude or significance. This inflationary tendency manifests through various means, including the overreporting or exaggerating the number of incidents, the extent of damages incurred, the perceived offensiveness of the behavior in question, and the overestimation of potential risks associated with the perceived threat (S. Cohen, 2011a). Such exaggerations contribute to the distortion of public perceptions and the magnification of societal anxieties.

As another critical factor in MP theory, volatility underscores the unpredictable and erratic nature of societal reactions and responses to perceived threats. This volatility is characterized by sudden and unforeseen shifts in public sentiment or collective action against the purported instigators of MP, often represented by the identified folk devils (S. Cohen, 2011a). These reactions can erupt spontaneously, driven by heightened emotions or sensationalized media coverage, and may dissipate just as abruptly, resulting in unpredictable fluctuations in public discourse and societal behavior. The volatile nature of MP stresses the complex interplay of social, cultural, and psychological factors that shape the trajectory of perceived threats within society.

MP theory was moved forward by Jennings et al. (2017), who added that the critical factor that distinguishes MP from other theories is that “moral panic [is] associated with trigger events that are viewed as being symptomatic of a wider condition” (p. 208). With all the

theoretical elements, there has yet to be a definitive tool to indicate MP. Therefore, it was the research position that there would be a statistically significant increase in the demands for policy actions against the folk devils (the perpetrators) discoverable through content analysis.

This study asserted that through the meticulous examination of key elements outlined in the scholarly literature on MP, employing methods such as document analysis, the presence of MP can be inferred within the context of this study. By scrutinizing textual data and conducting content analysis, indicators of MP, specifically the dimensions of concern and hostility, can be distinguished, particularly through the increased media coverage of the event under investigation. Using computer-assisted keyword searches facilitates identifying and tracking keyword frequencies in broadcast media reports, enabling data grouping by year (G. King et al., 2017). A significant surge in media coverage would lend credence to the presence of concern and hostility, aligning with S. Cohen's (2011a) framework.

To establish the element of consensus, Google Trends data were used to observe fluctuations in keyword searches, and comparing the usage of keywords in the presidential State of the Union address spanning the past decade offered additional insights. Analyzing these trends provided a basis for determining the existence of consensus regarding the focusing events. Moreover, spatial analysis of introduced legislation at the state level, incorporating keywords associated with the focal event, was a valuable approach to explore the elements of volatility and disproportionality. Monitoring the changes in the introduction of legislation related to law enforcement practices and policies shed light on the presence of MP dynamics.

Using document analysis, the findings corroborated the presence of elements of MP as theorized, this research then employed inductive reasoning as a methodological approach to strengthen the argument positing MP as a substantial factor within the selected case studies.

Through this iterative process of analysis and interpretation, the research constructed a coherent and robust interpretation of the role of MP in shaping the dynamics and outcomes observed within the case studies. By drawing logical inferences from the observed patterns and trends in the data, the research established a persuasive argument underscoring the significance of MP as the correlative factor in the chosen case studies.

## **Phase 2: Survey**

Phase 2 of the data collection process began with me overseeing the administration of the survey. The survey was internet-based through Qualtrics and entailed open-ended questions requiring a narrative answer to capture qualitative data and closed-ended questions to capture specific spatial data. Bazeley (2010) stated, “Surveys or questionnaires employing both closed and open-ended questions are a common source of mixed data” (p. 439). Before the survey was issued, a preinterest contact was developed from each member agency of the MCCA that may have helped facilitate this survey (Jenselius, 2014). The contact was a command-level administrator or director of research who could approve or decline to participate in the survey for the agency.

This data collection phase naturally fell into the process as the next step in this research because of the need to establish participation. Because this was a voluntary survey, there was no guarantee that agencies would participate. During this phase, five agencies stated definitively that they would not be able to participate because of specific policies preventing the release of any data without a Freedom of Information Act request or a court order. Of the remaining 63 agencies making up the U.S. contingent of the MCCA, I received 27 commitments to participate with specific contacts who would complete the survey. Once a good contact list was developed and IRB approval was obtained, surveys were distributed to all 63 agencies who indicated they

would participate, and 27 were sent directly to contacts who had committed to participate; the remaining were sent to the general contacts for the agency. Survey returns were manually reviewed and then reviewed and analyzed using the Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVivo 14.

### *Survey*

For one side of the research, data were collected through an open-ended, self-administered impact assessment survey to collect data from specific law enforcement agencies to determine whether they had been subject to defunding or elements of the UOF reform (Kelley et al., 2003). The first subquestions applicable to this section are Subquestion 2 and Subquestion 3, which explored the UOF reform patterns associated with external recommendations. The third subquestion applicable to this section is Subquestion 4, which explored what trends and perspectives emerged regarding the impact of the Defund the Police movement on budgetary allocations and priorities in law enforcement agencies, leading to reductions or reallocations of resources. The final subquestion applicable to this section is Subquestion 5, which asked to what extent pressures from policy executives may create cascading effects on law enforcement administration policies and practices.

Surveys are an accepted and widely used method for gathering large amounts of data using minimum resources. As such, surveys are commonly used in qualitative and quantitative research and can have closed and open-ended questions to enhance survey data (Datta & Vaid, 2018; G. King et al., 1994; Zohrabi, 2013). Using both forms of research questions can “heighten the dependability and trustworthiness of the data and their interpretations” (Zohrabi, 2013, p. 254). This survey used qualitative and basic quantitative questions to gather pertinent data.

I distributed the survey to the entirety of the U.S. membership of the MCCA; thus, sampling bias is not an issue. Concern for ethical issues was of primary importance for me during this study. It was and still is my responsibility to minimize the research's impact on any subjects who participated. Because this research did not include any physical interaction or psychological manipulation that may have been detrimental, this research and the survey associated with it were primarily concerned with securing and upholding informed consent, data security, and maintaining privacy (Anderson, 2017; Kang & Hwang, 2021). Because the survey results led to a comparative analysis of crime statistics, agency anonymity was impossible. However, this was fully disclosed and reviewed in the informed consent documentation.

The survey distribution entailed primary contact with the selected agency to garner specific contacts. Prenotification and preexisting contact have been shown to increase web-based survey response significantly (Bosnjak et al., 2007). Once a contact list was completed, an invitation for a web-based survey was sent to the preestablished contacts. Web-based questionnaires are an effective and cost-efficient method for survey distribution and are acceptable for scholarly research (Denscombe, 2006; 2010; Fox et al., 2003; van Gelder et al., 2010). Based on the target population of large metropolitan law enforcement organizations, there was no concern about reduced response because of lack of computer access or reliable internet, which would be a concern for other population samples.

The survey had three primary parts—area and agency demographics (DQ); Section 2, which explored whether the agency UOF policy had changed within the previous 5 years (UFQ); and the final section, which explored whether the agency budget had changed in the last 5 years (BQ). The survey focused on how and why changes were initiated. The questions have a research

index number in parentheses, only used to categorize data during analysis. The following questions were asked in the survey; a formatted survey is in Appendix A:

#### Demographics

1. (Q1) I have read and understand the linked moral panic survey information sheet.
2. (Q2) Agency name
3. (DQ1) What is the approximate population of your service area?
4. (DQ2) Number of sworn officers - Authorized positions/positions filled
5. (DQ3/4) How much influence do the following have over policy decisions for your agency (0 -“weak or N/A” to 10- “very influential”)

#### Citizen review boards

#### Collective bargaining units

6. (DQ9) Outside of the core department, collective bargaining units, or citizen review boards, please describe nonagency entities that are required to review and approve policies before implementation? (Such as but not limited to the board of supervisors, public comment period, or mayor)
7. (DQ10) Outside of the core department, collective bargaining units, or citizen review boards, please describe other entities that your agency voluntarily allow to review policies before implementation? (Such as but not limited to the board of supervisors, public comment period, and mayor)
8. (Q5) What form of government is your service area subject to?
9. (DQ7) Has your agency responded to protests in your service area in the last 5 years? (Defined as gatherings of greater than 100 individuals, no property damage)

10. (DQ7c) Has your agency responded to significant protests that resulted in civil disorder/riots in your service area in the last 5 years? (Defined as gatherings of greater than 100 individuals, property damage greater than \$100,000)
11. (DQ7a) Reflecting on the largest protest, if applicable, what was the level of agency response
12. (DQ7b) What was the approximate operational costs to agency for response to the protests? (\$0–\$150,000+)
  - Sworn staff pay
  - Equipment costs
13. (DQ8) Based on your knowledge, what are the top three contributing factors for protests/disorders/ riots in your service area?

#### Use of Force

14. (DQ12) Please describe the amount of political pressure your agency has been subjected to demanding use of force reform.
15. (DQ11) Please describe the public demands for use of force reform in your jurisdiction.
16. (UFQ1) Has your agency changed the use of force (response to resistance) policy within the last 5 years?
17. (UFQ1a) When were UOF policy changes initiated?
18. (UFQ2) What was the primary reason for changing or altering the agency's use of force policy?
19. (UFQ3) What changes were made, generally?



20. (UFQ4) Were changes developed internally, through external influence, or both?  
(External influence includes but is not limited to political directives, legal changes, citizen review boards, and public demand)
21. (UFQ5-7) Since implementation of UOF policy modification has there been a change in the following (generally)
- Overall physical incidents - not including routine application of handcuffs
  - Injuries during interactions (sworn and civilian)
  - Number of arrests
  - Violent crimes as reported in UCR/NIBRS
22. (UFQ8) Has your agency been the subject of a consent decree in the past 10 years?

#### Budget

23. (DQ14) Please describe the political calls for the reallocation of the police budget for other social programs.
24. (DQ13) Please describe the public calls for reallocation of police budgets for other social programs in your jurisdiction.
25. (BQ1) Has your agency budget been reduced due to calls to defund the police in the last 5 years?  
If yes, what percentage of change
26. (BQ2) Were police services required to be reduced, cut, or reprioritized due to budget changes in the last 5 years?
27. (BQ3) Were services required to be added, cut, or reprioritized due to political influence or policies in the last 5 years? (examples may be legislation, political directives)

28. (BQ4) What services were changed, added or subtracted

29. (BQ4a) How (if any) were such changes implemented?

#### Final Questions

30. (PP1) As a major law enforcement agency, how have political pressures impacted your agency efficiency, moral, or policies and practices?

31. (Q31) What changes have been implemented by your agency since 2018, as a way to maintain or improve community relations between law enforcement and the public.

The data collected in the DQ section established a baseline. Survey Questions 3 and 4 asked, “What is the population of your service area?” and “What is the sworn number of officers in the agency.” Survey Question 5 used a Likert scale of 1 through 10 to ask how influential a citizen review board is regarding agency policy, exploring the influence of citizen review panels in large agencies. It is the contention by supporters of civilian oversight that such oversight increases officer/department accountability and transparency of action because such bodies with higher authority over police policies and operations can significantly impact racial disparities and police UOF issues (Council on Criminal Justice, 2021). As Hope (2020) implied, the perceived effectiveness of a citizen review panel is contingent on the board’s power. A board that holds both investigative and disciplinary power has a much more significant influence on police agency actions than a board that holds strictly advisory powers. Consequently, the first part of Survey Question 5 (DQ3) was significant to establish what outside influences impact policy actions.

The second part of Survey Question 5 (DQ4) used a Likert scale of 1 to 10 to ask how influential collective bargaining units are regarding agency policy, exploring how influential collective bargaining is in the responding agency. Collective bargaining is a negotiation between

management and employees to reach a contractually binding agreement on working conditions, including discipline, work hours, policy changes, and other factors that impact the work environment (C. Harris & Sweeney, 2019). In some instances, police unions have stood against the formation of citizen oversight committees and what can be considered accountability-related policies (Katz, 2021). Survey Question 5 (DQ4) was highly telling regarding outside influence in policy and operational changes whereas the stronger the union, the greater the acceptance or resistance to organizational change. Survey Questions 6 (DQ9) and 7 (DQ10) were free narrative questions. Survey Question 6 (DQ9) asked, “Outside of the core department, collective bargaining units, or citizen review boards, are nonagency entities required to review and approve policies before implementation?” and Survey Question 7 (DQ10) asked, “Outside of the core department, collective bargaining units, or citizen review boards, does your agency voluntarily allow other entities to review policies before implementation?” These questions supplemented these data by examining outside influences and whether they are mandatory or voluntary.

Survey Question 8 (DQ5) asked, “What form of government is your service area subject to?” Studies have shown that partisan politics drastically influence policy and, therefore, drastically influence the dominant perception of social issues such as police reform (Burstein & Linton, 2002; Oliver & Rahn, 2016). The two case studies chosen for this research were not any different in that politics and political rent-seeking behaviors correlated with or between police policy actions and political leanings. Survey Question 9 (DQ7) collected information about whether participating agencies “responded to significant protests/civil disorders/riots in your service area in the last 5 years.” Survey Questions 10 through 12 (DQ7a–c) asked about the response level and the realized response cost. These questions allowed the exploration of the impact of the protests on the agency and jurisdiction. Survey Question 13 (DQ8), through a

freeform narrative, asked, “If reasons for protests/disorders/ riots in your service area are known, what are the top three reasons?” Again, this question helped to establish the issues affecting the jurisdiction.

The second section of the survey revolved around the police UOF policy. Using a freeform narrative, Survey Question 14 (DQ12) asked about the political calls for UOF reform. Question 15 (DQ11), also through a free-form narrative, asked about the public calls for the UOF reform. These questions acknowledged and explored the fact that public administration reform is often driven by political pressure and the motivations of political actors. Specific pressures depend on the political context and the goals of those in power, often driven by public sentiment (N. Cohen, 2022; Ingrams et al., 2020).

Survey Questions 16 (UFQ1) and 17 (UFQ1a) asked whether there had been any changes to the agency UOF policy within the last 5 years (2018-2022). Survey Question 18 (UFQ2) explored the reason for the changes through a freeform narrative, and Survey Question 19 (UFQ3) explored what those changes were generally. Both Survey Questions 20 and 22 (UFQ4 and UFQ8) explored the source of the changes. Policy changes are a natural progression in law enforcement. Case law, technology, and best practices in law enforcement are ever-evolving; Survey Questions 16 through 20 and 22 were designed to find the impetus of policy changes and whether such changes were forced or a normal process (Mastrofski & Willis, 2010). Survey Question 21 (UOF5-7), by asking if there had been changes in arrests, physical incidents, and injuries, delved into how changes may impact law enforcement key matrixes. As such, Survey Question 21 sought to establish whether changes were made and what the result was; these questions sought to capture variables of increased/decreased injuries, incidents, complaints, crime rates, and arrests.

The third section of the survey focused on budgets and any potential changes that have occurred. Survey Question 23 (DQ14), through a freeform narrative, asked about the political calls for use of budget reallocation. Survey Question 24 (DQ13), through a freeform narrative, asked about the public calls for budget reallocation. Such questions provided insight into the pressures the responding agencies have faced during the study's timeframe through a reiterative process of analyzing the content of the responses (Ebbinghaus et al., 2024). Then, based on the response analysis, the answers were ranked using a Likert-type scale from 0 = *no pressure* to 4 = *major pressure* to classify the responses into usable bins.

Survey Question 25 (BQ1) explored whether the respondent agency had been subject to realized budget reductions. This entailed examining the raw budgetary figures and understanding the underlying reasons for any fluctuations. Survey Questions 26 through 29 (BQ2, BQ3, BQ4, and BQ4a), through freeform narrative, asked whether agency budgets had been subject to defunding or reprioritization and what programs or services had to be modified, added, or eliminated. By scrutinizing responses to Survey Questions 26 through 29, patterns emerged, discerning whether changes in budgetary allocations necessitated changes in operational procedures, the scaling back or enhancement of existing programs, or the modification of service delivery methods. Integrating data from Survey Question 21 and Survey Questions 26 through 29 allowed analyses to identify correlations between budgetary shifts and crime statistics, offering nuanced insights into resource allocation strategies and their effects.

The final section of the survey had two questions aimed at capturing the perceived impact and changes associated with pressures and manners in which such pressures were mitigated. Survey Question 31 (PP1), through a free-form narrative, asked, "As a major law enforcement agency, how have political pressures impacted your agency efficiency, moral, or policies and

practices?” and Survey Question 31 (Q31) asked, “What changes have been implemented by your agency since 2018, as a way to maintain or improve community relations between law enforcement and the public?”

If changes were implemented, comparing crime statistics and the variance in arrest or UOF incidents/injuries/complaints, success or failure of policy change may be implied. Using a logical inference, one would expect that if policy changes were successful, there would be a statistical reduction in both violent crime rates and uses of force, complaints, and injuries. Subquestions 3 and 4 could be answered by frequently studying the terms defund the police and police use of force reform in national newspapers or political speeches before and after the focusing event.

There were some significant challenges to the data collection. Primarily, with the use of surveys, there is a notoriously low response rate. Researchers must create a contact that may be able to ensure the survey is completed, ultimately becoming known to the gatekeepers of information (Jensenius, 2014). Surveys have notable disadvantages; primarily that the responses are based on the knowledge or memory of the respondent and may be subject to response bias or lack of response (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

The census of law enforcement agencies on the MCCA member list was the focus of this research. Major city departments often have a research component, which may increase survey responses. Additionally, major cities are more susceptible to political influence, thus an indicator of national policy trends (Gimpel et al., 2020). Therefore, police policies are reflective of the populace.

### **Phase 3: Secondary Data Spatial Analysis**

Spatial data are often used in qualitative research through statistical data associated with specific locations or patterns and trends associated with specific geographic locations (de Graauw et al., 2013; Rucks-Ahidiana & Bierbaum, 2015). Spatial analysis allows testing proximal issues associated with specific geographic locations (Xu & Kennedy, 2015). This research used a staged process toward spatial analysis, in which the survey participants dictated the geographic analysis.

Using internet resources for secondary data collection and analysis, web-based research has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary academia (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2012). Leveraging existing online data sources such as government databases and organizational websites allows access to diverse information encompassing geographic locations, demographics, and socioeconomic indicators. This approach offers significant advantages, including efficiency and cost-effectiveness because it enables the collection of large amounts of data quickly and at a reduced cost compared to traditional fieldwork (Biddix & Park, 2008).

Moreover, web-based research provides unparalleled data collection and analysis flexibility, allowing researchers to employ various techniques to extract meaningful insights from online data. Furthermore, remote research methods offer efficiency and flexibility in data collection and analysis processes. Researchers can analyze existing datasets remotely, minimizing logistical challenges and accelerating research timelines. This aligns with the efficiency-driven approach emphasizing the importance of streamlining research procedures without compromising rigor (Creswell, 2013).

### *Spatial Analysis*

Phase 3 entailed taking the survey participants' geographical data and researching jurisdiction-specific information. This could only be accomplished after the final list of participants was received. Data such as violent crime statistics (murder, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery) were initially evaluated using the published crime data by MCCA; however, after finding inconsistencies in such reports, the crime statistics were found by using the jurisdiction and querying the nationwide crime data collection programs maintained by the FBI; the UCR for data up to 2021, and the new NIBRS for data from 2021 to the time of this study.

The UCR was initially developed in 1927 by the IACP, which determined that there was a need for a standard way crime data could be collected and studied. The UCR tracks data on eight major crime classifications, known as the crime index, and reports the data using a monthly summary report system. These include murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson (FBI, n.d.). The UCR has grown throughout the years, encompassing more data and approximately 18,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States. It has become a primary data source for crime data information used by Congress to inform national policy and award grants (James & Council, 2008).

NIBRS, the newest version of the UCR, is an incident-based reporting system that captures more incidents and the characteristics of victims and offenders, property involved, and persons arrested (National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, n.d.). It collects data on 52 offenses compared to the UCR summary report system, which collected data on eight offenses. Thus, providing greater detail than the traditional UCR summary report allows for analyzing crime patterns, trends, and relationships between various factors (FBI, n.d.). The UCR/NIBRS is



extensively used by researchers, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers to understand crime dynamics better, allocate resources effectively, and develop strategies for crime prevention and response (James & Council, 2008; Lantz & Wenger, 2019; Pattavina et al., 2017).

Using such crime reporting databases is strictly voluntary on the part of law enforcement agencies, but lack of participation impacts available federal funding. All participants in this research comply with UCR/NIBRS reporting requirements, allowing an exploration of crimes specific to participant jurisdiction. The crime statistics and the jurisdiction population were used to find the jurisdiction-specific crime rates. At this juncture in the study, agency staffing data (included in the survey) were corroborated using the jurisdiction-specific published annual budget.

Another spatial data source used was the National Conference of State Legislators, Policing database, and the Duke University Policing Legislation Registry (National Conference of State Legislators, 2023; Wilson Center for Science and Justice, 2023). Combining these databases made it possible to search for law enforcement-related legislation sorted by state and date. These data could only be obtained after the survey participants' geographic locations were known to me. Once spatial data were known, the two databases were searched, using the participant's location to establish what legislation had been introduced, defeated, or enacted at the state level, separated by legislative session. This provided a snapshot of how much pressure was politically being applied to survey respondents from the state level. Between the two databases, data were only available from 2018 to 2024; however, this timeframe corresponded well with data in the presidential State of the Union address.

A final area of spatial analysis was sourced from the ACLED. The ACLED is a nonprofit project initially developed by Dr. Clionadh Raleigh, a political violence and geography professor

at the University of Sussex, who is now in partnership with the University of Texas at Austin (ACLEd, 2023). The ACLED collects current data on political violence and demonstration activity globally but is searchable at the microlevel; therefore, it is a valuable tool for studying conflict events for this research (Dorff et al., 2023; Eck, 2012).

These data could only be obtained after the survey participants' geographic locations were known to me. Once spatial data were known, data were sorted by location and date to filter down to the desired data. I used the database filters riot/protest, United States, and rioters/protesters, and I used the date range of January, 2018 through January, 2023. Such filters provided significant information, including the number of protests, locations, level of violence reported, organizers, government interventions, and reason for protests at a national level, which could then be further distilled to a city level of analysis. Data were compiled and analyzed to find correlations between survey responses, and ACLED reported data.

#### **Phase 4: Interviews**

Phase 4 included participant follow-up interviews. Five participant agencies were interviewed for follow-up and clarification after reviewing the surveys, correlating documents, and archival analysis. Fifteen agencies were queried to see whether they would participate in follow-up interviews. Out of the 21 agencies that completed the online survey, I was only in possession of 15 direct contacts; the remaining six participating agencies completed the survey when the invite was sent to a general agency contact email. Therefore, there was less of a possibility of the individual who completed the survey being the individual who would be available for the interview. Therefore, the postsurvey interview invitations were only sent to direct contacts who could be verified as having completed the survey. Three participant agencies

who reported outlier information in the survey and two other agencies agreed to participate in the interviews.

The low responses to the postsurvey interviews could have been due to potential apprehension because of the topic's sensitivity, and through an interview, participants could have felt that their anonymity would have been in jeopardy. Additionally, in politically sensitive positions such as law enforcement executives, budget, promotions, and job security are often tied to the will of the local polity. An anonymous online survey is one thing, but participating in a recorded interview could be considered professionally risky.

Interviews were recorded using an external digital recorder with the participants' permission. Although Glaser (1998) strongly advised grounded theory practitioners to avoid recording interviews, it was a requirement to ensure accuracy. Once interviews were completed, the data were transcribed using the transcription function of the NVivo14 program (see Appendices E, F, G, H, and I). Once transcribed, the recordings of the interview and the transcripts were reviewed to ensure accuracy. Once transcription accuracy was confirmed, a narrative review was conducted to establish emergent themes or support themes previously found via the survey.

### ***Interviews***

Semistructured postsurvey interviews were conducted, a purposive sample of six postinterview subjects from agencies across the nation was identified, and a series of questions were asked to gather further insight into the research question. All interview subjects occupied command-level positions in their respective agencies and had 20 or more years of experience in that agency. In one instance, two interviews were conducted with MA3 because the primary

interviewee stated they could not answer the questions because they were not the subject matter experts.

Using a general interview guide approach, as discussed by Turner (2010), participants were asked a series of open-ended clarifying questions with the flexibility of follow-up or further illustrative questions posed by the interviewer. Interviews were conducted via electronic means, either via an online platform, Microsoft Teams, or via phone, based on what the participant felt most comfortable doing; therefore, they were able to choose the most private or relaxed settings based on their particular situation; all participants were assured confidentiality (Lune & Berg, 2017). All participants were advised that they could discontinue the interview at any time if it became uncomfortable, and all participants were advised that the interview would be recorded and should take less than 15 min per person. The participants were subjected to a semistructured interview using a grounded qualitative, exploratory research design. All participants were asked the same general questions with follow-up or exploratory questions as needed (G. King et al., 1994; Turner, 2010).

A semistructured interviewing method is commonly used in social sciences and could be considered exploratory, allowing researchers to reach a deeper depth of discover (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). During the narrative review of the survey returns, some data deserved a more profound exploration; interviews allowed a broader understanding of the subquestions, leading to a more robust analysis of the research question. Interviews were conducted with questions drawn from the survey as a follow-up to garner more information for the following subquestions (Dillman et al., 2014; Gall et al., 2006).

By addressing each one of the interview questions individually, I hoped to understand and further evaluate the impact of MP on public policy in the field of law enforcement. The

following questions served as a general guide for the interview, allowing for a free narrative response and follow-up questions as needed:

1. Do you remember the survey that you previously participated in, associated with this research? This interview is strictly a follow-up to information already explored in that survey.
2. Is it permissible for me to record this interview for later transcription to ensure accuracy?
3. Do you recall from the previous informed consent information associated with the survey that all personally identifiable data and agency identity would be strictly safeguarded and held confidential to the greatest extent possible? That confidentiality extends to this interview as well.
4. What was the most influential input, recommendation, or finding from professional law enforcement policy organizations/ groups such as PERF, NYU policing projects, or legislative bodies that prompted adjustments in your law enforcement agency's UOF policies, training programs, or reporting procedures?
5. Can you pinpoint a focusing event that led to revisions in your agency's UOF policies? What were the specifics of this incident, and when did it occur in relation to the policy changes?
6. From your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies?

Interview Question 1 was a familiarization question intended to remind the survey participants, reestablish credibility, and build rapport (Garbarski et al., 2016; Knott et al., 2022). This question helped resituate the interview participant to their prior engagement with the research. Research has found that when participants feel their prior involvement is recognized

and valued, they are more likely to provide rich, detailed responses that build upon and enhance the initial survey data (Garbarski et al., 2016; B. Saunders et al., 2017). This refamiliarization question set the stage for a productive follow-up discussion.

The second survey question had a dual purpose. First, it aimed to further build rapport by elevating the participant's status from passive interviewee to active collaborator by explicitly asking permission to record the conversation (McGrath et al., 2018). This small gesture helped create a more equal dynamic. Second, it served the legal function of obtaining the participant's authorization to record their statements because some jurisdictions have strict two-party notification laws governing recorded conversations.

The third survey question was designed to reassure participants that the informed consent parameters established in the original study would continue to be upheld in the follow-up interview, maintaining the strict ethics required of this study (Creswell, 2008). Reminding participants of the confidentiality protections helps maintain trust and encourages more open and candid responses. These initial questions served as an essential bridge between the participants' prior survey experience and their current engagement in the follow-up interview.

The fourth interview question was a derivative of Subquestion 2. The process of law enforcement agencies adapting policies and procedures in response to recommendations from authoritative bodies is a complex and nuanced undertaking. Research has shown that agencies often face significant challenges when translating high-level recommendations into meaningful, on-the-ground changes that are effectively implemented (Mastrofski & Willis, 2010; Skogan, 2008). Factors such as organizational culture, resource constraints, and political pressures significantly shape how agencies interpret and implement new policies. The degree and nature of adaptation also appear to depend on the specific recommendations, the agency's unique context,

and the broader political and social environment in which it operates (The Policy Circle, 2023). This interview question explored whether participant agencies have faced such external pressures or influences and have faced the need to adapt their policies and practices in response to recommendations from such authoritative entities.

The fifth interview question was a derivative of Subquestion 3, further delving into the intricate dynamics of revising UOF policies within law enforcement agencies. By further exploring this subquestion through an interview, the examination of specific events, such as high-profile incidents in which police have used force, enabled me to identify key characteristics and impacts of the policy changes that follow. This approach aligns with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of understanding the context and circumstances surrounding UOF incidents (Terrill & Reisig, 2003). Studies have provided valuable insights into best practices for developing effective UOF policies, underscoring the need for clear guidelines and comprehensive training for law enforcement personnel (PERF, 2022; The Policy Circle, 2023). By analyzing these characteristics and impacts, the question was intended to uncover commonalities and trends that law enforcement agencies have experienced in their efforts to reform UOF policies.

The sixth interview question was a derivative of Subquestion 5, exploring how high-level policy influencers, such as political leaders and policymakers, shape the administration and practices of law enforcement agencies. Previous studies have demonstrated the significant influence of these individuals on law enforcement strategies and priorities (Skogan & Frydl, 2004). Furthermore, research has shown that political ideology can impact decision making in law enforcement agencies and political elites playing a role in shaping policy agendas (Bradford et al., 2020; Greene, 1999; Meehan, 2000). By examining the extent to which high-ranking

influencers can initiate cascading effects on law enforcement policies and practices, the interview question aimed to provide deeper insights into the dynamics of policy formation and implementation within these agencies. Therefore, this allowed a deeper investigation and understanding of the complex relationship between political forces and administrative practices in public administration by shedding light on the influence of high-ranking policy influencers. Therefore, this question added significance to this study, informing about the appropriate balance between political oversight and professional autonomy in law enforcement administration.

Each interview question was meticulously crafted to eliminate ambiguity and prompt participants to provide nuanced and comprehensive responses. This thoughtful selection process enhances the interpretation and understanding of survey results, especially in complex scenarios (L. R. Harris & Brown, 2019). According to Wagner et al. (2020), postsurvey interviews allow participants to articulate their perspectives, recount their experiences, and narrate their stories on their own terms. This unveils novel themes or concepts and enriches comprehension of the issues while providing invaluable contextual information for analyzing survey findings.

### **Data Analysis**

Because this study was a grounded qualitative project with an exploratory component, in which exploratory research, qualitative data collection methods, and spatial data analysis were used sequentially and concurrently as appropriate (Creswell, 2008; 2015; Miller & Crabtree, 1994). Employing a grounded theory approach and using case studies and archival research allowed maximum flexibility in data collection (M. Saunders, 2012). Meticulous research notes enabled a data audit trail to be maintained, fitting with a grounded methodology, allowing this researcher to reflexively review research decisions and ensure robustness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using a grounded methodology, surveys, interviews, and content analysis provides three



data sources to support and validate the research findings. Using a methodological approach known as triangulation, integrating diverse data sets and sources, enhances research rigor by incorporating multiple perspectives and methods. Triangulation enabled me to cross-validate findings among different data sources, bolstering the study outcomes' reliability and robustness. (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

Creswell (2013) defined grounded theory as a systematic process that aims to explain a process or interaction at a conceptual level. This was followed by Gustafsson (2017), who defined a case study as “an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units” (p. 3). Using each participating agency as a subcase allows an interpretive approach, using cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2019) to parse data. The survey and interview data underwent evaluation through a constant comparison method, aligning with the foundational principles of grounded research established by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Using that approach, the data coding sequence followed an open coding, axial coding, and then a selective coding process.

Adhering to the guidelines outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the initial phase of open coding involved systematically deconstructing data into conceptual or categorical bins, facilitating a structured approach to data analysis. Subsequently, axial coding was conducted to establish connections between categories by contextualizing the data, enabling a deeper understanding of the relationships within the dataset. The third step in coding the data is “selective coding,” which involves validating relationships, selecting primary themes, and making systematic relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). Thus, I was permitted to revisit data as needed to guide the subsequent iteration of data collection and analysis.

Accepting that data coding in qualitative research has inherent risks of researcher error; it is prominent in social science research (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). However, the advantage of coding is that “it represents the gritty craftsmanship that enables artful and creative interpretation and analysis of the data” (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019, p. 261). Using a systematic approach, survey data were analyzed using open, axial, and then selective coding using Qualitative Data Analysis Software NVivo 14. Charmaz (2006) described grounded theory methods as methods that “consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data” (p. 2). Therefore, the qualitative data supporting a grounded theory approach are consistent with best practices and often used with grounded research (Charmaz, 2006; Khandkar, 2009).

As a process, open coding allows the development of broad concepts, which then can be grouped into aligned categories using axial coding; then, via selective coding, researchers can “integrate categories of organized data from axial coding in cohesive and meaning-filled expressions” (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 52). A grounded theory-influenced progressive data coding process allows researchers to develop meaning and theories by applying a methodological, analytical, and repeatable approach.

Various forms of data analysis were used to reduce the interviews into workable qualitative data. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and checked for word accuracy (Lune & Berg, 2017). The interview transcripts included speakers’ stutters or verbal wanderings, permitting a grounded theoretical approach toward content analysis. Using Microsoft Word as a platform for this manuscript, the text was coded using NVivo 14, and then a constant comparative analysis approach was used to discover repeated points and common themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In addition to the coding, a summative content analysis approach was used, relying on NVivo 14 software to create word frequency lists (Lune & Berg, 2017; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). To perform this analysis, the transcripts were manipulated only to include the participants' responses, excluding the words or phrases used by the interviewer. A frequency distribution of words analysis, excluding common words, did not produce an exorbitant amount of data. However, it would not be out of the scope of possibility that, with a larger sample, that could change.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, establishing trustworthiness is paramount to ensuring the credibility and reliability of the findings. This is achieved through several key strategies aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1986) framework emphasizing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The level of rigor or trustworthiness of a study equates to the overall confidence that consumers of the research can place in the data, interpretation, and methods used in the research (Connelly, 2016). Overall, the trustworthiness of this qualitative research was enhanced through careful attention to these four criteria, ultimately increasing the confidence readers can place in the validity and reliability of the study's findings, interpretations, and methods.

### **Credibility**

Credibility, also known as internal validity, is commonly defined as the "degree to which inferences made in a study are accurate and well-founded" (Polit & Beck, 2011, p. 745). Credibility can be viewed as working backward through a research project, looking at the findings to evaluate whether they are plausible based on the original data or researchers' interpretation of participants' original contributions. One benefit of a qualitative study with

spatial data as employed in this study is that using both qualitative and spatial data sets offers a natural convergence of information, allowing greater confidence in the findings and leading to richer data (Jick, 1979).

Referring to the practice of using multiple sources of data or methods to enhance the credibility of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), data triangulation (Denzin, 2009), as employed in this research, uses different sources of data such as surveys, interviews, content analysis, and spatial analysis to enhance the robustness of analysis and increase credibility. This form of triangulation is commonly used to obtain or substantiate research findings to increase credibility (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

Data sources, namely law enforcement administrators from various geographic areas, enabled this research to capture spatially sensitive data and then develop common themes that repeated across localities. Such diversity in respondents' locations reduced location-specific commonalities such as agency-specific ideologies, culture, or jurisdictional focusing events. Additionally, content analysis, a staple in document analysis, provided significant support for findings, creating interlocking themes (Stan, 2010). Therefore, the triangulation of content data and analysis of multiple viewpoints maximize this study's rigor and credibility (Denzin, 2009).

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability can be demonstrated through thick, rich descriptions of conclusions and interpretations. Researchers draw easily followable and repeatable lines directly from data to conclusions (Cope, 2013). In-depth descriptions elucidating all processes and roadblocks in the research, mapping the journey of deduction to such a degree that others may easily duplicate the research (Anney, 2014). Additionally, according to Koch (2006), the use of

reflexive journaling also assists in confirmability. A paper journal was used for reflective journaling during all stages of the present research.

Additionally, while coding the qualitative survey data, the memo function of NVivo14 was used to capture the decision-making process. Qualitative and spatial data and analysis findings were triangulated to identify converging patterns or themes. By comparing and contrasting the results, a deeper insight and a more robust interpretation of the data shed light on and led to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of MP on public policy.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is a crucial concept in qualitative research that refers to the degree to which findings can be applied or transferred to other contexts or settings. Transferability is rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, which recognizes that qualitative research is inherently context-bound and that the phenomena under investigation are inextricably linked to the specific social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they occur (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Therefore, qualitative research aims not to achieve statistical generalization but to provide rich, thick descriptions that enable readers to make informed judgments about the transferability of the findings to their contexts (Kyngäs et al., 2019; Shenton, 2004).

To enhance transferability, this research employed one of the most widely recognized approaches, detailed, contextualized descriptions of the research setting, participants, data collection methods, and analytical processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These rich descriptions, often referred to as “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, p. 6), enable readers to assess the degree of similarity, thereby facilitating informed decisions about the potential transferability of the findings.

In the context of this research, transferability was ensured by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research process, including the research setting, participant characteristics, data collection methods, and analytical procedures. These descriptions provide readers with sufficient contextual information to assess the potential transferability of the findings.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical research behavior is paramount in qualitative studies. Strict adherence to principles must be met to “protect participants and researchers, minimize harm, increase the sum of good, assure trust, ensure research integrity” (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012, p. 65). This research complied with and closely followed ethical mandates espoused by Kang and Hwang (2021). Informed consent forms were attached to all surveys and were acknowledged and agreed to prior to participation. The research data were maintained in two separate password-protected data lockers (primary and backup) and kept in a secure location. Research integrity is “honesty and probity within the conduct of qualitative research” (Watts, 2008, p. 440). Research integrity must be demonstrated and not just promised; all data, coding, and memos are available in compliance with Liberty University academic requirements, allowing confirmatory data analysis. Because of the subjective nature of qualitative coding (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019), there is a risk of researcher bias, which can pose risks to research validity.

This survey was administered online through Qualtrics, and none of the questions in the survey asked for any identifying information outside of the agency name. Further, Qualtrics does not collect the participants’ internet protocol addresses, which could be used to trace the identity of individual participants. The survey design protected confidentiality by not obtaining personal information that could be traced back to the survey taker. No questions asked personally identifying information, and participants were able to choose whether or not to answer questions

if they were not comfortable answering. Additionally, participants were able to choose a location of privacy to complete the survey if they so desired because the survey was online. All documentation was submitted to and approved by the Liberty University IRB for compliance with accepted standards for studies involving human subjects.

### **Summary**

The research investigated the impact of MP on public policy, focusing on law enforcement as a model. The research questions focused on how MP affects public policy in law enforcement and, based on such policies, whether agencies have altered their UOF policies or experienced budget changes. The study employed a grounded qualitative design to address the research question. The research also examined the elements of MP, including concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality, and volatility. Text and corpus analysis was used to track changes in media coverage, and analysis of introduced legislation helped assess volatility and disproportionality.

Surveys were used to explore the subquestions related to changes in the UOF policies and budget reductions, and process tracing was used to analyze the effects of MP on public policy. The study collected data through surveys distributed to law enforcement agencies that are members of the MCCA, and responses were analyzed alongside published violent crime statistics to identify correlations. The survey covered various aspects, including agency demographics, changes in the UOF policies, and budget changes impacting operations. The data collected were analyzed to determine whether policy changes are associated with improvements or deteriorations in crime rates, UOF incidents, injuries, and complaints. Confirmation survey interviews were conducted with questions drawn from the survey as a follow-up to garner a more

nuanced understanding of the influence of MP dynamics on the evolution of public policy within law enforcement agencies.

In conclusion, calls to defund the police, and for federal police UOF oversight, although existing previously, have had sporadic and highly compartmentalized support. This research was intended to contribute to understanding the relationship between MP, public perception, and policy impacts in the subfield of law enforcement administration. By examining the case studies of the Defund the Police movement and police UOF reform, the study provides insights into the effects of MP on public policy law enforcement policies and their impact on societal reactions and normative social order. Chapter Three explained the research methodology, design, and rationale selected to obtain the study purpose best. The chapter then reiterated the research questions. A section explained the data collection method, analysis, and anticipated challenges, ending with an overview to ensure trustworthiness. Chapter Four elucidates the findings associated with the research.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

This grounded qualitative study investigated the far-reaching implications of MP on public policy in the United States, focusing specifically on its impact as measured through law enforcement agencies. MP is a social phenomenon characterized by widespread fear, anxiety, and outrage over perceived threats to societal values, norms, or interests. It often involves the exaggerated perception of a specific group, behavior, or issue as a menace to the existing social order. This research unravels the complex interplay between moral panics, political elites, and policy decisions, informed by elite theory (Mills, 1956), PET (Jones et al., 1998), and MP theory (S. Cohen, 1969).

Elite theory posits that a small group of influential individuals influences societal decisions, often steering policy decisions to align with their interests. This perspective underscores political elites' pivotal role in orchestrating and influencing societal and political behavior. PET suggests that policy change occurs in bursts rather than gradual shifts. This framework emphasizes the episodic nature of policy shifts, highlighting moments of upheaval and transformation punctuating periods of relative stability. MP theory, developed by S. Cohen (1969) in the early 1970s, provides insights into the exaggerated perceptions and societal reactions associated with perceived threats. This theoretical lens explains how societal anxieties and fears can be magnified and manipulated, often leading to heightened public concern and policy responses that may not necessarily align with objective realities.

This study identified the key factors driving MP, analyzed their impact on policy development and implementation, and further explored second-order consequences that exacerbate societal divisions and negatively impact the public's perception of the enforcers of

public policy. This study can equip policymakers and public administrators with crucial insights by adopting a grounded approach involving in-depth data collection and analysis. These insights promote evidence-based, equitable, and effective policies, ultimately fostering more resilient, inclusive, and cohesive communities facing MP and societal challenges.

Calls to defund the police and federal police UOF oversight, although existing previously, have had sporadic and highly compartmentalized support. Since the tragic officer-involved deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, when minorities died at the hands of police, there has been a much larger and louder call for change. This study was not intended to answer those calls; it focused on whether the calls for implementing change in the law enforcement profession fit the classical S. Cohen (1969) theoretical model of MP developed in the early 1970s.

The central problem investigated by this study revolved around understanding how MP influences public policy within law enforcement. The challenge lies in the ephemeral impact of policymakers who, driven by political considerations, create policies that law enforcement must implement as SLBs (Lipsky, 1969). Surprisingly, no known studies from public administration or criminal justice scholarship have explored the factors influencing MP impact on public policies in law enforcement, particularly regarding the effects on staffing, public perception, and second-order consequences.

The aforementioned focusing events, prominently featuring the deaths of minority citizens at the hands of law enforcement, have elicited significant national outrage, leading to calls for diverse degrees of police reform. These events have become illustrative of broader societal issues regarding race, justice, and law enforcement practices, catalyzing widespread

public discourse and activism. The narratives have often highlighted instances of perceived injustice, institutional failures, and systemic biases within law enforcement agencies. As a result, they have become focal points for advocacy efforts aimed at addressing systemic inequalities and promoting accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system.

The dissemination of these narratives through various media channels has played a crucial role in amplifying public awareness and mobilizing support for reform initiatives. They have galvanized diverse participants, including activists, community leaders, policymakers, and law enforcement officials, to engage in dialogues and action plans aimed at fostering meaningful change. Moreover, these narratives have underscored the importance of addressing racial equity and social justice issues in law enforcement practices, signaling a broader societal imperative for reform and accountability.

### **Survey Data**

This study's reliance on straightforward qualitative data informed by secondary data developed the basis for drawing conclusions from the gathered data. Data from close-ended questions adopted a multiple-choice format, accommodating both single and multiple responses; additionally, open-ended questions allowed respondents to answer questions using their own words and independent points of view. The Qualtrics survey tool facilitated the automatic tracking of question responses as percentages of the total number of responses. The resulting final survey results report was pivotal for evaluating specific information.

Within the comprehensive report, responses were meticulously assessed based on their relationships to other questions on the survey. This interquestion analysis provided a means of validation, particularly when examining issues or information aligned with similar data points.

Consistent responses with minimal variance were deemed reliable, contributing to the overall robustness of the collected data.

A summative content analysis approach was employed in tandem with manual coding, leveraging open-source commercially available software for generating word frequency lists (Lune & Berg, 2017; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Qualtrics and NVivo 14 played instrumental roles in analyzing and organizing responses relative to survey questions, facilitating the extraction of qualitative insights. Qualtrics was used to distribute and collect all survey data. Once the survey was collected, all survey data were transferred to NVivo 14. NVivo 14 was used to store and categorize survey answers and reflexive memos. Then, NVivo 14 was used to find commonalities and themes through computer-assisted coding, facilitate manual coding, and visualize hierarchical models consistent with a grounded methodology.

Various qualitative data analysis methods were applied, and shared sentiments among most surveys were identified. These sentiments correlated to the underlying issues initially discussed in this study. The analysis process involved manipulating transcripts to solely include participants' responses, excluding the words or phrases used in the survey questions. This multifaceted approach allowed a nuanced understanding of the data through analysis and provided depth and context through qualitative insights. The integration of both methods strengthened the study's capacity to draw comprehensive and well-grounded conclusions, contributing to the robustness of the research findings.

### **Final Sample Size**

On October 26, 2023, the survey was distributed to 68 agencies representing the entire U.S. contingent of the MCCA, using the Qualtrics survey link associated with an introductory letter emailed to each agency. Survey distribution permitted the respondent to submit the survey

only once to avoid ballot stuffing. Participants could also save their responses and complete the survey in multiple online sessions.

Despite proactive outreach, five agencies indicated their inability to participate because of agency policies restricting the release of records without a Freedom of Information Act request or policies outright prohibiting survey participation. Of the 63 remaining agencies, 27 initiated the survey, and 21 completed it by the closing date on November 27, 2023. This yielded a 33.33% return rate ( $n = 21$ ), signifying a substantial and representative engagement from the surveyed agencies.

Although not reaching the ideal response rate, the obtained proportion of responses was deemed acceptable for an online survey. Deutskens et al. (2004) found that the average internet-based survey response was 17% for surveys over 20 questions or more and 25% for surveys under 20. This study's engagement level indicates the relevance and interest of the participating agencies in the study's subject matter. Furthermore, this response rate aligns with industry standards for survey research involving top managers of large organizations, which is a return rate of 35.5% with a standard deviation of 13.3 (Baruch, 1999).

### **Participants**

The following section employs a comprehensive survey distributed among members of the MCCA to investigate the intricate dynamics of public and political pressures on law enforcement agencies. By anonymizing agency data through geographic coding, the study delved into the nuanced variations in population size, staffing levels, and governance structures across participating jurisdictions. The predominance of mayor-council systems in the sampled agencies warranted a closer examination of how external influences might shape these governance frameworks. Supporting the survey findings, postsurvey interviews were conducted with diverse

participating agencies, ensuring a multifaceted exploration of the subject matter and fostering a more holistic understanding of the complexities inherent in contemporary law enforcement practices.

### **Survey**

As stated, responses to a voluntary survey of law enforcement agencies that are members of the MCCA provided significant data for the study. Results from the study, therefore, informed the analysis. The survey, comprised of basic agency demographic information, aimed to capture the influence of public and political pressures on agency practices, policies, and operations. To maintain promised participant anonymity, each agency was assigned a simple code based on geographic location and alphabetical order (e.g., Southeast 1 = [SE1], Southeast 2 = [SE2]).

The responses were broken down into geographic bins (see Table 1). All were members of the MCCA, which publishes membership guidelines requiring 1000+ sworn staff, a residential population of 1 million or more, and requires that the agency be the primary law enforcement agency in the jurisdiction. The survey revealed that only three of the 21 respondent agencies met all three published criteria for 2015 to 2023. Per MCCA, agencies that do not meet all of the criteria are allowed to join the association on a case-by-case basis.

Agency demographics offered insights into the diversity of participating jurisdictions with variations in population, approved sworn positions, filled sworn positions, and forms of government (see Table 1). Notably, most jurisdictions followed the mayor-council form of government, with council-manager and county executive/council as other prevalent structures. This exploration of government structures allowed the examination of potential external influences on the agencies, considering research indicating that publicly elected mayors may be

more susceptible to external pressures and public opinion than other forms of local governance (Lavery, 1992).

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics 2018–2022*

Agency alias	Population Mean	Approved sworn positions Mean	Filled sworn positions Mean	Form of government
SW1	560,325	1,100.00	904.20	Mayor council
SW2	930,949	1,863.60	1,577.00	Council-manager
MA1	847,111	1,976.40	1,843.60	County exec and council
MA2	676,371	4,000.00	3,541.80	Mayor council
MA3	1,140,020	1,451.60	1,497.00	Council-manager
MA4	951,633	1,786.00	1,530.40	County exec and council
MA5	452,272	817.80	752.60	Council-manager
MW1	306,852	1,095.00	1,012.40	Mayor council
MW2	883,784	2,008.40	1,836.00	Mayor council
MW3	872,947	1,700.00	1,598.40	Mayor council
MW4	516,989	1,325.00	1,110.00	Mayor council
MW5	470,829	800.00	647.00	Council-manager
MW6	745,733	907.33	816.11	Council-manager
SE1	927,523	1,782.80	1,719.60	Mayor council
SE2	433,337	1,348.00	1,300.00	Mayor council
SE3	2,670,966	3,112.60	3,034.00	Mayor council
NE1	303,478	1,700.00	1,010.80	Mayor council
WC1	534,113	851.20	808.40	Mayor council
WC2	428,362	943.00	828.00	Mayor council
WC3	1,370,026	2,038.80	1,864.20	Mayor council
WC4	197,515	584.33	487.33	Mayor council

*Note.* SW = Southwest, MA = Mid-Atlantic, MW = Midwest, WC = West Coast, SE = Southeast, NE = Northeast.

## Interviews

The follow-up interview participants were solicited from the pool of survey respondents.

An initial review of the survey data, correlated documents, and archival analysis informed the

selection process. For the interviews, three agencies were paramount as critical cases because of outlier information reported in their survey responses, warranting further exploration through interviews. According to their survey answers, these three cases had increased budgets, minimal protest activity, high staffing numbers, and positive public support. This starkly contrasted the remainder of the survey participants who reported low support, low staffing, low budgets, or high protest activity.

Because of logistical constraints, as mentioned previously, 15 agencies were solicited for postsurvey interviews. Ultimately, five agencies agreed to engage in the interview process, allowing them to clarify and elaborate on their survey responses. All three outlier agencies agreed to participate. Two agencies were from the mid-Atlantic region, one was from the West Coast, one was from the Midwest region, and one was from the Southeast region (see Table 2). This geographically diverse sample allowed varied perspectives and experiences, not influenced by geographic culture or a singular salient local focusing event, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

**Table 2**

*Interview Participants*

Participant	Gender	Experience	Position
MA5	Male	30 years	Executive
MW4	Male	27 years	Executive
WC1	Male	31 years	Executive
SE2	Male	24 years	Executive
MA3(1)	Male	19 years	Supervisor
MA3(2)	Male	23 years	Executive

*Note.* A second interview with the agency MA3 was conducted because the primary interviewee could not provide sufficient information.



## Research Results

A survey and follow-up interviews were the primary data sources for this portion of the study. Primary coding was achieved through the auto-coding function of NVivo 14 qualitative software; once completed, a line-by-line manual coding process was conducted. This allowed for a more nuanced approach and to ensure an accurate representation of the data.

Using a constant comparative method applicable to grounded research, thematic coding was applied iteratively to identify, review, refine, and categorize recurring themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I thoroughly examined participants' responses to extract meaningful patterns. A systematic process of reading and coding the responses was then conducted, generating initial codes that evolved into broader themes through iterative comparison. The thematic coding process identified eight overarching themes, offering a nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives. Results are presented and discussed in relation to these emergent themes (see Table 3).

The following primary themes were found through the use of NVivo14 qualitative software. The frequency distribution of words analysis, excluding common words, produced moderate data. The following primary themes were identified and explored: (a) financial changes, (b) focusing events, (c) local initiatives and programs, (d) media influence, (e) morale and efficiency impact, (f) political pressure and policymaker stance, (g) public pressure and calls for change, and (h) transparency and accountability measures. The information obtained from the identified themes was used to inform answers to the research question, "How does MP affect public policy implemented within the field of law enforcement?" It would not be out of the scope of possibility that, with a larger sample, such themes would have even greater significance.

**Table 3***Manually Developed Themes Corresponding Description and Number of References*

Theme	Description	References
Theme 1: Financial changes	Encompasses instances where there were actual changes in police budgets, including reductions or redirection of funds.	16
Theme 2: Public pressure and calls for change	Captures the varying degrees of public sentiment regarding the reallocation of police budgets to other social programs.	32
Theme 3: Focusing event	Events that are believed or understood to be driving factors in public or political pressures	67
Theme 4: Political pressure and policymaker stance	Focuses on the role of political figures and policymakers in advocating for or against the reallocation of police budgets and UOF reform	44
Theme 5: Local initiatives and programs	Focuses on specific initiatives, ordinances, or programs that involve the reallocation of funds for social services, and attempts to improve community Image	38
Theme 6: Media influence	Includes traditional analogy, and TV media as well as social media impacts	15
Theme 7: Morale and efficiency impacts	Explores the impact of political pressures on law enforcement agencies, such as morale, efficiency, and staffing	25
Theme 8: Transparency and accountability measures	Involves changes in policies and practices related to transparency, accountability, and community oversight.	44

**Theme 1: Financial Changes**

The financial ramifications experienced by the surveyed respondents have been considerable, reflecting a prevailing trend of budgetary constraints and resource reallocation affecting law enforcement agencies. A noteworthy majority of participants, over half, disclosed stagnant or reduced staffing allowances between 2018 and 2022, signaling a substantial strain on operational capabilities (MA2, SW1). These fiscal limitations have prompted various measures to reduce costs and optimize resources. Notably, some agencies have opted to temporarily shutter primary police academies and dismantle specialized units to alleviate financial burdens (MA2,

SW1). Although imperative from a financial standpoint, these adaptations may impact the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement operations.

Another consequence of budgetary constraints is the transition from face-to-face services to alternative delivery modes. Instead of officers responding to the caller's location, community members are now directed to file reports online, over the phone, or at local stations for certain offenses, reflecting efforts to streamline operations and curtail expenses (MA4, WM3). However, this shift may affect accessibility and community engagement, particularly for individuals encountering barriers to online or remote services.

Furthermore, the reallocation of funds within public safety budgets toward nonlaw enforcement endeavors signals a broader reordering of priorities and resource allocation strategies. For instance, one jurisdiction diverted \$11.4 million from its public safety budget to establish a new violence prevention department beyond traditional law enforcement purview (NE1). Similarly, MW6 witnessed reductions in peripheral services, such as community engagement and specialized units, because of manpower shortages, underscoring the impact of budget constraints on agency operations.

Moreover, some agencies found themselves burdened with additional service requirements without a commensurate expansion of budgets, exacerbating financial pressures. The inclusion of social service workers for community aid services and heightened training demands exemplifies tasks imposed on agencies without sufficient financial backing (MA5, MW3, WC3, SE2, SE3, WC1). Although not directly under the defund umbrella, these mandates contribute to financial strain and operational hurdles for law enforcement agencies.

A causal relationship appeared evident in certain budgetary issues. A significant correlation was observed in the following instance: although MA4 borders MA2, the latter has

slashed its public safety budget, coinciding with a 71% surge in violent crime between 2021 and 2022 in MA2 (see Table 4). MA4 noted, “I believe our close proximity to [MA2] and the rising crime rate educated citizens that cutting police funding was not appropriate.” In another scenario, an agency cited budget increments in recent cycles owing to heightened demand for police services and the imperative to substantially raise officer salaries to halt a mass exodus from the agency (WC4).

**Table 4**

*Violent Crime Rate for Participant Agencies*

Agency	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
SW1	1,370.67	1,353.32	1,341.19	1,437.49	1,380.23
SW2	401.05	433.68	494.12	523.87	540.28
MA1	571.01	555.33	446.21	411.99	347.97
MW1	840.51	845.57	889.03	819.91	841.89
MW2	534.69	533.63	637.96	666.50	486.66
MA2	984.11	1,012.98	990.22	355.99	707.53
WC1	554.43	457.23	656.63	903.75	865.29
MW3	1,277.73	1,037.43	1,099.98	1062.08	1,038.98
SE1	543.26	544.39	558.68	563.26	556.02
MW4	967.18	1,149.21	1,006.90	1,063.64	680.45
SE2	686.68	650.75	598.57	0.00*	222.43
SE3	201.53	199.27	225.63	88.27	204.39
NE1	679.10	565.38	480.75	469.70	520.19
WC2	1,272.47	1,267.07	1,286.70	1,452.21	1,521.10
MA4	211.42	211.85	242.76	259.01	264.28
MW5	357.22	320.19	409.26	479.19	499.76
WC4	756.61	735.41	940.94	1,002.10	978.28
WC3	390.95	378.18	382.78	417.63	430.53
MW6	182.84	181.45	206.55	201.46	179.87
MA5	126.98	133.08	99.92	112.53	87.72

*Note.* Violent crime rate = (violent crime incidents / population) x 100,000. Violent crime incidents published by NIBRS for murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault.

\*did not report Crime Data in 2021

The repercussions of defunding endeavors reverberate long-term; in several instances, multimillion-dollar sums, such as \$14 million (MA2) and \$11.4 million (NE1), were extracted from police budgets, resulting in diminished staffing and the closure of entire divisions. In the case of SW2, “Council cut \$150M from the budget in the form of reallocation of [SW2] departments out of the control of [SW2] and under the control of external city agencies,” alongside the “closing of the police academy for a year,” a “5% reduction in the public safety budget,” and the disbandment of tactical and community engagement teams.

A significant majority of respondents, 71.4%, attested to varying degrees of public pressure to reallocate funds. Conversely, a minority of jurisdictions, contrary to public demand, reported stable or increased police budgets. The disjuncture between the intensity of discourse and the factual budgetary landscape became evident as agencies navigated the delicate balance of stability maintenance while adapting to evolving community needs. This theme acknowledged that certain issues necessitate dedicated financial commitments within the broader context of community funding.

The data underscore the substantial financial impact of budgetary constraints and resource reallocation on law enforcement agencies, precipitating operational adjustments and shifts in service delivery. These challenges underscore the imperative of effective budget management strategies and deliberate resource allocation to ensure law enforcement operations’ sustained effectiveness and efficiency while addressing evolving community needs and priorities.

## **Theme 2: Public Pressure and Calls for Change**

Calls for change can be correlated to public discourse manifested through public protests or riots, as mentioned in the opening of this research project. Survey respondents were asked

whether they responded to protests defined as “gatherings of more than 100 individuals, with property damage” since 2018. The survey data showed that 95.2% of the participating agencies responded to protests as defined. The data also indicated that 61.9% said they had responded to a riot as defined in Chapter One, resulting in over \$100,000 of property damage. All respondents who stated they had responded to riots as defined, did enact mutual aid assistance from neighboring jurisdictions.

Respondent agencies have stated that the demand for the UOF reform centered between 2019 and 2020, “2019 to 2020 the push was great, but as of 2022 to 2023 it’s a topic is [sic] brought up less” (MW3). In one case, there was significant pressure from the public to alter the agency’s response to resistance (UOF) regarding actions taken during protests in 2020, such as restricting chemical munition under many circumstances (SE3).

As previously indicated by data from the ACLED, nationwide protests increased by 407% from 2019 through 2020 (see Figure 3). More granularly, the difference between Q1- 2020 protests increased by 152%, and then Q2- 2020 again increased by an additional 201%. Q2- 2020 correlates with the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd (see Figure 4)

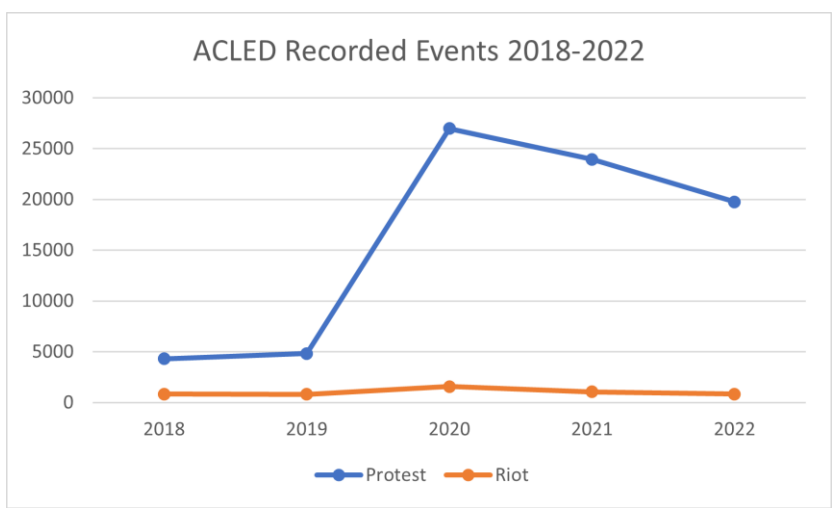
Adding strength to this theme was the high number of protests and riots mentioned previously and the explosion of Twitter activity with the hashtag, or derivatives of the hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter. This indicated significant public pressure exerted on political entities to defund law enforcement. One of the published demands from the Black Lives Matter (BLM) website includes defunding the police (BLM, n.d.).

Of the survey participants, 95% (20/21) stated that their agency responded to public protests between 2018 and 2022. Of those agencies that reported responding to protests, 65% (13/20) classified the event as a riot under the parameters mentioned in Chapter One. Using this

as a baseline, it is evident that there was a large amount of public pressure for change between 2018 and 2022.

**Figure 3**

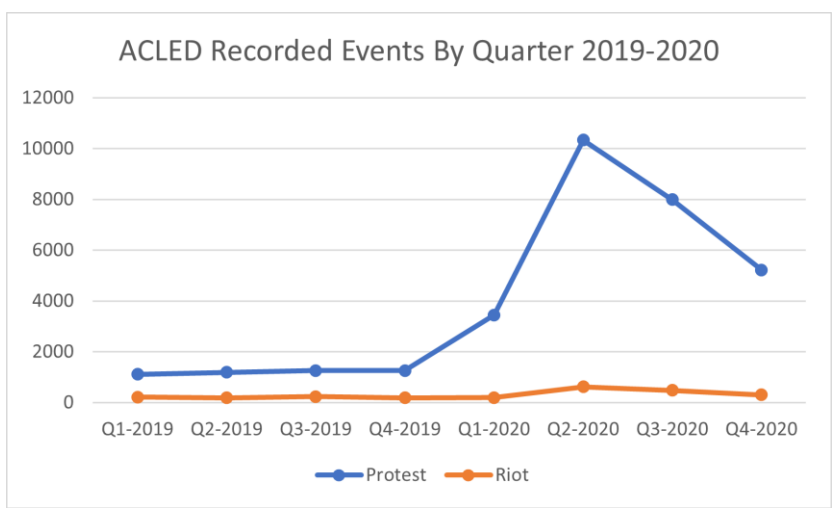
*ACLEd Recorded Events United States 2018-2022*



*Note.* Data from <https://www.acleddata.com/dashboard> (December 1, 2023) using the filters riot/protest, United States, and rioters/protesters.

**Figure 4**

*ACLEd Recorded US Events by Quarter 2019-2020*



*Note.* Data from <https://www.acleddata.com/dashboard> (December 1, 2023) using the filters riot/protest, United States, and rioters/protesters.

### Theme 3: Focusing Event

Numerous reasons were associated with the protest events, as categorized in Table 5. Survey participants were asked to report the top three reasons for such protest events. The majority of the focusing events (51%) were associated with either national-level law enforcement events such as George Floyd (WC2, SW2, MW4, WC3, SE2, MW6), Breanna Taylor [*sic*], (MW4), social injustice/perceived police brutality (MW6, WC4), police use of force (SE1), BLM (WC2), and overall police reform protests (SW2). However, local-level law enforcement-related events included local officer-involved shootings (SW1, WC3) and arrests (NE1).

**Table 5**

*Reported Public Protest Focusing Events*

Protest event focus	<i>N</i>	%
National: Non-LEO	10	16%
National: LEO	25	40%
Local: Non-LEO	10	16%
Local: LEO	7	11%
None/NA	11	17%

Nonlaw enforcement reasons made up 32% of the responses, and national events such as visit from President Trump (WC2), gun rights (SW1), and January 6 (MA2) all fall into that category. Local issues, including sports team win (MA4), transgender (MW2), business owner activity (MW5), COVID lockdowns (MW4), and abortion (MW2) were also reported.

### Theme 4: Political Pressure and Policymaker Stance

The application of political pressures reverberated throughout the survey responses. A point of contention was that respondents believed that political pressure has resulted from MP-focusing events. MA1 shared, “The change is coming from politicians in the state who are reacting to activity across the country.” In one instance, WC2 stated that they “have more boxes



to check and policies have become more complicated,” but as a result of the changes, they have “much stronger support from our mayor and city council” supporting the notion that policy elites have imposed their will on the selected agency and once compliance was achieved, they then supported the agency. In one instance, the interview participant mentioned that because state legislators are reacting to other large population centers, they often enact “contrary” legislation to what the local population wants or needs (WC1).

Analyzing respondent data, 55.6% of the respondents reported changes in the UOF policies in 2020 or 2021. With 61.6% citing legal changes or consent decrees requiring policy updates, 23.1% cited that policies were changed to stay consistent with best practices. MA2 reported, “We have mostly been impacted by a series of legislation over the last 3 years that reduced what we are able to do.” WC2 explained, “Significant pressure from city council proposing an ordinance to establish an Office of the Independent Monitor.”

MW3 made another telling statement:

Some of the changes were required by the state of [redacted] as we became aware. The movement was not towards change but towards a review for better transparency with public input related to the events surrounding George Floyd, choke holds, and the public’s understanding of reasonable officer standards.

This indicates significant political pressure because of an aggregate focusing event. Other respondents indicated high political pressure in 2020 and 2021, which would correlate with the focusing events of the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor as major protests initiated at the end of May 2020, as cited by ACLED previously in this chapter.

The data showcased instances in which political pressures emanating from legislative changes and consent decrees prompted agencies to adapt their UOF policies to align with

evolving best practices. Noteworthy is the acknowledgment of external pressures as a response to events regarding George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, suggesting significant political pressure stemming from aggregate focusing events (see Table 5 and Table 6).

**Table 6**

*UOF Policy Change Date*

Year	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
2018	6	16.7	16.7
2019	4	11.1	27.8
2020	10	27.8	55.6
2021	10	27.8	83.3
2022	6	16.7	100.0
Total	36	100.0	100.0

*Note.* Seven responses included changes made in multiple years, and two respondents stated they did not change policy.

A common thread that resonated throughout this theme was that significant outside pressures by state or local politicians or legal mandates significantly influenced the agencies' policies and operations. MW2 stated, "Initially political pressure and then ultimately a court injunction necessitated changes." MA2 explained, "Between 2020 and now, several police reform laws have been passed." WC1, in an interview, stated that they were subjected to significant state legislative pressures when it came to a specific UOF policy: "Those were all done in a legislative arena."

The study supports the assertion that many of the use-of-force reforms are related to political actors reacting to external stimuli to influence change in agency operations. MA1 said, "The change is coming from politicians in the state who are reacting to activity across the country." WC3 shared, "State mandated procedures related to training, barring of UOF techniques like carotid restraint, and stop data collection." WC1 explained, "It wasn't about

public law enforcement policy or doing research. It was about legislators reacting and making some fairly significant changes in the law.” This sentiment underscores the extent of such pressures.

Of the survey respondents, 87% of agencies have modified their standing UOF policy, training, or reporting in the last 5 years. Of those, 76.9% of respondents changed because of legislative initiatives, case and statutory law changes, and PERF, IACP, or “eight can’t wait” recommendations. Not a single respondent mentioned the NYU Project Initiative. This was supported by a postsurvey interview with MA5, who stated, “Our agency asked PERF to come in and review some of our policies and to give recommendations.” He continued with an explanation of why the MA5 chief did this:

The biggest reason that he asked for PERF to come in is that it gives him a chance to make some changes and give [*sic*] somebody else to give their perspective and [he] wants to be able to have a credible organization agreeing with him to make the change.

MW4 mentioned that the most significant influence on their UOF policies and practices was in response to the previously adopted training program ICAT, which stands for Integrating Communication Assessment and Tactics training promoted by PERF. For MW4, ICAT was initiated with their agency prior to any focusing events mentioned in this study. A second agency, WC1, mentioned the influence of a state-run law enforcement accreditation agency, POST, the Peace Officer Standard and Training Commission, as a significant influence.

MA3v2 mentioned the impact that the pressures and behaviors of the elected district attorney have on street-level policies. Based on what they will criminally prosecute in court significantly impacts what happens on the lowest level of implementation. During this interview, it was mentioned that even if something is by ordinance arrestable, the SLB may not enforce it if

they believe it will not be prosecuted. Additionally, the district attorney's propensity in this specific jurisdiction to criminally charge officers for what he or she believes may be excessive force has resulted in SLBs being hesitant to use force even if allowable by policies.

In summary, political pressures resonated significantly in the survey responses, reflecting concerns about their origins in MP-inducing events. Respondents noted state politicians' reactions to nationwide activity as influential, although some felt local legislators enacted contrary laws. Notably, 55.6% reported changes in use-of-force policies, primarily influenced by legal mandates resulting from focusing events like the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. External pressures significantly impacted agency policies and operations, and 87% modified use-of-force protocols in response to legislative initiatives. Interviews highlighted political actors' sway over policy changes, underscoring the intricate relationship between political dynamics and law enforcement practices.

### **Theme 5: Local Initiatives and Programs**

Survey and interview data indicated that there was a significant move toward local initiatives and programs in response to funding and resource allocation. Many survey respondents described transferring program responsibility to outside resources for mental health calls. In one instance, the "city implemented a new response team that is not related to the police department to respond to calls that involve mental health and no violence" (SW1). Alternatively, "The city funded a program in which a nonsworn deflection unit responds to qualifying mental health runs" (MW4) or the addition of civilian social workers (MA5).

A coresponder or nonofficer response model for mental health-related calls is a common theme throughout the survey responses. In one jurisdiction, the agency has started a gang outreach program aimed at reducing violence by providing services such as GED and high

school diploma counseling, hoping to give the youth a means of enhancing the quality of life outside of gang activities (SE3).

Agencies have shifted focus to include more community outreach and community programs to enhance public participation. Community first diversions team (MA4), enhanced public information officer and social media outreach officers' units were frequently cited in the survey to enhance officer and community ties and transparency. Events such as Coffee with a Cop or Chess with a Cop (MA2) are seen as a way to engage with the community positively.

Although this theme was noticeably less robust than other themes, surveys and interviews revealed a shift toward local initiatives because of funding constraints. Many agencies are transferring mental health call responsibilities to specialized teams outside the police department or funding nonsworn deflection units and civilian social workers. These efforts reflect a trend toward nonofficer response models. Additionally, agencies are prioritizing community outreach, introducing programs like gang outreach for youth services and events like Coffee with a Cop to enhance officer-community relations and transparency. These strategies demonstrate proactive measures to address community needs while navigating resource limitations.

### **Theme 6: Media Influence**

Multiple respondents underscored the media's influence. The response data indicated that social and traditional media sources have been used positively and negatively. In shaping protest events, there is a multifaceted perspective on the complex interplay between public sentiment, media influence, and the nuanced landscape of law enforcement responses and reforms (SE2, SE3, MA3, WC3). As stated by SE1, the "national climate fueled by media" was one of the significant contributors to protests. All survey participants indicated that public and political sentiments were driven by events discovered via media coverage. This was a logical assumption

because individuals on the West Coast would not have witnessed events from other locations without media coverage.

Agency respondents also recognized the need to have positive relations with the media, and multiple survey respondents mentioned that they have increased their traditional and social media outreach and availability (SE2, WC1, MW6). SE2 shared the following (repeated words or stuttering were removed for clarity):

I think that that that's a huge help. I think that, you know, the fact that we do have a very good relationship with it with our media outlets here, we don't try to play hide the ball with them. If we're wrong, we admit we're wrong. But we do maintain those relationships. [We] really don't "No comment" our way out of anything. We have learned through the years and through hard experiences that if you "no comment" anything. That 2-minute report or that minute and a half report has got to be filled up with something. So if it's not you, it's not your PIO behind that microphone. They're [media] going out in the street and they're going to put that microphone in somebody else's face. And so you get out, you can either tell your own story or have somebody else tell it for you. But yeah, our relationship with the media is, very open, very just a very collaborative working relationship.

Although calls for defunding reverberated in discussions, their translation into tangible shifts in budgetary allocations or UOF reform remains complex, highlighting the intricacies of implementing substantial changes amid evolving societal expectations. In a postsurvey interview, SE2 emphasized that their positive relationship with the media was instrumental in maintaining a positive relationship with the community and ensuring that "the idea of defunding the police was never really given any serious consideration" in their jurisdiction.

## **Theme 7: Morale and Efficiency Impacts**

Analysis of this theme revealed that because of political, media, and public pressures, agencies face challenges that they have not had to overcome before. Impacts on staffing include low morale, mass retirements, lack of recruiting, and inability to staff needed positions.

The looming specter of political pressures significantly influences law enforcement agencies' efficiency, morale, and policies. Increased scrutiny, media portrayals, and evolving political climates impact morale, recruitment, and operational efficiency. This theme brings to light the palpable effects of political pressures on the human aspect of law enforcement—the officers.

The undercurrent of recruitment challenges and staffing issues emerged as a common thread woven through the narratives. Political decisions, negative perceptions, and media portrayals have impacted the ability to attract and retain officers. Changes in working conditions have led to resignations, affecting overall efficiency and morale. Statements like “Our agency struggles with recruitment, and many officers are opting for early retirement” and “Morale has, however, been significantly impacted by political pressures. Retirements and resignations are up considerably, and recruiting has been a challenge” (MW2) underscore the tangible consequences of external pressures on law enforcement agencies.

Morale, through the last few years (2018-2022), was mentioned as a primary casualty of external pressures on law enforcement agencies. In the cases studied, political and public pressures to defund or implement use-of-force reform led to low morale. Agencies reported high levels of early retirements, resignations, and negative attitudes. SE1 stated, “Moral is challenged when the media consistently portrays officers negatively.”

This manifests itself in both retention issues and hiring challenges. MW3 shared,

Many police officers retire early (across the nation), and many members of the public do not apply to the police department ... because of the political pressures related to attrition, or for new applicants, [they are] unsure of the support by those they will serve. Additional agencies noted challenges with basic staffing for operational needs and reduced division effectiveness, such as removing tactical teams for 12 months, closing the basic police academy, and disbanding mounted patrol units (WC3, SW1, MA2).

Each agency was asked to identify the number of approved and filled sworn positions from 2018 through 2022. There was a distinct disparity between the number of approved and filled positions, and the median trended toward more unfilled positions as the years progressed. SE2 reported the lowest mean vacancy percentage with a mean of 2.51% vacancy over the 5 years reported. NE1 reported the greatest mean vacancy percentage with a mean vacancy rate of 40.54% (see Table 7). An additional calculation revealed that the combined mean vacancy by year in 2018 was 8.4%, which increased significantly to 13.32% in 2022 (see Table 8). This trend is consistent with other studies showing increased law enforcement officer vacancies in the post-Ferguson era (Mourtgos et al., 2023).

This perceived erosion of morale directly translates into retention and hiring hurdles; officers have retired prematurely and potential recruits have been deterred by political pressures, creating operational challenges and reducing division effectiveness. This narrative aligns seamlessly with spatial analysis of secondary data revealing a drastic growth in vacant positions since 2018, correlating perceived political pressures' profound and multifaceted impact on law enforcement agencies' human and operational facets.

Compounding this second-order consequence, additional spatial analysis of secondary data revealed a statistically significant, moderately positive monotonic relationship between staff



**Table 7***Agency Mean Percent Understaffed 2018-2022*

Agency ID	Mean	N	Std. deviation
SW1	14.59300	5	3.70765
SW2	7.95730	5	4.03048
MA1	6.71470	5	3.87812
MA2	17.37500	1	
MA3	2.99110	5	3.39931
MA4	14.31130	5	4.11403
MA5	7.96930	5	3.54796
MW1	7.52440	5	3.50954
MW2	8.59240	5	2.14109
MW3	5.89510	5	4.10556
MW4	16.22640	5	6.75039
MW5	11.92270	5	4.73505
MW6	9.89368	5	2.57243
SE1	3.55390	5	2.61633
SE2	3.92720	2	1.98589
SE3	2.51530	5	0.84105
NE1	40.54120	5	0.57994
WC1	4.99770	5	2.95248
WC2	12.19510	5	2.29890
WC3	8.56640	5	2.11093
WC4	13.54720	5	5.71669

**Table 8***Understaffed Percentage by Year (All Agencies)*

Year	Mean	N	Std. deviation
2018	8.404	19	8.7592
2019	8.417	19	8.8147
2020	10.022	19	8.5360
2021	11.886	20	8.5149
2022	13.321	21	8.7450

vacancy and violent crime rates. The observed moderately positive correlation suggests that as vacancy percentages increase, there is a tendency for crime rates to increase. Where the

perceived political pressures implied a much stronger relation to agency vacancies, the public pressures were also significant. Public and political pressure directly affects agency vacancy; as pressure increases, so does the number of vacant positions. WC3 stated,

The increased scrutiny, political posturing, and associated media comments, along with increased anti-police agenda at state and local politics, has made it more difficult to recruit and motivate officers to engage in policing activities. Most notably, stops/detentions by police at my agency have dropped nearly 50% since 2018, and in some agencies it has dropped nearly 75%. Many politicians wanted less police interaction with communities, they achieved it not by defunding, but rather by changing the working conditions of law enforcement throughout the state.

### **Theme 8: Transparency and Accountability Measures**

Amid the escalating calls for reform in law enforcement agencies, the principles of transparency and accountability have risen to the forefront of discourse. These principles are encapsulated in initiatives to enhance oversight and community engagement while fostering trust through transparent communication channels. Notably, reforms such as revising UOF policies, including civilians in oversight boards, and implementing advanced training programs underscore a collective commitment to bolstering accountability measures in law enforcement.

One prominent thread emerging from survey data and postinterview analyses was the imperative for improved transparency and communication. For instance, the proactive restructuring of the communications unit by WC2 reflects a concerted effort to enhance public and media engagement, acknowledging the pivotal role of effective communication to foster community trust. WC2 explained, “We reorganized communications unit for a more proactive stance.” Similarly, the widespread adoption of body-worn cameras and the introduction of new

reporting systems among various agencies underscore a commitment to transparency and accountability in law enforcement practices.

Moreover, postsurvey interviews revealed collaborative endeavors between law enforcement agencies and external stakeholders, including community action groups, professional policy bodies, and legislative entities. These partnerships, exemplified by MA3v2's collaboration with the NAACP and ACLU, MA5 asking PERF to review policies, and MW4s early initiation of ICAT training highlight the recognition of the value of diverse perspectives in shaping policies and practices that enhance transparency and accountability. MW4 emphasized,

We need to be considering what they're asking. And then, is there a way we can work together to do some sort of hybrid where they are going to recognize we're making an effort and we are recognizing that they may have some valid points? We just can't turn a blind eye to everything they say because maybe they are not our greatest friend every day.

Transparency emerged as a dominant theme in response to mounting public pressure and political demands for increased oversight and data transparency. Efforts such as the proposal for an Office of the Independent Monitor by the city council (WC2) signal a heightened emphasis on accountability measures in law enforcement agencies. Postsurvey interviews further unveil ongoing efforts to establish mechanisms for public and civilian review of policy outcomes and complaint investigations, underscoring a commitment to fostering transparency in law enforcement practices.

### **Subquestions Addressed**

The subsequent section sequentially tackles the subquestions outlined previously, aligning with the four interconnected phases of this research. Employing a qualitative research

approach rooted in grounded theory principles and process tracing methodology, this study delved into Subquestion 1 via historical document analysis, Google Trends searches, legislative reviews, media coverage (analog and social), and corpus analysis of the presidential State of the Union address. Subquestions 2 through 5 drew upon survey responses, interview data, and secondary spatial analysis to enrich and substantiate the research findings. Therefore, those subquestions are presented with the themes developed during coding.

### **Subquestion 1**

Subquestion 1 for this study was, “To what extent might empirical evidence from 2014-2023 support the presence of elements contributing to MP?”

The research embarked on its foundational phase by conducting thorough document analysis and gathering essential background knowledge to grasp the phenomenon of MP comprehensively. This preparatory step laid a robust groundwork for subsequent research subquestions. Various sources, including social, analog, and digital media platforms, online search patterns, and the United States State of the Union address, were meticulously scrutinized to identify commonalities and trends that either reinforced or challenged the concept of MP. This initial investigative phase was imperative to establish whether the elements characterizing MP delineated by S. Cohen (1969, 2011a) could be substantiated.

Despite the extensive theoretical underpinnings regarding MP, a definitive methodology for validating its occurrence remains elusive. This study, however, posited a statistically significant increase in calls for policy actions against perceived folk devils (the purported culprits), discerned through rigorous content analysis. By corroborating established elements of MP through meticulous document scrutiny, the research identified expressions of apprehension and hostility within texts, unveiling a surge in media coverage triggered by specific events.

Through this rigorous process of supporting recognized elements of MP via document analysis, the study offered compelling linkages suggesting the presence of MP within the scope of this study.

### ***MP Elements of Concern and Hostility***

The MP elements of concern and hostility were extracted through the study of text and corpus analysis, showing an increase in media coverage regarding trigger events. Using the News Coverage Index Methodology (Pew Research, 2011) led to a web archive that allowed computer-assisted keyword searches to provide insight into the frequency changes of keywords (G. King et al., 2017). Such keyword mentions were then categorized by year published. Findings showed a significant increase in media coverage with keywords police accountability, police use of force, and police brutality. There was a notable spike in the media mention of those specific keywords with peaks in 2020, correlating with the significant trigger event, the death of George Floyd in May, 2020, and subsequent large-scale riots in many major population areas. The increased media mentions of those keywords support the required elements of concern and hostility (S. Cohen, 2011a; see Figure 1 in Chapter Two).

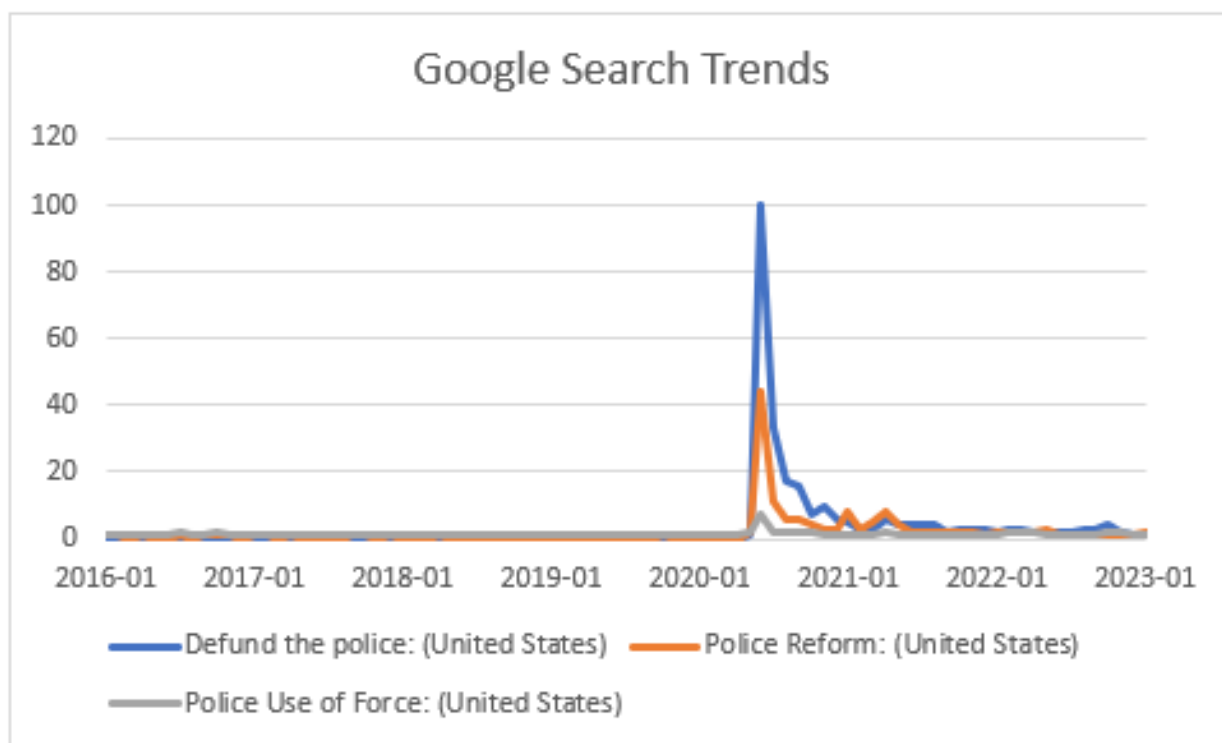
### ***MP Element of Consensus***

To establish consensus, MP requires the existence of public concern about an issue or a perceived problem (G. Morgan et al., 2010). Fundamental to the dynamics of consensus is the notion that there needs to be a legitimization of the dominant voice decrying the evils of the deviants (McDermott, 2013). A two-part analysis for the consensus element was used. First, the increase of internet searches using Google Trends revealed spikes in the searches for the following specific keywords: defund the police, police reform, and police use of force (see

Figure 5). Second, the keywords used in political campaigns over the past 10 years were compared (see Figure 2 in Chapter Two).

**Figure 5**

*Google Search Trends*



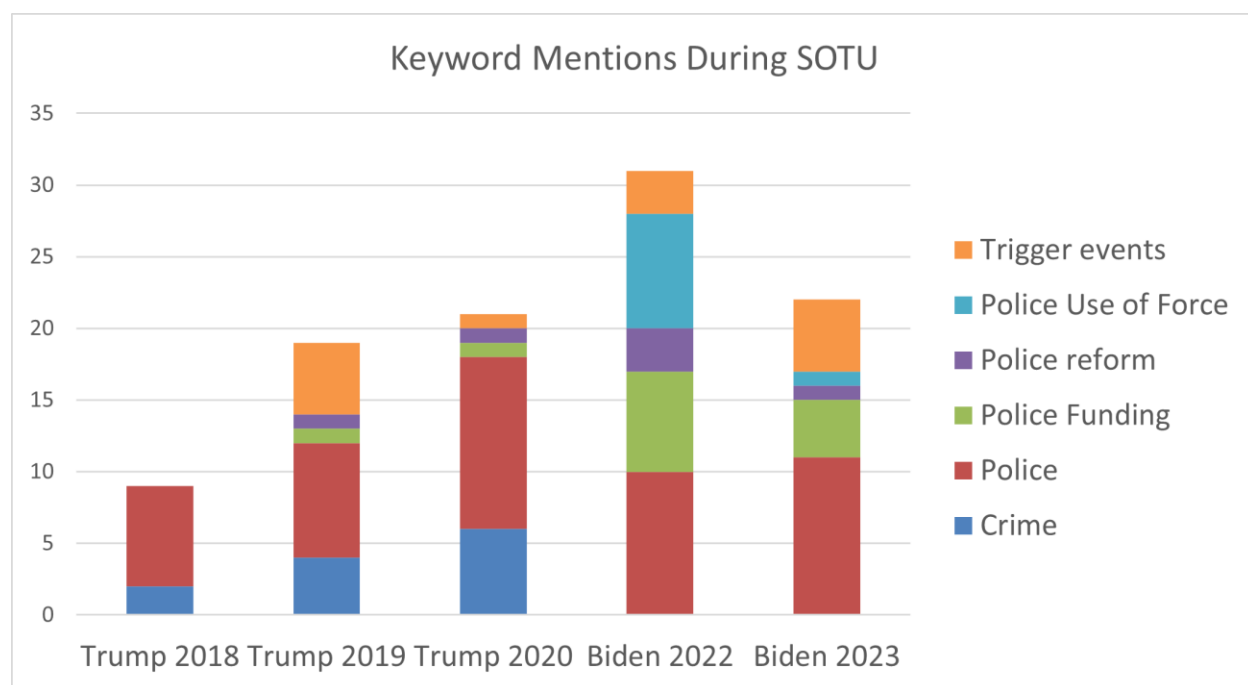
*Note.* Numbers represent search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given region and time. A value of 100 is the peak popularity for the term. Filters applied were United States, web search, and all categories.

An analysis of State of the Union addresses by U.S. presidents showed a drastic increase in rhetoric from the president of the United States (POTUS). Studies have shown that the narratives of individuals in positions of authority have the ability to influence public consciousness and political initiatives solely through their rhetoric (Jennings et al., 2017; Vitiello, 2020). The rhetoric by highly influential politicians such as the president of the United States or the English monarch can carry a significant weight toward fanning the effects of MP

(Hawdon, 2001; Jennings et al., 2017). Figure 1 (in Chapter Two) shows a significant increase in the mentions of police, police reform, police funding, crime, and police UOF, in the media whereas Figure 6 shows the mentions of specific trigger events by POTUS at the annual State of the Union address. Using these two correlates, the research could reasonably support the consensus element.

**Figure 6**

*State of the Union Keyword Mentions by POTUS*



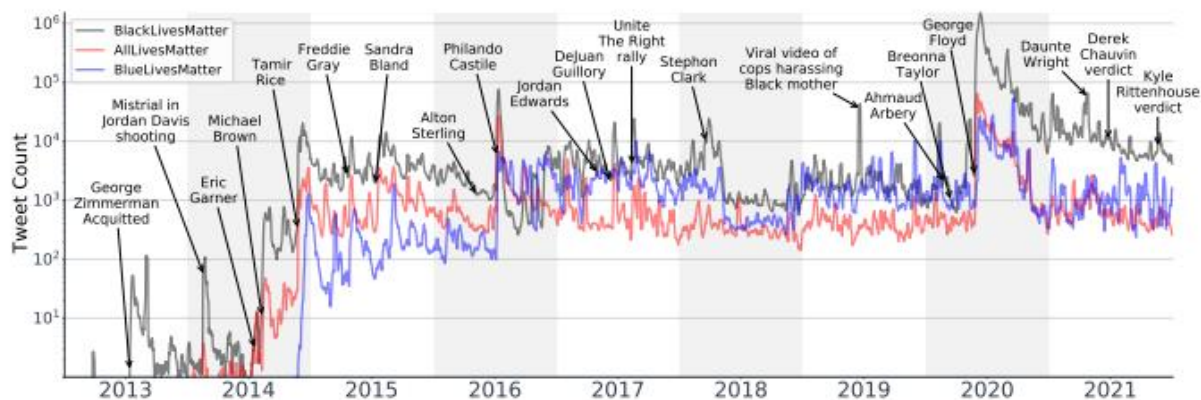
*Note.* No official State of the Union in 2021.

Between May 1, 2020, and August 31, 2020, there were 12,847 protests and 647 riots in the United States (ACLED, n.d.). The use of social media is shown to affect protest dynamics (Picarella, 2023; Theocharis et al., 2014). Figure 7 represents data retrieved from the social media site Twitter (referred to as X since July, 2023). Using key phrases Black Lives Matter, Blue Lives Matter, and All Lives Matter, the data show that in 2020, the number of tweets that

used those phrases reached a maximum of about 10,000,000, with all phrases maintaining a consistent pattern in relation to each other (Giorgi et al., 2022; Picarella, 2023). Additionally, according to Giorgi et al. (2022), the “#BlackLivesMatter social media hashtag has come to represent the grassroots movement, with similar hashtags counter-protesting the BLM movement, such as #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter” (p. 1). Therefore, it would be logical to assume that as the number of tweets increased, public concern, volatility, and pressure on policy elites would increase, resulting in increased rent-seeking behaviors by those elites to maintain or elevate their status.

**Figure 7**

*BLM Tweet Chart*



*Note.* The 7-day moving average of monthly tweet counts from 2013 to 2021 for all three keywords. With annotations for trigger events. From *Twitter Corpus of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement and Counter Protests: 2013 to 2021*, by S. Giorgi, M. Himelein-Wachowiak, A. Kwarteng, S. Hwang, M. Rahman, and B. Curtis, 2022, Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence, p. 3 (<https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2009.00596>).

An analysis of introduced legislation further supported the MP elements of volatility and disproportionality through rent-seeking behavior. Researching the annual increased or decreased amount of legislation initiated at the state level that encompasses keywords associated with the focusing event supports such elements (see Table 9). Legislative data search focused on police-



related initiatives introduced by the state legislature of each responding agency. Analysis indicated a notable (191.8%) spike in the 2021 legislative sessions. This is consistent with the fact that most legislative sessions start in the first month of the calendar year and run through late summer or early fall. Reviewing the state’s legislative sessions, 67% of the survey population ( $n = 21$ ) ended their 2020 legislative session by May (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2023). Therefore, using the events related to the major protests after George Floyd’s death in late May, it would stand to reason that new legislation would be introduced in the next available session.

**Table 9**

*Legislative Initiatives by Region Geographic Location of Survey Participants*

Region	2020	2021	2022	2023
West Coast	13	26	22	19
Northeast	53	85	63	13
Midwest	28	134	25	57
Mid-Atlantic	48	96	52	50
Southwest	16	120	4	53
Total	158	461	166	192

*Note.* Legislative initiatives retrieved from the National Conference of State Legislatures Database, using the following tracking topic options: certification, data and transparency, decertification, investigations and discipline, oversight, policing alternatives and collaboration, training, and use of force. From *State Legislative Sessions*, by National Conference of State Legislatures, November 14, 2023 (<https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/legislative-responses-for-policing-state-bill-tracking-database>).

As stated previously, MP refers to “the exaggerated responses from the media, the police or wider public” toward activities or events of a particular group of individuals (Marsh & Melville, 2011, p. 2). However, in this instance, the traditional enforcer of societal normative standards, law enforcement, became folk devils. They easily fit into the profile of a folk devil because they (law enforcement) are easily recognizable, dress alike (uniforms), share an

ideology, and stand out as different from the majority of the population (S. Cohen, 1969; Walsh, 2019).

The layering of narratives over the dangers of interactions between minority populations and law enforcement created a flash after the death of George Floyd. Increased media coverage, narrative layering, grassroots movements, and rent-seeking behaviors of some political elites created a firestorm of discontent directed at law enforcement, who, in previous MPs, have been considered the enforcers of culturally normative behaviors. Evidenced by explosive media and social media coverage, the layering of singular incidents created an endemic perception of abuse of power and corruption in law enforcement, effectively singling out law enforcement nationwide as folk devils and therefore the outward-facing symptoms of a much deeper problem.

As levels of anxiety and fear intersected, a protective communal hostility ensued, indicating risk and responsibility are subjective and prone to manipulation through a dialectical relation or remoralizing society (Hier, 2015). Hostility hinges on emotion and interpretation associated with the envisioned collective harm. Based on these data, the elements of MP can be supported; the following sections, through inductive reasoning, postulate that the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd should be considered the focusing events that sparked a MP across the United States of America.

## **Subquestion 2**

Subquestion 2 for this study was, “What discernible patterns characterize the adaptation of policies and procedures by law enforcement agencies in response to recommendations from authoritative bodies such as PERF, NYU Policing Projects, and legislative bodies?”

This subquestion explored some of the external pressures agencies are exposed to when faced with policy changes by determining what patterns emerged in evaluating the external

reasons for agencies altering their UOF policies. With that in mind, although eight themes were identified through the data, two emerged as applicable to this subquestion: (a) transparency and accountability measures and (b) political pressure and policymaker stance.

Amid demands for reform, transparency and accountability emerged as focal points. UOF reform, civilian involvement in oversight boards, and enhanced training reflected a commitment to increased accountability. Local ordinances regulating surveillance technologies showcased efforts to align law enforcement practices with community expectations, fostering trust through transparent engagement.

As a supporting theme for this subquestion, respondents were asked why they changed their UOF policies and practices. Sixty-one point five percent 61.5% of the respondents reported that it was required by a federal consent decree or state or local legislative requirements, and 15.4% stated that there was a mixture of reasons, including law changes, political demands, or best practices.

The survey and interview analysis provided compelling avenues of exploration of the subquestion. The findings suggested that agencies have altered their UOF policies, training, or reporting based on recent recommendations from organizations such as PERF, IACP, or legislative initiatives. The nuanced insights gleaned from the survey and interviews underscored the dynamic interplay between law enforcement agencies and external pressures, contributing valuable perspectives to the broader discourse on MP and its impacts on policing practices.

### **Subquestion 3**

Subquestion 3 for this study was, “Through an in-depth analysis of specific events, what defining characteristics and impacts may be elucidated regarding the revisions made to UOF policies within law enforcement agencies?”

This research subquestion sought to uncover the nuanced dynamics regarding the revisions made to UOF policies in law enforcement agencies. In analyzing the data associated with this study, four main themes were identified to address this research question: (a) political pressure and policymaker stance, (b) public pressure and calls for change, (c) focusing event, and (d) transparency and accountability measures.

The data showcased instances in which political pressures emanating from legislative changes and consent decrees prompted agencies to adapt their UOF policies to align with evolving best practices. Noteworthy was the acknowledgment of external pressures as a response to events surrounding the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, suggesting significant political pressure stemming from aggregate focusing events (see Table 7).

Focusing events can be correlated to public discourse manifested through public protests or riots, as mentioned at the beginning of this research. Survey respondents were asked whether they responded to protests defined as gatherings of more than 100 individuals, with property damage since 2018. The survey data showed that 95.2% of the participating agencies responded to protests as defined. Of participating agencies, 61.9% said they had responded to a riot, as defined in Chapter One, resulting in over \$100,000 of property damage. All respondents who stated they had responded to riots as defined, did enact mutual aid assistance from neighboring jurisdictions.

Respondent agencies have stated that the demand for the UOF reform centered between 2019 and 2020: “2019 to 2020 the push was great, but as of 2022 to 2023 it’s a topic is [*sic*] brought up less” (MW3). In one case, there was significant pressure from the public to alter the agency’s response to resistance (UOF) regarding actions taken during protests in 2020, such as restricting chemical munition under many circumstances (SE3).

According to ACLED (2023), nationwide protests increased by 407% from 2019 through 2020. More granularly, the difference between Q1- 2020 protests increased by 152%, and then Q2- 2020 again increased by an additional 201%. Q2- 2020 correlates with the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.

Referring to the large spikes in protests and demands for action, there was an increased number of agencies that formed “Community advisory boards [and] reorganized communications unit for a more proactive stance” (WC2). Others have acted to implement improved media relations (MW6), higher standards for officer intervention, or “active bystandership” (SW1). With many agencies integrating and publishing body-worn cameras into publicly accessible records, “more data collection, public records access greatly expanded, and training increased” (WC3).

The correlation analysis on the timing of significant protests and shifts in UOF policies yielded compelling findings. The survey revealed that 55.6% of the respondent agencies reported making significant changes in their UOF policies in 2020-2021, including banning choke holds and mandating active bystandership, and these changes correlated with the timing of nationwide protests and focusing events. Specifically, the deaths of Breonna Taylor (March, 2020) and George Floyd (May, 2020) emerged as pivotal events, prompting the calls for the revision of police UOF protocols. This correlation underscores the intricate interplay of transparency, political influence, and public sentiment, shaping the decision-making landscape for law enforcement agencies in adapting UOF policies to meet evolving societal standards. These findings offered valuable perspectives on the temporal dynamics of UOF policy reform triggered by significant societal occurrences.

#### **Subquestion 4**

Subquestion 4 for this study was, “What are the emerging trends and varied perspectives regarding the influence of the Defund the Police movement on budgetary allocations and strategic priorities within law enforcement agencies?”

The research subquestion explored the complex dynamics surrounding the Defund the Police movement and its impacts on law enforcement budgets and priorities. Five themes combine to address this subquestion: (a) public pressure and calls for change, (b) political pressure and policymaker stance, (c) media influence, (d) local initiatives and programs, and (e) financial changes. This analysis was completed using data from surveys and interviews and secondary spatial data associated with specific jurisdictions.

By correlating the political pressure mentioned by survey respondents, the significant increase in internet search trends and the strong relationship between the public and political calls to defund revealed significant evidence of public and political pressures. The fact that in the month following the focusing event of George Floyd’s Death, “#BLM was mentioned over 80 million times on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, and various blogs,” with the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter receiving over 800,000 comments daily the first week of June 2020 (Picarella, 2023, p. 163), and the published demands from the BLM (n.d.) website include defunding the police is testament to such pressures.

Although the data lacked the precision to identify a specific focusing event triggering the defund movement, the evidence suggested that MP-focusing events, such as George Floyd’s death, catalyzed the broader application of defunding efforts. The strong correlation between political and public pressures, coupled with the surge in social media discussions and explicit

demands from the BLM movement, provides a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing the Defund the Police movement.

Where public and political calls have resulted in the reallocation of funds, agencies have been required to cut many services to the public; the closing of specific departmental sections may have reduced the agency's efficiency. Additionally, numerous participants indicated they had reallocated responsibility to social workers or specially trained individuals to respond to mental health calls. Although popular in many jurisdictions, this responder model was too new to show a robust empirical impact definitively. The interconnected themes of public and political pressure underscore the complex dynamics surrounding law enforcement budgetary discussions, revealing the intricate relationship between societal events and calls for police funding reform.

The survey's qualitative analysis, supported by correlation data, provided substantive avenues of discovery for this subquestion. Finding multiple emerging trends of the intricacies of public and political pressures underscored agencies' challenges to navigate budgetary decisions amid evolving societal expectations. The findings contributed valuable insight to the ongoing discourse on the impacts of the Defund the Police movement on law enforcement agencies.

### **Subquestion 5**

Subquestion 5 for this study asked, "To what extent may high-ranking policy influencers create cascading effects on law enforcement administration policies and practices?"

This subquestion addressed the influential role of high-ranking policy influencers to shape law enforcement administration policies and practices, underscoring the impact of political leaders and policymakers on law enforcement strategies and priorities. Although this subquestion could arguably be the most obviously externally influenced of the previous questions, two themes informed this analysis: (a) political pressure and policymaker stance and (b) morale and

efficiency impacts. This subquestion was addressed by analyzing surveys, interviews, and secondary spatial data associated with specific jurisdictions.

The application of political pressures reverberated throughout the survey responses. A point of contention was that respondents believed that political pressure has resulted from MP focusing events. Heavily criticized, the political elites were called “inexperienced and untrained” (MW3). Using spatial data from legislative initiatives showed a 191.8% increase in police-related legislation in the jurisdictions of the survey respondents. Correlating legislative data with the qualitative data derived from the survey theme, political pressure, there was sufficient evidence to show that policy elites reacted to social pressures, which included demanding policy changes and budgetary reallocation in many instances.

To support the second contention of second-order consequences, this analysis drew on the theme of morale and efficiency impacts. Analysis of this theme revealed that because of political, media, and public pressures, agencies faced challenges that they had not had to overcome before. Impacts on staffing included low morale, mass retirements, lack of recruiting, and inability to staff needed positions.

Subquestion 5 sought explicitly to establish whether the evidence derived from the analysis supported the subquestion that policy elites perpetuated the cycle of MP. Policy elites, influenced by political pressures and reacting to social events, demanded actions that led to second-order consequences, creating further issues. The multifaceted impact on law enforcement agencies, including low morale, recruitment challenges, and rising violent crime rates, highlights the complexity of the relationship between MP, policy decisions, and their consequences. This nuanced understanding underscored the need to comprehensively explore contributing factors



and potential interventions in navigating the intricate dynamics between societal pressures and law enforcement outcomes.

Supporting this finding was the identification of significant outliers. The qualitative data, informed by spatial and foundational data, supported the main findings with minimal outliers. However, surveys, interviews, and secondary spatial data supported the finding that three participating agencies had minimal political pressure from public administrators (WC2, MA3, SE2). These agencies reported proactive, flexible policy changes that included local public administrators and the public and were initiated before or shortly after the nationwide focusing events. WC2 provided links to news programs in which the agency head made public announcements about the proactive UOF reform, addressing specific changes in policies and practices, increasing transparency, and increasing community involvement.

Adding credence to these findings, protest data from ACLED in WC2 classified all 142 protests in this jurisdiction between January, 2020 and December, 2022 as peaceful protests, the lowest of three categories in this event classification (ACLED, n.d.). There were no reported protests in MA3; however, that could most likely be attributed to the proximity to the nation's capital, which is within 100 miles of MA3 and could be a bigger protest target.

The three agencies in this category stated that they enjoyed increased budgets, and these agencies showed staffing vacancy rates lower than 6%, indicating a departure from the sample-wide vacancy mean of 13.32%. Complimenting this fact was that SE2, MA3, and WC2 showed an increase in approved and budget for staffing positions. During a postsurvey interview, WC2 stated,

We have a public that's very supportive of law enforcement, budgets that have increased since 2020, for our police department, and other agencies in the area. The state legislation

is driven by other communities that do not have that law enforcement support. So as a result, our community ends up having to respond to what other communities want, instead of what our community needs or desires.

Correlation with the survey return from WC2 stated, “We have had excellent local political support, resulting in increased pay, better retention, and increased sworn staff.” WC2 also showed a 4.256% reduction in violent crime between 2021 and 2022 whereas MA3 showed a significant reduction in crime rates in the categories of homicide and rape during that same time.

Separating SE2 from the other outliers, SE2 was under a narrowly focused consent decree between 2010 and 2016. The agency adjusted training, transparency, and staffing during that time. In a postsurvey interview, SE2 stated that the open relationship with the media and community groups has resulted in high levels of support for the agency: “We do not try to play hide the ball with them; if we are wrong, we admit we are wrong.” The political pressure was minimal to demand changes. SE2 had significant numbers of protests in the area during this time frame; however, of the 324 protests, fewer than 20 events were classified as more than peaceful protests (ACLEd, n.d.). SE2 showed a drop in all violent crime categories; however, because SE2 did not report in NIBRS or the UCR for 2021, the overall percentage of change could not accurately be reported.

Although such proactive policies indicated a politically inclusive administration, the low levels of the local policy elite influence with minimal interference in policy improvement actions led to positive second-order consequences, such as reported high morale, minimal recruitment challenges, and positive reductions in violent crime rates. Supporting the connection between MP-induced policies and high MP-influenced policy implementation created a cascade of

negative second-order consequences for agencies. In contrast, low political or public administration forced pressures and demonstrated that support positively impacted agencies.

### **Research Question Response**

In response to the central research question, “How does the theory of MP influence the evolution of public policy within the subfield of law enforcement administration?” This research systematically explored the phenomenon of MP in the context of law enforcement administration to unravel its influence on public policy evolution. At its core, the study delved into five interrelated subquestions, each designed to illuminate specific facets of the overarching inquiry. These subquestions were not isolated entities but rather interconnected to form a comprehensive understanding of the intricate nature of MP and public administration.

Subquestion 1 laid the groundwork, scrutinizing empirical evidence that spanned nearly a decade and probing the extent to which elements contributing to MP manifested within the given timeframe. Through a rigorous analysis of historical documents, media coverage, and legislative reviews, this subquestion phase revealed a notable correlation suggesting a surge in calls for policy actions against perceived folk devils. By laying this foundational groundwork, Subquestion 1 facilitated the assertion that empirical evidence from 2014 to 2023 supported the presence of elements contributing to MP, thus setting the stage for deeper exploration.

Subquestions 2 through 5 were vital pathways leading to a comprehensive understanding of the underlying dynamics. Subquestion 2 delved into the adaptation of policies and procedures by law enforcement agencies, unraveling discernible patterns and shedding light on the influences of authoritative bodies and legislative mandates. The findings unveiled how agencies adjusted their use-of-force policies, training, or reporting in response to recommendations from

organizations like PERF, IACP, or legislative initiatives. This exploration offered crucial insights into the mechanisms driving policy changes in the law enforcement landscape.

Subquestion 3 dissected the nuanced dynamics concerning revisions to UOF policies in law enforcement agencies, identifying defining characteristics and impacts. Through the analysis of specific events and key themes such as political pressure and transparency measures, this subquestion revealed a substantive correlation between nationwide focusing events, calls for transparency, and the increased public and political pressures driving revisions in UOF policies. It underscored the intricate interplay between societal events, public discourse, and policy responses.

Subquestion 4 addressed the emergent trends and varied perspectives regarding the influence of the Defund the Police movement on budgetary allocations and strategic priorities. Through a multifaceted analysis of public and political pressures, media influence, and financial changes, the research illuminated the complex dynamics shaping budgetary discussions and strategic priorities in law enforcement agencies. An examination of tangible financial changes resulting from the movement provided insights into budgetary reallocations and resource shifts toward alternative community-based initiatives.

Last, Subquestion 5 delved into the influential role of high-ranking policy influencers to shape law enforcement administration policies and practices. The study revealed how policy elites, driven by political pressures and social events, instigated actions that led to second-order consequences, thereby creating further issues. By examining the interplay between political pressure, policymaker stance, and morale impacts, this subquestion offered valuable insights into the cascading effects of policy decisions on agency dynamics and outcomes.

Each subquestion served as a critical piece of the puzzle, contributing unique insights and perspectives to the overarching research question. Through a systematic exploration of interconnected themes, the study provided a nuanced understanding of how MP theory influences the evolution of public policy in law enforcement administration. By integrating empirical evidence, thematic analysis, and scholarly discourse, the research shed light on the intricate dynamics shaping policy responses to societal challenges, thereby answering the research question and advancing the understanding of the complex interplay between MP, policy decisions, and institutional outcomes in the realm of law enforcement.

### **Summary**

This qualitative-grounded study sought to examine the influence of MP on public policy with a specific focus on its influence in the realm of law enforcement. The research used an internet-based survey and statistical analyses of open-source data, employing a grounded design to understand the subject comprehensively.

The study's design was informed by the research question to uncover the impact of MP on public policy implementation in law enforcement. The qualitative approach, detailed in this chapter, provided a robust framework for gaining deeper insights into the complexities of the phenomenon (Denscombe, 2010). The subsequent presentation of findings incorporated descriptive statistics of the participant population and organized analyses based on research questions.

The amalgamation of data revealed significant impacts of MP on participating law enforcement agencies. External pressures stemming from MP were identified as key factors contributing to reduced efficiency and morale among SLBs. Furthermore, the responses to MP included reallocating funds to external programs, leading to tangible consequences for agency

operations and efficiency. The study also highlighted the adverse effects of reduced morale and negative public perceptions of law enforcement, resulting in recruiting and retention challenges and, consequently, a substantial number of vacant positions. Notably, these vacancies were correlated with increased crime rates.

The central problem explored by the study centered on understanding how MP influences the implementation of public policy in the field of law enforcement. The research successfully demonstrated that MP had far-reaching impacts, affecting the efficiency and morale of law enforcement personnel. The reallocation of funds to external programs, driven by MP responses, had tangible operational consequences for law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the study unveiled a direct correlation between reduced morale, recruitment challenges, high vacancy rates, and increased crime rates.

This study contributes valuable insights to the intricate dynamics of MP and its implications for public administration policy implications in the subfield of law enforcement. By adopting a grounded qualitative approach, the research was able to capture both qualitative nuances and spatial trends, offering a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by law enforcement agencies amid MP. The findings underscore the need for nuanced policy responses that consider the broader societal context and the potential ripple effects of MP on law enforcement operations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

This grounded qualitative study investigated the far-reaching implications of MP on public policy in the United States, focusing specifically on its impact as measured through law enforcement agencies. The study identified key factors driving MP, analyzed their impact on policy development and implementation, and further explored the potential second-order consequences that may exacerbate societal divisions and negatively impact the public's perception of the enforcers of public policy.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study was conducted to examine and understand the influence of MP on public policy in the field of law enforcement. The underlying theories used in this study were MP theory, elite theory, and PET. Each of these theories provided significant insight into the research question.

A qualitative grounded theory approach offers a robust framework for in-depth exploration of complex, underresearched phenomena. Its inductive nature enables the uncovering of nuanced insights and emergent themes overlooked by deductive methods. Grounded theory excels at investigating poorly understood areas and comprehensively examining topics (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This iterative, flexible process refines inquiries based on emerging findings, fostering deep understanding. Exploring context-specific factors and variable interactions provides holistic insights (Charmaz, 2006). This inductive approach requires researchers to generate context-specific, transferable findings based on nuanced understanding, theory development, and context-rich insights across diverse fields (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Its

inductive nature makes grounded theory a powerful choice for exploring underresearched areas such as MP in public administration.

### **Subquestion 1**

Subquestion 1 asked, “To what extent might empirical evidence from 2014-2023 support the presence of elements contributing to MP?” The research identified recurring patterns indicative of MP using a triangulation approach, which involved scrutinizing various sources, including social media, traditional media outlets, and scholarly publications. Despite the inherent challenges associated with operationalizing and validating MP, the study employed content analysis techniques to discern significant increases in calls for policy actions against perceived folk devils within the specified timeframe. By establishing robust linkages between documented evidence and recognized elements of MP, the study offered compelling support for the presence of MP in the context under investigation.

### **Subquestion 2**

Subquestion 2 asked, “What discernible patterns characterize the adaptation of policies and procedures by law enforcement agencies in response to recommendations from authoritative bodies such as PERF, NYU Policing Projects, and legislative bodies?” This subquestion explored the intricate dynamics regarding policy adaptation in law enforcement agencies in response to external pressures and recommendations from authoritative bodies. The study identified discernible patterns reflective of broader trends in policing practices by employing a grounded qualitative research approach, including interviews, surveys, and content analysis. Key themes such as transparency, accountability, and community engagement emerged as central drivers influencing policy changes in law enforcement agencies. By revealing the mechanisms through



which external pressures shape policy adaptation, the research contributes valuable insights into the evolving landscape of law enforcement governance.

### **Subquestion 3**

Subquestion 3 asked, “Through an in-depth analysis of specific events, what defining characteristics and impacts may be elucidated regarding the revisions made to UOF policies within law enforcement agencies?” This subquestion uncovered the nuanced dynamics concerning revisions to UOF policies in law enforcement agencies. Drawing on a rich dataset of qualitative interviews, archival data, and media analysis, the research identified four main themes relevant to this subquestion: (a) political pressure and policymaker stance, (b) public pressure and calls for change, (c) focusing events, and (d) transparency and accountability measures. Through a systematic thematic analysis, the research highlighted instances when external pressures, particularly in response to high-profile events such as George Floyd’s and Breonna Taylor’s deaths, have catalyzed revisions in UOF policies. By contextualizing policy changes within broader sociopolitical dynamics, the study offers a nuanced understanding of the factors driving reform efforts in law enforcement agencies.

### **Subquestion 4**

Subquestion 4 asked, “What are the emerging trends and varied perspectives regarding the influence of the Defund the Police movement on budgetary allocations and strategic priorities within law enforcement agencies?” This subquestion examines the multifaceted impacts of the Defund the Police movement on law enforcement budgets and strategic priorities. Using qualitative methodologies, the study identified five themes relevant to this subquestion: (a) public pressure and calls for change, (b) political pressure and policymaker stance, (c) media influence, (d) local initiatives and programs, and (e) financial changes. Through a nuanced

analysis of these themes, the research interpreted the complex interplay between societal pressures, political dynamics, and budgetary decision-making processes in law enforcement agencies. By providing empirical evidence of the tangible effects of the movement on budget allocations and strategic priorities, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ongoing debates surrounding police funding and resource allocation.

### **Subquestion 5**

Subquestion 5 asked, “To what extent may high-ranking policy influencers create cascading effects on law enforcement administration policies and practices?” This subquestion unpacked the influential role of high-ranking public administration policy influencers to shape law enforcement administration policies and practices. The research identified two primary themes relevant to this subquestion: (a) political pressure and policymaker stance and (b) morale and efficiency impacts. Through a rigorous analysis of these themes, the research examined the mechanisms through which political pressures stemming from MP-focusing events influence policy decisions and organizational dynamics in law enforcement agencies. By exploring the ripple effects of policy decisions on agency morale and efficiency, the study offers valuable insights into the interplay between MP, policy formulation, and institutional outcomes within law enforcement administration.

### **Central Research Question Conclusion**

The central research question asked how the theory of MP influences the evolution of public policy within the subfield of law enforcement administration. In response to the research question, the findings from the qualitative and spatial components were complimentary. Whereas there is no empirical test to indicate MP by supporting the elements of MP—(a) concern, (b) hostility, (c) consensus, (d) disproportionality, and (e) volatility (S. Cohen, 2011a)—

Research Subquestion 1 established that there was enough support for the elements of MP that it would be acceptable to contend that MP was present between 2018 and 2023 in the United States, significantly influencing public perception and law enforcement policies.

Through analysis of social media traffic, traditional media mentions, keyword mentions during the U.S. State of the Union address, internet search trends, nationwide protest data, and survey responses, there was enough evidence to support the contention that MP was present following the layered-focusing events of the death of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in March and May of 2020. Correlating qualitative and spatial data from the survey and published crime statistics allowed a deeper understanding of the impacts of MP. Between 2018 and 2022, crime rate and vacancy had a significant positive correlation. Thus, as vacancies increase, crime rates also increase.

Qualitative data revealed that political and public pressures significantly impacted vacancy rates. As the perceived amount of public and political pressure increased, so did the agencies' vacancies, with perceived political pressure showing the most significant correlations, indicating a significant relationship between perceived political pressures and vacancy, higher political pressures resulted in higher unfilled positions. Using spatial analysis to support qualitative findings, perceived pressure to defund the police and perceived pressure for the UOF reform are still significant indicators, thus supporting qualitative data that participants reported indicating challenges in recruiting and retention in the face of what they felt was negative pressure.

### **Outliers**

The qualitative and spatial data supported the main findings with minimal outliers. However, surveys, interviews, and statistical data supported that those three participating

agencies had minimal political pressure from public administrators. These agencies reported proactive, flexible policy changes that included public administrators and the public and were initiated prior to the nationwide focusing events. Such agencies reported and confirmed by ACLED protest data that the civil unrest in the jurisdiction was notably less than in other jurisdictions that did not have such administrative support. Additionally, the agencies in this category stated that they enjoyed increased budgets and low staffing vacancies. Although such proactive policies indicated a politically inclusive administration, the low levels of political interference and pressures supported the study findings that high MP influenced policy implementation, creating a cascade of second-order consequences. There is sufficient evidence to maintain that MP-influenced public policies, when implemented without forethought or research, can negatively impact the subfield of law enforcement.

### **Discussion of Implications**

This section engages in a comprehensive discussion exploring the implications of the research findings on the dynamics of public administration policy in the subfield of law enforcement, particularly in the context of MP. The primary theoretical frameworks underpinning the discussion were elite theory, PET, and MP theory.

Garland (2008) contended that actions may align with the issues of concern, or the issue of concern itself may be more significant than previously acknowledged or studied. This research aligned the focusing event to the deaths of minority individuals, namely Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, at the hands of law enforcement. Acknowledging the egregiousness of those events and others not mentioned in this study, this research reached past those events and, in the frame of the study, used them as a point of focus or genesis of the case studies for this research.

## **Theoretical Discussion**

This section discusses the findings and the extent to which they aligned with previous literature and theory. Consideration is given to the agreement between the findings from this study and previous literature and insight into why any discrepancies may have been present.

### ***Elite Theory***

Drawing from Mills' (1956) groundwork, the research underscored that a select group of political elites significantly influenced decision-making processes in the specified instances. The sway of political elites extended over surveyed respondents' policies, practices, and resources. Social media emerged as a potent tool for influencing public opinion, disproportionately impacting policy decisions. Notably, political elites strategically used social media attention and trends for rent-seeking activities, emphasizing the correlation between governmental form and applied pressures on law enforcement agencies.

The study's use of elite theory provided a lens through which to understand the intricate relationships between political elites and policy outcomes in public administration. Mills' (1956) conceptualization of power structures shed light on the disproportionate influence wielded by political elites, highlighting the nuances of decision-making processes in bureaucratic frameworks.

This research used law enforcement as a case study because of the availability of measures such as the police UOF reform and Defund the Police movement. However, the impacts felt from MP-induced policy decisions reverberate throughout all public administration fields. As political elites feel pressures to act, they apply downward pressures to agencies under their scope of control: the greater the perceived pressures, the more significant the impact that is felt at the operational levels.

Holding true to the groundwork by Mills (1956), this research has shown that a few power holders significantly sway the decision-making process in these instances. Such political elites were able to exercise both political and public influence over the policies, practices, and resources of the survey respondents. To the last participants, all respondents indicated that there was some form of pressure on their agency from external forces between 2018 and 2022. This pressure could have manifested as strong suggestions or through coercive force, as suggested by Weber (1969).

This research has shown that social media is a powerful tool for disseminating information and elevating events to a high public consciousness. On both sides of this study, social media has been shown to be an effective tool. The use of Twitter (X), Facebook, and Reddit was a pipeline stirring up a torrent of public outrage after the focus events. Supporting Mills's (1956) elite theory in part, a disproportional representation on social media found by Pew Research showed that of all the #BlackLivesMatter tweets, 77% of the original content was produced by 25% of the posters (Bestvater et al., 2023). Political elites have used social media attention and trends to maximize their exposure to rent-seeking activities. Within 3 weeks of the focus events in May, 2020, 121 members of U.S. Congress mentioned #BlackLivesMatter or a derivative of the tag for the first time in their Twitter history, and many did not mention it again (Shah & Widjaya, 2020).

Many survey respondents mentioned that to increase transparency, accountability, and public support, they have intentionally focused on increasing their social media presence. This is a means of garnering support and potentially ensuring that they get out ahead of any panic or false narratives generated in the absence of facts and data.

***PET***

The research aligns with PET literature, identifying punctuations triggered by disproportionate information processing and institutional friction. Constrained by the need for timely choices and incomplete information, decision makers engaged in unintentional policy under- or overreactions. The study contends that PET played a pivotal role in policy decisions, with a surge in law enforcement-related legislative initiatives following the focusing event, subsequently decreasing in the subsequent year. The increased reliance on social media and legislative fluctuations supports the assertion that policy elites are highly responsive to public opinion.

As presented in the literature review, PET literature discussed two broad reasons for such sudden jumps in action, often called punctuations, offering a framework for analyzing the episodic nature of policy change in response to external pressures (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, 1993). PET highlights the adaptive nature of governance structures in navigating turbulent policy environments by conceptualizing policy shifts as punctuated by focusing events.

Disproportionate information processing and institutional friction are major punctuations that often contribute to PET policy changes (Fernández-i-Marín et al., 2019; Flink, 2017). The limited ability of policy designers to process all available and incoming information is supported by Simon's (1955) rational choice model. Decision executives often have to satisfice to make timely decisions. This can lead to unintentional policy under- or overreactions if decisions are based on incomplete information (Flink, 2017).

A foundational premise of this study lies in the contention that PET exerted substantial influence over the policy trajectories observed in the specified cases. Through examination and survey analysis, the prevailing sentiment suggests that political elites catalyzed a surge in

legislative activity after a period of relative inactivity prompted by focusing events. This claim finds support in the drastic increase of law enforcement-related legislative initiatives by 191.8% during the 2021 legislative cycle that followed the focusing events. In opposition, this push subsided significantly in 2022 with a notable decrease of 63.9% as protest movements waned and public outcry diminished. Such trends underscore the phenomenon of political rent-seeking, wherein policy elites strategically maneuver to capitalize on public attention while mitigating potential professional repercussions. This interpretation contributes to a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between political dynamics and policy formulation processes within the realm of law enforcement governance.

The increased social media use, using trending hashtags, and the significant increase in legislation support both Jensen (2011) and Falkof (2018) who contended that policy elites are highly responsive to public opinion and susceptible to external influence factors becoming major decision criteria used for political gain. Supporting such contention, this study found a correlation between the form of government and the public and political pressures applied to agencies. This indicates that public pressures are indicative of political pressure, and therefore, it would not be an enormous leap of deduction to state that political rent seeking drives many political activities.

### ***MP Theory***

S. Cohen (1969) contended that MP occurs through the propagation of narratives by individuals of influence about people or groups whose actions or mere presence fan a population's fear of the degradation of normative social order (Frederiksen & Harboe Knudsen, 2021). This study supports the contention that the propagation of specified narratives by individuals of influence fanned the fear of many. This was evident through the massive increase



in related social media activity following the focusing events, increased legislation, and increased attention drawn to the focusing events by POTUS during State of the Union addresses. Hawdon (2001) and Jennings et al. (2017) stressed the impact of the rhetoric of highly influential politicians, which carried significant weight toward fanning the effects of MP.

Accepted knowledge has stated that MP can be categorized into three foundational sources: grassroots, interest group, or elite-engineered/elite-generated (Critcher, 2009; David et al., 2011; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Victor, 1998). On the other hand, it is my conclusion that the MP was a combination of grassroots, interest group, and elite engineered rather than separate foundational sources. This could be a function of the scale defined by the nationwide emotional impact or by the compounding effects and the speed of social media. Using an amalgamation of the social media corpus, massive increases in protest activity, and the increased media and political elite attention paid to the focusing event creates a compelling argument to state that MP can initiate from a compound foundation in the modern era.

Like many MP scholars, Critcher (2009) contended that the display of moral behavior is conditioned and enforced by normative cultural traditions. Critcher, like many scholars of moral psychology, argued that the display of moral behavior is shaped and enforced by normative cultural traditions. He established a causal relationship between the state, which defines and enforces normative behaviors, and its role as the moral regulator. Supported by Hunt (1999) and Hier (2002, 2008), Critcher contended that a MP is an exceptional form of generated moral awareness through moral regulation. This research challenges the normative nature of such contention. This research concludes that MP was present in this study but lacked the traditional moral regulation from those in positions of authority.

Contrary to the requirements of Critcher (2009), Hunt (1999), and Hier (2002, 2008), this panic did not meet the requirement of having the state as the definer of moral behavior. Instead, the definer of acceptable normative behavior was the public, which demanded changes. This caused a reversal of the standard roles in MP scenarios in which the state is the setter of standards or manipulator of the populace as a means of subjugation.

However, this research supports Ungar (2001) and Victor (1998) who defined MP as “a societal response to beliefs about a threat from moral deviants [... which represent] a collective form of behavior characterized by suddenly increased concern and hostility in a significant segment of society” (Victor, 1998, pp. 542–543).

The study supports the idea that influential politicians’ rhetoric significantly influences MP amplification. The research affirms that narratives following the focusing events contributed to the fear among the public. Social media, legislative changes, and the attention garnered by political figures, notably the president during State of the Union addresses, intensified MP effects.

## **Exploration of Theoretical Challenges**

### ***MP Theory Challenges***

Challenges associated with MP theory have varied, but one has stood out. Horsley (2017) contended that MP capitalizes on the gullibility of the audience “even to the extent that it could be located in the widely condemned stable of conspiracy theory” (p. 86). Thus, insisting that MP rests on a foundation of a social order promoted by elites does not stand the test of time. Instead, holding that MP is a means of top-down control by elites through purposeful manipulation of public concern and fears is a “nostalgic invocation of a modernist world” that operates outside of modern realism (Horsley, 2017, p. 86).

This study contradicts Horsley's (2017) assertion that MP capitalizes on the gullibility of the audience, which is closely related to "conspiracy theory" (p. 86). Accepting that modern societies have divergent perceptions of reality, the fact that there was such a large-scale uprising counters the conspiracy theory aspect. Whereas one group may see an issue, another group may not, in no way negating the issue's saliency or importance. In this study, the correlation to the focusing event, subject to exploitation and rent-seeking behaviors as it may be, cannot counter the fact that the focusing event happened, which by logical inference could not be considered a conspiracy because it was not artificially generated.

Furthermore, Horsley's (2017) contention was that MP itself is a means of top-down control by elites through manipulation of fears and public concern. Because the context of this MP event was a bottom-up or a grassroots-initiated movement, this assertion is called into question. Granted, the narrative was advanced through substantial traditional media influence, political rent seeking, and social media capitalization as shown in this study. This contraindicates the assertion of top-down control, instead indicating a bottom-up control supported by traditional influencers of MP.

Garland (2008) added two additional requirements to the elements of MP: the acceptance of the moral dimension of the social reaction and the belief that deviant conduct is symptomatic of much more significant issues. This study supports Garland's added dimensions to MP, namely, the contention that the deviant conduct is symptomatic of a much larger issue. Supporting this, one could cite the large-scale protest activity that swept the nation following the focusing event when protests increased by 407% nationwide. Therefore, increased protest events indicate a substantial consensus on an issue. Garland stated, "'It's not just this . . .' they say, before presenting claims about associated problems and wider implications" (p. 11). Supporting

this aspect is the number of reasons for protests cited previously in this study. Sixty-six percent of the stated reasons for large-scale protests in the participating jurisdictions indicated that political or law enforcement issues were causative factors, adding credence to the “it is not just this, but” aspect of a much larger issue.

In the realm of public administration, the widespread protests, diverse reasons cited for protests, and the public pressures applied to jurisdictions underscored a unique consensus on broader issues. This necessitates reimagined responsibilities, particularly in areas such as mental health awareness, homelessness mitigation, and enhanced transparency for force-related issues. Additionally, supported by the public pressure theme discussed previously, significant pressures were applied to many jurisdictions that dictated reimagined responsibilities such as much higher levels of mental health awareness, homelessness mitigation, and much greater transparency for force-related issues.

### ***Elite Theory Challenges***

Another theory that the findings challenge is the classical model of elite theory, particularly in the context of MP and its influence on public policy implementation. Elite theory, rooted in the work of Wright Mills (1956), posits that a small group of elites holds significant power and influence over societal decision-making processes. These elites, including political leaders, activists, and other influential figures, are believed to shape policies and control resources to serve their interests.

However, the study’s findings suggest a more nuanced understanding of elite theory, especially regarding the dynamics of MP and its impact on public administration policy. Although elite influence was evident in the study, it was not the sole determinant of policy decisions. Instead, the study highlights the role of social media and public opinion to shape

policy responses to MP events, indicating a broader base of influence beyond traditional elites. Political leaders may respond to public pressure and social media trends, amplifying MP narratives and driving policy changes (Pettinicchio, 2016).

Furthermore, the study reveals how grassroots movements and SLBs also significantly shape policy outcomes. Fueled by social media and public outrage, grassroots activism can exert considerable pressure on policymakers, challenging the notion of elite control over decision-making processes. In essence, although elite theory provides valuable insights into power dynamics within society, the study's findings suggest that the influence of elites is not absolute, especially in the context of MP and its implications for public policy implementation. Instead, a more comprehensive understanding of decision-making processes must consider the interplay of elite influence, public opinion, grassroots activism, and social media dynamics.

### ***Politics–Administration Dichotomy***

The politics-administration dichotomy, as proposed by Wilson in 1887, delineates a separation between the political realm, focused on policymaking and leadership, and the administrative realm, concerned with implementation and management. Advocates of this traditional model have argued for distinct spheres, asserting that politics should guide overarching goals and values, and the administration should execute policies impartially and efficiently, enhancing accountability and effectiveness. However, critics have challenged this rigid division, arguing that it oversimplifies the intricate interplay between politics and administration, particularly in modern governance contexts in which administrative actions inherently involve political considerations.

This study introduced a nuanced perspective, revealing a more complex relationship between politics and administration, especially in the context of MP's influence on law

enforcement. It demonstrated how political elites significantly influence law enforcement agencies, shaping policies, practices, and resource allocation. This challenges the notion of a clear separation between politics and administration because administrators must navigate political pressures while implementing policies.

Furthermore, the study elucidated the significant influence of external factors, including social media trends and public opinion, on policy formulation in law enforcement agencies. This analysis underscored the pivotal role of SLBs in shaping both public perceptions and policy outcomes, thereby illustrating the extent to which they are susceptible to external pressures and political interference. Given their direct interface with the public, SLBs are particularly vulnerable to these influences, thereby potentially compromising their morale and effectiveness in policy implementation.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the traditional politics-administration dichotomy may not fully capture the complexities of policy implementation, especially in dynamic and contentious environments like law enforcement. Instead, they advocate for a more integrated understanding of the relationship between politics and administration, emphasizing the need for administrators to navigate political dynamics while striving for effective policy implementation.

### **Implementation Challenges**

Implementing policies influenced by MP poses several challenges for law enforcement agencies, which can affect their operational efficiency and effectiveness. Law enforcement agencies have hierarchical structures in which resistance to change can originate from various levels, including frontline officers, midlevel managers, and administrative staff.

Frontline officers, or SLBs, may resist new policies if they perceive them as impractical, unrealistic, or inconsistent with their professional judgment and experience. For example, SLBs

might resist policies mandating increased UOF reporting or de-escalation techniques if they believe these measures hinder their ability to respond effectively to volatile situations. Midlevel managers may also resist policy changes if they perceive them as undermining their authority or creating additional administrative burdens without adequate support or resources.

Law enforcement agencies face resource constraints in terms of staffing, funding, use of technology, and infrastructure, which can impede their ability to implement new policies effectively. Policy changes influenced by MP require additional resources for training, equipment upgrades, community outreach initiatives, and data collection and analysis.

Limited budgets and competing priorities may prevent agencies from allocating sufficient resources to support the successful implementation of these policies. For instance, policies aimed at improving community relations or enhancing transparency and accountability may require investments in officer training, community engagement programs, and technology systems, which may strain agency budgets.

New policies influenced by MP may conflict with existing procedures, protocols, and organizational culture in law enforcement agencies. Resistance to change may arise if officers perceive the new policies as contradictory to established practices or if they disrupt established routines and workflows. Additionally, policies that impose additional bureaucratic requirements or paperwork may face resistance if perceived as bureaucratic red tape or administrative burdens. For example, policies mandating increased documentation of UOF incidents or requiring officers to engage in community policing activities may clash with traditional enforcement-focused approaches.

Lipsky's (1969) SLB concept highlights frontline workers' discretionary authority to interpret and implement policies. SLBs may resist new policies if they perceive them as

impractical or conflicting with their professional judgment. Research on policy implementation has emphasized the importance of considering organizational behavior, institutional constraints, and stakeholder dynamics to understand implementation challenges. Conflicts with existing procedures and resource constraints are common barriers to effective policy implementation (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021b; Hupe & Hill, 2015).

These theoretical frameworks provide insights into the complexities of policy implementation in bureaucratic settings and underscore the need for adaptive management approaches that account for organizational and operational realities and stakeholder perspectives.

### **Recommendations**

Within the domain of public administration, the phenomenon of MP presents intricate challenges for policymakers and administrators, necessitating a comprehensive examination of their roles in policy implementation. This section delves into the pivotal role of public administrators amid the complexities of MP. MP characterized by societal reactions to perceived threats often prompts swift and sometimes excessive policy responses from elected officials and administrative bodies. Against this backdrop, public administrators assume critical intermediary roles and are tasked with translating policy directives into actionable strategies while navigating a landscape fraught with competing interests and demands.

This exploration offered a nuanced analysis of the multifaceted interactions between public administrators, political pressures, and societal dynamics within the context of MP. It scrutinized how public administrators respond to external pressures, engage stakeholders, and operationalize policies amid heightened public scrutiny and media influence. Furthermore, it delved into the ramifications of MP-induced policies on agency morale, staffing dynamics, and



operational efficacy, highlighting the cascading effects of hastily formulated or inadequately considered decisions.

### **Public Administrators**

Qualitative analysis revealed significant correlations between perceived political and public pressure felt by public administrators, which have far-reaching second-order consequences such as recruiting and maintaining staffing challenges. Results from this study offer significant contributions to the knowledge base of public administration and the study of MP influenced policy implementation.

This research intersects many levels of public administration because all public agencies are susceptible to public and political pressures. Such pressures can result in ill-conceived policy, rushed implementation, and political rent seeking. Public administrators should prioritize stakeholder engagement throughout the policy implementation process, involving agency heads, SLBs, subject matter experts, community leaders, advocacy groups, and other relevant stakeholders in policy discussions and decision making. Establishing regular forums for dialogue, such as town hall meetings, focus groups, and advisory committees, can facilitate open communication and collaboration among stakeholders.

Central to effective stakeholder engagement is the involvement of agency heads, who are crucial in guiding policy decisions within their organizations. Public administrators can tap into their expertise and insights by actively involving agency heads in policy discussions and decision making, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the policy landscape. This collaborative approach allows development of well-researched policies informed by subject matter experts, resulting in a more nuanced and compelling policy framework.

Moreover, public administrators should leverage the support of community leaders, advocacy groups, and other relevant stakeholders to inform policy development and implementation. Establishing regular forums for dialogue, such as town hall meetings and advisory committees, fosters open communication and collaboration among stakeholders. By actively seeking input from diverse perspectives, public administrators can gain valuable insights into community needs, concerns, and preferences, which are essential for crafting policies that resonate with the broader population.

Public administrators should establish clear and transparent communication channels to disseminate information about new policies, procedures, and expectations to all stakeholders. With the support gained from inclusion in the policy development process, agency heads can assist in implementing the policy for those in their sphere of influence, including SLBs. Using multiple communication channels, such as email, memos, staff meetings, and training sessions, can ensure that information reaches all levels of the organization and is understood by everyone involved. Providing regular updates and opportunities for feedback can help address any misunderstandings or concerns and foster a culture of transparency and accountability within the agency.

Public administrators must prioritize developing and implementing comprehensive training programs to support SLBs to effectively understand and implement new policies. Training programs should cover a range of topics, including the rationale behind the new policies, relevant legal and procedural requirements, de-escalation techniques, cultural competency, and conflict resolution skills. Training sessions should be interactive, tailored to the specific needs of SLBs, and accessible in various formats to accommodate different learning styles, time constraints, and work schedules.

One of the primary consequences of high levels of outside interference in agency operations and policies is a high number of vacancies and reduced employee motivation. Qualitative analysis showed high levels of negative sentiment toward those who create such frictions. In outward-facing agencies, the SLBs are the ones who have the most contact with the public and, therefore, are significant influencers in perceptions. Failing to maintain high morale and continued support from such SLBs can have a significant ripple effect on agency efficacy and the public support of the goals and missions of the agency.

Policies mandated by individuals not versed in such operations create challenges that may result in an everyone loses situation. Therefore, building on the contention that there may be a more significant influence based on the agency and its specific task, that “ongoing interaction, reciprocal input, and mutual deference between elected officials and administrators” (Verschuere, 2009, p. 37).

The literature identified six broad mechanism-based categories: actor certification, blame avoidance, brownie points, repeated interactions, focusing events, and attribution or threat. By determining what triggers implementation support for specific policies, public administrators of every level may focus on the mechanisms to implement policies successfully (Busetti & Dente, 2016), reducing such friction. However, it would entail a nuanced understanding of the problem at hand and patience from the entity demanding policy change. Snap judgments and rushing to make policies based on pressures or to get ahead of changes become nothing more than window dressing and are easily seen by those on the inside as not being genuine attempts at effective change.

Additionally, policymakers are urged to adopt adaptive strategies that account for the cyclical nature of MP. Rather than reactive responses, evidence-based policymaking can contribute to more effective and sustainable policy outcomes.

### **Political Implications**

When SLBs become folk devils, it creates significant issues and friction for politicians, who face the wicked problem of either supporting the SLBs and risking the ire of the public or supporting the public and risk alienating the SLBs. This research showed that in many cases, the rent seeking of the politicians alienated the SLB, who then decided to abandon their position. This expands on Mourtgos et al. (2022), who showed a significant increase in police retirements following the death of George Floyd. Mourtgos et al. studied the impacts of stress as a result of the focusing events, and the findings from this research expanded the concept by using political pressure and MP in lieu of stress.

This research supports Maor's (2021) contention that policy responses may be intentionally undertaken when political executives are vulnerable to voters. Often, in national security or criminal justice, politicians produce intentional overreactions with the need to show aggressive stances (Maor, 2012). This research should dissuade politicians from such rent-seeking behaviors in MP situations. Often, such responses are ill-conceived and rushed, creating a significant possibility of unintended consequences, as shown by this research.

The perception from the SLBs about the actor motivation for implementation can create a steep divide between the developers of policy and the SLBs. Buseti and Dente (2016) recognized that policies are often developed through a group effort; however, if policies are not perceived as a group effort by those who enforce or are affected by them, there will be higher friction levels.

Empirical evidence solidifies the role of social media as a potent amplifier of MP. Policymakers and administrators must recognize the influence of social media trends to shape public perceptions and legislative responses, prompting a need for strategic engagement. The data underscore a significant surge in reactionary legislative initiatives following the focusing events. Policymakers should cautiously approach legislative changes, acknowledging the potential for volatility and ensuring evidence-based decision making.

### **Reimagining MP**

Challenging traditional categorizations, this study proposes a compound foundation for MP initiation, enmeshing grassroots, interest group-driven, and elite-engineered elements (Cricher, 2009; David et al., 2011; Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Victor, 1998). This unique perspective gains relevance in public administration, acknowledging the multifaceted origins of MP and its implications for policy formulation. The nationwide emotional impact and swift dissemination of information through social media contribute to this compound foundation, evolving to a modern understanding of MP initiation in public administration.

Contrary to established models in which the state typically dictates normative behavior during MP, this study revealed a paradigm shift. The public emerged as a defining force in shaping acceptable normative behavior, prompting a reconsideration of the dynamics of societal influence. A distinctive theoretical contribution lies in identifying a MP devoid of state-driven moral regulation. This departure challenges prevailing frameworks, necessitating reevaluating the relationship between MP and state influence by challenging conventional theories and proposing a nuanced foundation for MP encompassing grassroots, interest groups, and elite-engineered elements. This expanded conceptualization prompts a reexamination of traditional sources and drivers of MP.

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

Limitations in research refer to factors primarily outside researchers' control that restrict the scope and findings of a study. Delimitations, on the other hand, are the boundaries consciously set by researchers to narrow the focus of the study, such as specific research questions, theoretical frameworks, or participant selection criteria. Although limitations are unavoidable, delimitations allow researchers to define the study's parameters and make informed choices about the research design.

### **Delimitations**

The study's significant delimitation centers on using the U.S. contingent of the MCCA census as the study population. The study's focus on law enforcement agencies in the U.S. contingent of the MCCA census presents certain contextual limitations. Although this focus allows a detailed examination of MP's impact on policy implementation within a specific context, it inherently limits the generalizability of findings to broader public administration contexts (Hood, 1998). Public administration practices and policy implementation processes vary significantly among jurisdictions and organizational settings. Therefore, the study's findings do not capture the diverse experiences and perspectives in international or non-U.S. contexts.

Another delimitation to this study was the exclusion of policy executives. This exclusion was necessary to limit the focus on the impact of policy decisions on law enforcement. Additionally, this delimitation was necessary to prevent possible future negative repercussions on participating agencies, especially because such policy executives significantly influence law enforcement agencies' promotions and budgets. If policy executives were integrated into the study, it could impact the willingness of agency administrators to participate.

## **Limitations**

The study encountered several methodological challenges that warrant consideration. One significant issue is the data's reliability and validity, particularly law enforcement agencies' hesitancy to disclose nonpublic information (Christmas, 2012). The reluctance of agencies to provide specific data, such as UOF, injury, and arrest statistics, limited the scope of inquiry and introduced potential biases into the analysis. This hesitancy limited the scope of inquiry, rendering certain aspects inaccessible or unreliable and, therefore, unusable because of missing data. Additionally, statistical data published by MCCA could not be validated through either NIBRS or UCR. In many instances, data published by MCCA significantly differed from those found in NIBRS and UCR. This prevented the use of MCCA data as reliable or confirmable, requiring additional data mining from sources that could be academically supported.

Moreover, reliance on self-reported data from participants raises concerns about response accuracy and social desirability bias, which may influence the study's outcomes. Additionally, individuals who completed the surveys are in command positions or were authorized to do so by those in command positions, creating possible response bias issues because many in such positions of trust may be politically motivated or concerned about future professional opportunities if they are hypercritical of administrators' behaviors. Thus creating a possible skewed point of view.

Ethical considerations pose additional challenges to the study's validity and reliability. Although the research demonstrated a commitment to ethical principles, navigating ethical dilemmas remains complex (Willis, 2004). Ensuring participant rights, privacy, and confidentiality throughout all data collection and reporting methods was essential in this study. However, the potential for participants to withhold sensitive information or provide

professionally desirable responses could compromise the integrity of the study's findings.

Moreover, ethical concerns regarding participant anonymity and data protection require careful attention to maintain the trustworthiness of the research process.

The major limitation of this study was the small number of participants; even though there was a significant response from the survey, the MCCA represents only a small percentage of total U.S. agencies. A small percentage of overall agencies nationwide could impact the generalizability of the findings. Although this did not appear to be the case because many of the surveys were completed with brutal honesty and clarity, it is still a limitation that must be acknowledged.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this study suggest that the public policy implemented in the wake of MP has multiple adverse consequences for public administrators. Factors such as unfilled positions and negative interactions between the public and the SLB create a ripple effect across many levels. Beyond its immediate findings, this research lays the groundwork for future endeavors that promise to enrich academic discourse and contribute substantively to the field.

First and foremost, longitudinal studies could guide policymakers through the tangle of MP-induced policies. By extending the temporal horizon, these studies could offer an opportunity to observe the evolution of policies over time. Through rigorous empirical analysis, researchers can uncover subtle shifts, persistent challenges, and unexpected outcomes that elude short-term investigations. This longitudinal approach would deepen academic understanding of the complex interplay between MP and policy implementation and provide invaluable insights into the durability and sustainability of policy responses.



Moreover, comparative analyses across broader jurisdictions hold immense promise for expanding theoretical frameworks and refining existing empirical models. By examining the contextual nuances that shape policy outcomes in different cultural, political, and social settings, scholars could uncover universal principles while acknowledging the unique challenges posed by specific contexts. Such a comparative lens would enrich an understanding of MP's effects on public administration and possibly expand across disciplinary boundaries.

Such interdisciplinary collaboration represents another avenue for advancing scholarly discourse into MP and public administration. By bringing together scholars from sociology, psychology, political science, and other relevant fields, future researchers can leverage diverse perspectives to construct comprehensive theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. This interdisciplinary dialogue would enhance the rigor and robustness of future analyses and foster innovative solutions to complex societal challenges created by MP.

### **Summary**

This chapter served as a critical synthesis of the study's findings, examining their alignment with the literature in Chapter Two and unraveling their implications for research, theory, practice, and transformative change. The qualitative analyses have produced a nexus between MP and effective policy in the realm of public administration, uncovering a modern compound foundation of MP and illuminating second-order consequences that arise when external pressures clash with established policies and practices.

In summary, navigating the challenges posed by MP, PET, and elite influence underscores the paramount importance of effective policy implementation. Public administrators are pivotal in ensuring policies are well-conceived, adequately communicated, and implemented with foresight to avoid second-order consequences. Although this study provides insights into a

specific corner of public administration, its findings offer a foundation for broader considerations. Expanding research to include various SLBs would enrich understanding of policy implementation challenges across diverse sectors.

Illustrative examples shed light on the multifaceted nature of policy implementation challenges. For instance, sanitation workers tasked with sorting refuse to meet recycling standards may face public backlash despite merely executing directives from administrators. Similarly, public school teachers, mandated to remove certain books from classrooms, may encounter resistance rooted in concerns over educational freedom.

Although changes in policies and practices are inevitable and necessary in today's world, it is crucial to recognize the catalytic role of MP, PET, and elite theory in prompting vital societal discussions. Historical events such as the end of segregation, the women's suffrage movement, and the Civil Rights movement highlight how MP can drive positive societal changes despite initial challenges.

As evidenced by this study, it is not MP, PET, or elite influence that determines the success of a new policy. Instead, it is the implementation phase that ultimately determines policy outcomes. Policies crafted with foresight, clear communication, and multilevel support garner higher levels of community, staff, and political endorsement.

Collaboration and stakeholder engagement are pivotal to navigate the intricacies of policy implementation. Building consensus and addressing diverse stakeholder perspectives are essential for achieving sustainable policy outcomes. By leveraging insights from research and embracing collaborative approaches, public administrators can steer policy initiatives toward greater efficacy and societal impact.

The results from this research present a substantial and distinctive addition to the scholarly landscape of public administration. This study contributes nuanced insights that transcend the specific timeframe by evaluating the intricate interplay of MP-induced pressure and public policy spanning 2018 to 2022. Recognizing public administration as a multifaceted domain influencing the quality of life, the research's transferability across the entire public administration spectrum underscores its relevance for diverse contexts and scenarios.

In essence, this chapter not only brings forth the interconnections between MP and effective policy but also positions these findings within the broader discourse of public administration scholarship. The implications stretch beyond the immediate context, resonating with the intricacies of public administration and affirming the study's significance in advancing knowledge and understanding within the field.

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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**  
**Moral Panic Survey**

---

**Start of Block: Demographics**

Q1 I have read and understand the linked Moral Panic survey information sheet.

- Yes, I agree to participate
- No, I do not wish to participate
- 

Q2 Agency name:

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DQ1 What is the approximate population of your service area

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DQ2 Number of sworn officers -

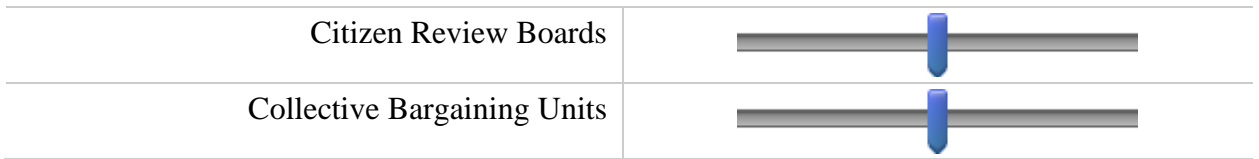
	Authorized Positions	Positions Filled
	Answer 1	Answer 1

2018		
2019		
2020		
2021		
2022		

DQ3/4 How much influence do the following have over policy decisions for your agency (0 - "Weak or N/A" to 10- "Very Influential")

No influence to Very Influential

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



DQ9 Outside of the core department, collective bargaining units, or Citizen Review Boards, please describe non-agency entities that are required to review and approve policies before implementation? (Such as but not limited to the board of supervisors, public comment period, or mayor)

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DQ10 Outside of the core department, collective bargaining units, or Citizen Review Boards, please describe other entities that your agency voluntarily allow to review policies before implementation? (Such as but not limited to the board of supervisors, public comment period, and mayor)

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Q5 What form of government is your service area subject to?

- Mayor-Council
- Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Model
- Council-Manager
- Commission
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

DQ7 Has your agency responded to protests in your service area in the last five years? (Defined as gatherings of greater than 100 individuals, no property damage)

- Yes
- No
- 

DQ7c Has your agency responded to significant protests that resulted in civil disorder/riots in your service area in the last five years? (Defined as gatherings of greater than 100 individuals, property damage greater than \$100,000)

- Yes
- No

---

DQ7a Reflecting on the largest protest, if applicable, what was the level of agency response

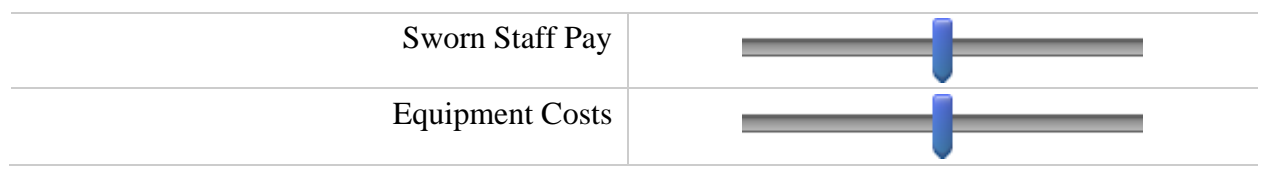
- Increased officer Presence (Minimum)
- CDU (civil disturbance unit) gear publicly displayed, and response units staged
- Full CDU response-Officer engaged
- Mutual aid / use of assisting agencies required (Maximum)

---

DQ7b What was the approximate operational costs to agency for response to the protests? (\$0 - \$150,000+)

Measured in thousands of Dollars

0 15 30 45 60 75 90 105 120 135 150



---

DQ8 Based on your knowledge, what are the top three contributing factors for protests/disorders/riots in your service area?

- First \_\_\_\_\_
- Second \_\_\_\_\_
- Third \_\_\_\_\_

**End of Block: Demographics**

---

**Start of Block: Use of Force**

DQ12 Please describe the amount of **political pressure** your agency has been subjected to demanding use of force reform.

---

DQ11 Please describe the **public demands** for use of force reform in your jurisdiction.

---

UFQ1 Has your agency changed the use of force (response to resistance) policy within the last five years?

Yes

No

UFQ1a When were UOF policy changes initiated

2018

2019

2020

2021

2022

UFQ2 What was the primary reason for changing or altering the agency's use of force policy?

---

UFQ3 What changes were made, generally?

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UFQ4 Were changes developed internally, through external influence, or both? (External influence includes but is not limited to political directives, legal changes, citizen review boards, and public demand)

- Internally developed and initiated
- Externally developed
- Combination of both
- 

UFQ5-7 Since Implementation of UOF policy modification has there been a change in the following (generally)

	Click to write Column 1		Click to write Column 2
	increased	Decreased	Percentage of Change

Overall Physical Incidents - not including routine application of handcuffs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Injuries during interactions (sworn and civilian)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Number of arrests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Violent crimes as reported in UCR/NIBRS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	



UFQ8 Has your agency been the subject of a consent decree in the past ten (10) years<br>

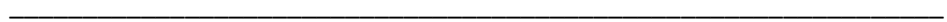
- Yes
- No

**End of Block: Use of Force**

---

**Start of Block: Budget**

DQ14 Please describe the **political calls** for the reallocation of the police budget for other social programs.





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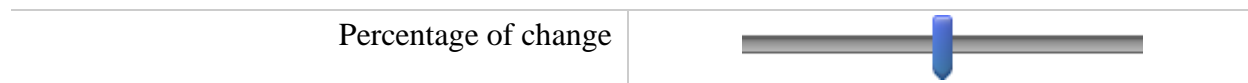
DQ13 Please describe the **public calls** for reallocation of police budgets for other social programs in your jurisdiction.

---

---

BQ1 Has your agency budget been reduced due to calls to defund the police in the last five years?

0 3 5 8 10 13 15 18 20 23 25



---

BQ2 Were police services required to be reduced, cut, or re-prioritized due to budget changes in the last five years?

---

---

BQ3 Were services required to be added, cut, or re-prioritized due to political influence or policies in the last five years? (examples may be legislation, political directives)

---

---

BQ4 What services were changed, added or subtracted

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---

BQ4a How (if any) were such changes implemented?

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**End of Block: Budget**

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**Start of Block: Final**

PP1 As a major law enforcement agency, how have political pressures impacted your agency efficiency, moral, or policies and practices?

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Q31 What changes have been implemented by your agency since 2018, as a way to maintain or improve community relations between law enforcement and the public.

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**End of Block: Final**

## APPENDIX B

### IRB Approval

Date: 10-26-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY23-24-469

Title: MORAL PANIC IN THE MODERN ERA: THE EFFECTS OF MORAL PANIC ON POLICY IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE FIELD OF LAW ENFORCEMENT Creation Date: 9-18-2023 End

Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Charles Oakley

Review Board: Research Ethics

Office Sponsor:

### Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

### Key Study Contacts

Member George Austin	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact [REDACTED]
Member Charles Oakley	Role Principal Investigator	Contact [REDACTED]
Member Charles Oakley	Role Primary Contact	Contact [REDACTED]

### Initial Submission

## APPENDIX C

### Study Intro and Survey Link

Greetings [Agency representative],

As a doctoral candidate in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Public Administration degree. The purpose of my research is to investigate the profound implications of moral panic on US public policy, particularly within law enforcement agencies. The hypothesis posits that moral panic substantially influences policy formulation and implementation, leading to observable effects on policy changes, budget allocations, and societal responses via law enforcement and I am writing to invite your agency to join my study.

Participants must be an agency representative for a law enforcement agency that meets the eligibility requirements to be a member of the Major City Chiefs Association (MCCA). With the general guidelines of being a primary law enforcement in the jurisdiction, have a residential population of 1,000,000 or more, as well as have approximately 1000 sworn positions. Participants will be asked to take an anonymous, online survey. It should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete the procedure listed. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click here

[https://liberty.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_etbkxTSZH494K5U](https://liberty.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_etbkxTSZH494K5U)

to complete the survey.

An information document link is provided as a link in the first survey question containing additional information about my research. Because participation is anonymous, you do not need to sign and return a consent document. After you have read the information form, please indicate willingness to participate by answering “yes, I agree”. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Sincerely,

Charles J Oakley “CJ”  
PhD Candidate – Helms School of Government, Liberty University

XXXXXXXX.XXXXXX@fairfaxcounty.gov

-OR-

XXXXXXXXXX@liberty.edu

IRB #: IRB-FY23-24-469

## APPENDIX D

### Moral Panic Survey Information Sheet

**Title of the Project:** MORAL PANIC IN THE MODERN ERA: THE EFFECTS OF MORAL PANIC ON POLICY IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE FIELD OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

**Principal Investigator:** Charles J. Oakley Doctoral Candidate, Helms School of Government, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be employed by a law enforcement agency that is eligible to be a member of the Major City Chiefs Association (MCCA). Taking part in this research project is voluntary. (Agency requirements are: Must be primary law enforcement, have a residential population of 1,000,000 or more, have approximately 1000 sworn positions)

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to investigate the far-reaching implications of moral panic on public policy within the United States, focusing specifically on its impact as measured through law enforcement agencies.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in an online open-ended survey that should taking approximately 20-30 minutes.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include an increased understanding of moral panic's impact on public policy development and will shed light on the complex interplay between societal reactions and policy decisions. By Addressing gaps in implementation literature this research will contribute valuable insights to public administrators, and policymakers. Providing a path to help policy executives in developing policies that effectively address societal concerns without exacerbating tensions or

contributing to unintended consequences. By exploring the relationship between moral panic and public policy, this research aspires to enable policy makers to create evidence-based, equitable, and effective policies, ultimately contributing to more resilient, inclusive, and cohesive communities in the face of moral panic and societal challenges.

Therefore, contributing to the scholarly knowledge by exploring the unique dynamics of law enforcement as a target of public policy actions. Exploring the potential second-order consequences that may exacerbate societal divisions. As well as promoting policies that are evidence-based, equitable, and effective, fostering more resilient, inclusive, and cohesive communities in the face of moral panic and societal challenges.

Ultimately this study's findings will contribute to the broader fields of public administration, criminal justice, and sociology, enhancing knowledge on the dynamics of moral panic and its impact on policy implementation.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer/in a locked file. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

#### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey, without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

#### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Charles J. Oakley (CJ). You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr G. Austin, at [REDACTED].

#### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

#### Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

## APPENDIX E

### MA5 Phone Interview -Redacted

CJ Oakley	00:04	Afternoon, [REDACTED]
MA5	00:05	How are you?
CJ Oakley	00:06	I am good. How are you?
MA5	00:08	Not bad
CJ Oakley	00:09	I appreciate you taking the time.
MA5	00:12	No worries.
CJ Oakley	00:13	Are they keeping you busy?
MA5	00:16	Yeah, yeah, yeah. Meetings after meetings
CJ Oakley	00:20	Yeah. I understand. I will not take But just a couple of minutes of your time, if you don't mind. So I just have a couple of follow-up questions. Reference that survey I sent.
MA5	00:37	Okay.
CJ Oakley	00:38	And once again, this is all voluntary. You could you could stop it at any time and I'll redact anything that you guys that would identify your agency.
MA5	00:51	Okay.
CJ Oakley	00:53	So do you mind if I record this so I could transcribe it?
MA5	00:57	nope, not at all.
CJ Oakley	00:59	Okay. So this is kind of this is following up on the interview question. So I only have three of them for you. The first one is what was the most influential input recommendations or findings from the law enforcement policy organization such as per NYU Policing Project or legislative bodies that prompted adjustments to your use of force policies, training programs or reporting procedures?
MA5	01:27	We asked our agency. I asked PERF to come in and review some of our policies and give recommendations which they came in on voluntarily. And they came in and made recommendations on use of force and on our K9 policy. We're in fact going through right now looking at the recommendations and making changes based on their recommendations.
CJ Oakley	01:56	Okay.
MA5	01:58	The Force policy, a couple policy recommendations they made on our canine was to have a, before our K9 is deployment, the supervisor had to approve it thank God the chief didn't agree with that. So we don't have that. But what it's modified our policy is that chief now has made it so that all and this is kind of still in development and probably be published in probably about three weeks. Our policy now is going to be that the K9 handler has to announce over the radio it give the....so that he's deploying to dog. And I mean, I don't mean when I saw deploy I don't mean that he's going to bite somebody it means he's got 'em in play for the call if that makes sense.
CJ Oakley	02:49	Oh, wow. So just bringing him out of the vehicle?



- MA5 02:52 bringing him out of the car to engage and he doesn't have to announce that he's going to release the dog on somebody. And the chief's the chief's thinking on that is and we've convinced him short of making a precinct sergeant. Giving permission to open the door on the K9 door. Is that okay If the canine guy has made a poor decision to bring the dog out where it shouldn't be, the Sergeant, can hear that and say put the dog back. That's that's going to be our, that like an example of what the PERF, their review of our policy has changed.
- CJ Oakley 03:34 Interesting. Okay. Can you pinpoint a focusing event that led to these revisions in your use of force policies?
- MA5 03:48 I don't I don't think we have a focused event. I can tell you that when our chief is three years and three months here, and when he first got here, we had a couple of I'll tell you why. Why the canine force policy was brought in was because when he got here, we had a couple of bites, all good bites. But he was he used to from **[REDACTED LOCATION]**. He wasn't used to the dogs being in play that much of that makes sense.
- MA5 04:20 So he was in charge of operations as a deputy chief and he didn't have as many bites come across his ta... his desk so he was, you know, concerned about why we had so many bites and when he first got here. So he's always been sensitive to that. And that's why I tell you, it was a catalyst in a sense. That would be the reason why K9 was definitely on the table for PERF to review. Now, if you didn't have that, would a likely chief probably ask you from your professional organization to come in and review policies you would take one of your policies probably would be your canine without that perspective. That makes sense.
- CJ Oakley 04:58 Absolutely. Absolutely. It's a very high visibility.
- MA5 05:03 Yeah. And I think I think the biggest thing is the biggest reason that he asked for PERF to come in it just gives him a chance to have, you know, because he was here about a year and a half a year here when he when he asked them. And it gives him a chance to make some changes and to give somebody else to give him perspective, because maybe he's not copacetic on some things but worried that is his, his bias from **[REDACTED LOCATION]** coming in and he wants to be able to have a credible organization agreeing with him to make changes that make sense.
- CJ Oakley 05:37 100%. Absolutely. So the last question I have for you is, from your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies?
- MA5 05:54 See that again to me I'm sorry.
- CJ Oakley 05:55 Okay. From your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies?
- MA5 06:06 I think they've increased greatly for two reasons. One is, is I think more of society is looking at it and demanding it. I was probably, what, eight

years ago, nine years ago. You never see a police department have their policies online and want to redact everything and not release them. And now all your policies are on that out. You know that. Plus we have a we have a civilian oversight board. In a sense, it's quasi it's nowhere near we it's not an oversight board. It's a review board. So if I may, if a citizen makes a complaint against a officer and doesn't like the disposition, they can appeal to that board and that bill, that board will review not only the actions of the officer, the investigation, the internal affairs did and the policies that may be a catalyst for the for the violations that make sense.

CJ Oakley

07:07

Absolutely.

MA5

07:08

So, We've got that. And that's that's in state code. But it's not, state code passed it but they didn't mandate it. Basically, a state code. We're a Dillon state so we can't do anything the city of the state doesn't let us do so. What the state code did was allowed city council if They wanted to do this board, this panel. They could. and our City council did it. Now, they didn't go as far as some other ones where they have , you know, subpoena power and discipline power and all that. They do not have that.

CJ Oakley

07:43

Yeah, absolutely. Okay. I'm going to stop the recording real quick.

## APPENDIX F

### MW4 Microsoft Teams Interview - Redacted

CJ Oakley	00:05	Morning, Major.
MW4	00:07	Hey, good morning. Can you hear me?
CJ Oakley	00:09	Sure can.
MW4	00:11	All right.
CJ Oakley	00:11	Sure can.
MW4	00:12	I'm all yours. Just ended the last meeting. And then I say close the door on your way out to them.
CJ Oakley	00:19	I appreciate you taking the time and helping out with this.
MW4	00:23	No worries. I want to help . You're making the world a better place. All right.
CJ Oakley	00:29	You all ready for your DC trip?
MW4	00:32	Pleasantries – Redacted through 1:26
CJ Oakley	00:45	
MW4	00:45	
CJ Oakley	00:58	
MW4	01:03	
CJ Oakley	01:08	
MW4	01:18	
CJ Oakley	01:18	
MW4	01:20	
CJ Oakley	01:26	Oh, so I've got. I just have a couple of follow up interview questions if you don't. If you don't mind. There's, you know, about three questions. And just to kind of go over once again, I will remove any references to your agency, to your department, to you.
MW4	01:46	I appreciate it
CJ Oakley	01:46	from that. And your free
Speaker	01:50	Yeah I didn't ask permission cause if I did it'd take too long to run everything through legal.
CJ Oakley	01:54	No, I appreciate it. ....And you're free to stop this at any time.
Speaker	02:02	All right.
CJ Oakley	02:02	So, you know, just getting that out. Do you mind if I record it?
MW4	02:06	Yeah, go ahead.
CJ Oakley	02:06	Okay. Just so I could just. So I can transcribe it later. Um, so the first question is, what was the most influential input recommendations or finding from a professional law enforcement policy organization such as Perf NYU policing project or a legislative body that prompted adjustments in your agency's use of force, policies, practices or reporting procedures.
MW4	02:34	So the first part of that, what was the most influential?
CJ Oakley	02:37	Correct.
MW4	02:38	And like it is in recommendation is what they're recommending or because. So I would say this and tell me that this is not what you're

looking for, but for us is probably the move to ICAT\*. A few years ago that directly impacted all of our use of force, which then impacts the reporting, the investigation and how we do everything what we teach. ICAT, we were one of the first big departments. We were the one that they did research on early on. So we went to that and maybe five years ago now.

- CJ Oakley 03:13 Oh, wow. So yeah,  
MW4 03:16 we were very early. So everybody in the department gets it, recruits get it, and then we refresh on it. I think right now we refresh every year.
- CJ Oakley 03:23 Okay. So was this was this received when they decided to do the iChat? How was that pushed out to everybody? Was it, you know, came from the chief down or was it a  
MW4 03:34 yes  
CJ Oakley 03:35 Okay.  
MW4 03:36 Yeah. Came from the chief down to the command staff. And then they used the training academy to do all of it, But they used some folks that were very well-respected in the academy across the entire department. Everybody loves these, the set of instructors. And when they did that, I think I took a lot of the sting out of it.
- CJ Oakley 03:56 Yeah, Interesting That that's interesting. Yeah. We're just starting iChat so that that five years that's a great time frame. Okay. So my next question is, is could you pinpoint a focusing event that led to revisions in your use of force policy? What was the driver?
- MW4 04:20 Oh, there were a few events that we had. Its where they were they were second guess kind of the upper level on that. We need to that we need to use deadly force or can we have done something different? I know one was a guy with a screwdriver to there was a foot chase two officers come around corner, he's got a screwdriver and he runs at the one with the screwdriver. So and it became an officer involved shooting and that was one that they, they all we referred back to and I'm trying to remember what the other 1 or 2 were, but they weren't firearm related. They were sharp edged weapons related where we pushed the envelope ourselves. And instead of just backing off a little bit and buying some time. But I don't know. They were the ones that we always referenced all the way through the ICAT stuff early on. So there were there was a group of cases. It's a good question. What was it? Because it's pretty...It predates [Redacted named event]. Well, we had [Redacted named event] in 2020. So it predates that. I want to find out if I can find out. Can I get back to you on that?
- CJ Oakley 05:44 Oh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Um, so my last question is and my last formal question is, from your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies and practices?
- MW4 06:06 The influence is very, very heavy, what we learned, especially in our department through [Redacted Named Event], and mainly was that we don't control the narrative. Somebody else will control the narrative. So

we want to be in front of everything if we can. So when groups come along with extra training to push or there's are, you know, there's a push from the state or even our local council on something, you can't just throw it away. You know, you got to look deeper than what you're looking at and see what truly is needed there. They're getting our information from somewhere, so we may not make a change simply based on that right away, but we need to be considering what they're asking. And then is there a way we can work together to do some sort of hybrid where they're going to recognize we're making an effort and we are recognizing that, hey, they may have some valid points. We just can't turn a blind eye to everything they say because maybe they're not our greatest friend every day.

- CJ Oakley 07:10 Excellent. Do you involve the public in your policy decisions or do they review your...
- MW4 07:19 We don't yet, but we are going under a consent decree. We just got a rough draft consent decree two weeks ago, and I foresee that being part is the policy, the public review section of the policy. So I would say in a year or two or so sooner, but yeah, I'm sure based on what everybody else is going around the country. Yeah.
- CJ Oakley 07:41 All right. Well, I tell you what, that is everything. Those are all the questions that I had for you. It's a.
- MW4 07:47 Gotcha.
- CJ Oakley 07:48 Let me. I'm going to stop the recording right now.

\*Integrating Communication Assessment and Tactics training or "ICAT"

## APPENDIX G

### WC1 Phone Interview -Redacted

#### *WC1 Interview*

WC1	00:18	Well, Sir how's the weather in Virginia today?
CJ Oakley	00:19	It's a little cold, but I can't complain. It's not snowing.
WC1	00:25	Yeah, I heard that things were warmer this winter across the nation. Did you guys get any of that?
CJ Oakley	00:33	Yeah, we. We actually only had just a couple of small some small snow incidents, so I can't complain about it at all.
WC1	00:43	Well good
CJ Oakley	00:44	How about over for you?
WC1	00:47	Well I don't know It was only 70 degrees yesterday with blue sky, so I don't want to rub it in brother.
WC1	00:51	We've got rain coming in this weekend, though, so if that makes you feel better.
CJ Oakley	00:55	Your killing me. your Killin me. Yeah. It's a balmy 35 degrees out right now, so.
WC1	01:02	Yeah, wait until, I call you July and it's 113 out here. Then we'll talk.
CJ Oakley	01:06	Okay, Deal.
WC1	01:09	So how did your project turn out?
CJ Oakley	01:10	Actually, it's going. It's going great. You know, the some of the stuff I've got about the 25 different agencies that that weighed in and did the survey. So I've got a good sample and it across the board there's a lot of connections and stuff that the I'm seeing a lot of correlations. Now there's a couple of outliers which is kind of one of the reasons why I wanted to see if I could ask you a few questions.
WC1	01:47	Sure.
CJ Oakley	01:48	Okay. Do you mind if I recorded? So I can
WC1	01:51	No go right ahead, absolutely
CJ Oakley	01:51	And as usual, I will redact anything that that would identify you guys.
WC1	02:02	I'll try to keep it vague, to cut down on your workload.
CJ Oakley	02:07	But, um. So I've only got three interview questions. The first one is, what's the most influential input recommendations or findings from a professional law enforcement policy organization? And I'm talking about something such as per for NYU policing project or legislative bodies that prompted the adjustments in your agency's use of force policies, trainings and programs.
WC1	02:34	We had statutory law change in our state, Um, in 2020, or in the wake of 2020s events. That eliminated the carotid restraint hold or any choke hold as described by the legislature. So that was probably the most significant aspect. There was also changes to lethal force policy on. And those were all done in a legislative arena. So it wasn't about recommendations. It wasn't about, um, public law enforcement policy

doing research. It was about legislators reacting and making some fairly significant changes in the law.

CJ Oakley 03:13 So that was that was done in 2020?

WC1 03:17 In the wake of 2020.

CJ Oakley 03:19 Okay.

WC1 03:19 Might have actually taken place later in 2021, and in effect in 2022. But that was the source of the legislation was the events of 2020 in places other than in California

CJ Oakley 03:32 Oh, okay. Interesting. Okay. So my next one is, can you pinpoint a focusing event that led to revisions in your agency's use of force policies? You kind of touched on it prior, but was there a specific event other than legislation that occurred to to prompt this?

WC1 03:56 Um. Yeah. Minneapolis.

CJ Oakley 03:58 Okay.

WC1 04:03 I mean, that that grabbed everyone's attention in 2020. And our legislators immediately went to work.

CJ Oakley 04:11 Okay. All right. And the last question that I have for you is, from your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies?

WC1 04:31 Well, we believe that the with the trust in the behest with the community, there's nothing we can do for without community support. What's interesting, though, is I, I work in a very large state that won't be identified for survey purposes. It might be the most populous in the nation as a result is large, not just in population, but also geography. And so while power is centered in in other large metropolitan areas, the community makeup in those areas is very different from what we enjoy here at home. So whereas we have a public that's very supportive of law enforcement budgets that have increased since 2020 for our police department and other agencies in the area. These state legislation is driven by other communities that do not have that law enforcement support. So as a result, our community ends up having to respond to what other communities want instead of what our community needs or desires. We're definitely in what we would call the conservative minority here in our community. I'll just give you one example. C.J. asked off the top last weekend on Saturday, we had 3200 people, 3200 people paid cash money to show up for a run called the [ Redacted, Location Specific] . So people came out on a cold and wet Saturday morning and paid cash money to demonstrate their support for law enforcement. While there were 5000 people attend the event, 3200 active runners, walkers. I saw people in wheelchairs, people on canes and crutches that were walking 2K to support law enforcement. I don't know anywhere else in the world that's happening now. So that's the kind of support we have in our community. But as you're well aware, statewide, that sentiment is very different. And there are challenges in major metropolitan areas of the state and with that large population. So goes the votes of the legislature. So that's the challenge I see from

where I sit..... is my community is not effectively represented when it comes to these legal changes, these statewide changes, not just legislation, but also with POST for policy guidelines and training guidelines and those kinds of things as well. So it's you know, we play by the rules they give us and we do a good job with that and we're in full compliance. But some of these things seem to have gone far beyond what our community might be feeling as necessary when it comes to law enforcement.

CJ Oakley	07:27	Interesting.
WC1	07:28	I hope that make sense.
CJ Oakley	07:30	Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. 100%.
CJ Oakley	07:34	I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording right now. Okay..



## APENDIX H

### MA3 Phone Interview 1 (MA3v1)- Redacted

MA3	00:10	Lt [ <b>Redacted</b> ] (answering Phone)
CJ Oakley	00:11	Hey, Lt this is CJ Oakley? How are you doing?
MA3	00:13	Good. How are you?
CJ Oakley	00:14	Good. I appreciate you taking the time to take my call today.
MA3	00:19	Yep.
CJ Oakley	00:21	So this this a follow up from the survey that you guys filled out for me a few weeks ago.
MA3	00:30	Yeah. What was this? Sorry we do a lot of the... I just sent tons of surveys all the time to fill out for lots of things. Can you remind me the topic of this one.
CJ Oakley	00:40	Sure it was the impact of moral panic on public policy. I could actually send you a copy of the survey. I think
MA3	00:53	if you could, please.
CJ Oakley	00:54	All right. Yeah. Give me give me just two seconds. I'm right here on my computer. I think I've got a relatively clean copy of one that I can send you a survey. You know what? I could actually send you a copy of the one that you filled out and sent to me. It should just take a quick second.
MA3	02:01	That's right.
CJ Oakley	02:04	They keeping you busy today?
MA3	02:08	Yeah. I get a few things going on. We're trying to work on here, so there's definitely a busy week here.
CJ Oakley	02:25	I understand. Okay. Here we go. Okay. Let me. Just pull yours up real Quick.
CJ Oakley	03:25	Okay, so I'm going to send this over via your department email.
MA3	03:28	Okay.
MA3	03:29	Thank you.
CJ Oakley	03:30	sent. ....Okay. You should have it any time now.
MA3	04:05	All right. All right.
CJ Oakley	04:29	Did it come through?
MA3	04:31	Yep got it, yeah I remember this one.
CJ Oakley	04:33	Okay. So I only have just a couple of follow up questions. If if you got, you know, five, ten minutes, it really should take less than ten minutes.
MA3	04:46	Okay. All right.
CJ Oakley	04:50	All right. So as and I'll go back through the disclaimer here. I will redact any agency or personal information. It's going to be pulled out, so it's not going to be in my final paper. And this is voluntary. If you decide that you don't want to answer any more questions, just let me know and we'll end it right there.
MA3	05:11	Okay
CJ Oakley	05:12	All right. So and do you mind if I record this so I could transcribe it later?

MA3 05:18 Yep.

CJ Oakley 05:19 All right. Okay, so the interview questions. What was the most influential input recommendation or finding from a professional law enforcement policy organization? And I'm talking about a group such as Perf or NYU Policing project or legislative body that prompted adjustments in your agency's force policies, training programs or reporting procedures.

MA3 05:44 Um, I'm kind of on it. And so we had to reach out for a lot of these questions to other experts within the department. And so I just wouldn't be the best one to kind of if we had to reach out, I think, to about 10 or 15 other experts and given these questions, were all kind of broad.

CJ Oakley 06:05 Okay.

MA3 06:06 Yeah. So.

CJ Oakley 06:08 All right.

MA3 06:09 Let me try to see here if I can try to figure out where that is within your survey so that I can try to find out. Yeah, I think I'm going to have to pass on that one. I know. We said uh lets see. Outside of collective bargaining system review board, I know we kind of put down board of supervisors elected board supervisors are kind of our new and review and approve our general orders so.

CJ Oakley 06:59 Well what I'm what I was getting at with this. Did you guys get something from perf or was it legislative that kind of prompted you guys to change that? Not review, but, you know, hey, it's time to change these? Or was that done just kind of a natural evolution?

MA3 07:21 Yeah, I wouldn't be the best. I wouldn't be

CJ Oakley 07:23 Okay.

MA3 07:24 So I don't have the knowledge on kind of what that is. So. Yeah. Sorry.

CJ Oakley 07:28 Not a problem. Not a problem. Okay. So can you pinpoint a focusing event that led to the revisions in the policy? Was there a certain thing that prompted the agency to kind of, hey, we need to change our policies or update our policies?

MA3 07:54 No, I don't have any.

CJ Oakley 07:59 Okay.

MA3 08:00 Yeah. I don't have anything to put on that one. Okay.

CJ Oakley 08:03 Okay. Um, so the last question is, from your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies?

MA3 08:19 I would say that it's you know, it definitely has a part in it. And we take into account and we have a public a way for a public or at least public advocacy groups to have time to discuss or give their opinion on some of our policies before they're implemented. And so I would say that it's definitely part of it, but there are several parts. So.

CJ Oakley 08:52 Okay. All right. And I like I said, I only had three questions for you.

MA3 09:00 Right. That's good. Sorry, I can't answer all for it. But yeah, there's a lot of people we had to reach out to you for this to kind of get a different input. So,

Speaker	09:08	no, I. I appreciate it. And I appreciate you guys helping out with the survey and all that. Thank you very much.
MA3	09:16	All right, sir.
CJ Oakley	09:16	Have a good day. You, too. Take care.
MA3	09:19	Alright by

## APPENDIX I

## MA3 Phone Interview 2 (MA3v2)- Redacted

CJ Oakley	00:00	So I've got three questions for you. And you should be able. It shouldn't be an issue if at some point you decide you don't want to answer it, just let me know.
MA3 Subject 2	00:09	I mean, as for your dissertation, I mean, it'll get published, but it's not going to hit anything else.
CJ Oakley	00:14	Correct. And I'm going to redact anything that could identify the agency or you.
MA3 Subject 2	00:22	Perfect, if you can if it can't be reverse engineer to find out. It was [REDACTED] and me. I'm good.
CJ Oakley	00:30	All right. I'm sorry. I had to get my interview questions out.
MA3 Subject 2	00:39	Okay.
CJ Oakley	00:39	What was the most influential input, recommendation or findings from a professional law enforcement policy organization such as Perf and why you policing project or legislative body to prompt an adjustment in your agency's use of force policies, training or report for reporting.
MA3 Subject 2	00:58	Damn, that's a lot to unpack. So if you're asking you what PERF, specifically, what PERF policies has any impact on general orders for use of force?
CJ Oakley	01:09	Did, you guys get recommendations, either legislative or organizational, from a group directing you to change your force?
MA3 Subject 2	01:22	Yes. So there have been special interest groups in the community, and I. I do not have firsthand information.
CJ Oakley	01:30	Mm hmm.
MA3 Subject 2	01:31	This is the information that was sort of almost second floor information, because I've been out of that circle conversation, because I used to live in that world of policy before, after Covid. That's for I'm sorry. A year before Covid started, I was removed that policy. I got shipped off to a district station. So I no longer have visibility since 2019 on policies, but my understanding is as follows There have been special interest groups in [ REDACTED - Location] and they're headed by the National Chapter of AACCP the ACLU, certain other special interest groups, and they are forming a group to provide advice to the police department. And they look at our policy and we literally go back and forth in communication or email. You know, we share this new draft of a use of force policy and they send it back saying, no, we don't like this language. We don't like that. And I mean, I can't go into great detail because I don't know which specific policy points were addressed, but I know there was influence and I know there was input from outside the agency. Now, specific to PERF, I couldn't tell you what PERF was, what was used out of PERF. I know PERF has their own recommendations. And typically, generally speaking, we do abide by or

- we do use that as a guideline. But I can't say with confirmation that we totally adopted all the recommendations. I had no idea.
- CJ Oakley 03:12 Okay.
- CJ Oakley 03:13 Perf was just an example of the type of organization.
- MA3 03:17 Okay. Yes. We also obviously since 2020, 2021, with the new legislation, with this, quote reformation of police and sort of decriminalization and all the whole scaling back of laws, that obviously has impact on our use of force policy because yeah, we don't like... One of them if I remember.... I don't know if it's because of legislation or because of community input, like for instance, like example the use of Tasers back in a days when [Redacted] were on the streets, I use tasers on people running from me for like drunk in public or even suspicious events people are running. But today we have a policy that says that you cannot use Tasers on fleeing individuals for misdemeanor crime. I believe the language is like a misdemeanor or something less than that. Like it has to be it has to be something more than other than the guy is running because he is drunk or he stole like a fucking Snickers bar from the 7-11. You can't deploy a taser on that individual running from you. So yes, that that's actually a recent change. And so small little things like that come to mind when I think of the changes and use of force policy. But I will say I don't know how much of the influence has come from like say PERF versus the community members, but the community members have always been part of this conversation, always going back to maybe 2017, 2015 when we had the ad hoc committee.
- CJ Oakley 04:51 Mm hmm.
- MA3 04:53 I was actually plugged into that the ad hoc committee had 270 plus recommendations to pretty much revamp our policies. And so we had to have years of ongoing meetings to address each and every single one of those 272 recommendations and come to like almost middle ground because we were just under the we were just under the pressure of political pressure from the government center to work with an ad hoc committee to reform our general orders and policies and use of force was one of those categories.
- CJ Oakley 05:28 Okay. So my next question is, can you pinpoint a focusing event that led to the revision of your agency's policies? Was there a specific reason why you guys jumped up and said, Hey, we've got to change?
- MA3 05:47 You broke out what?.
- Subject 2
- CJ Oakley 05:49 Where you guys perked up and said, Hey, we've got to change. Was there a specific event that made you guys recognize that?
- MA3 05:57 Um. Again, I, I can't say it was. So, All right, so I'll give you a lot of ...how do i put this ? I can't say there's like one singular point or event that drastically changed our use of force that doesn't come to mind, but instead I think it's more like different factors that plagued policing. And I'll give you examples. Obviously, you know, George Floyd, a Black
- Subject 2

Lives Matter movement of summer of 2020. Then you had the liberal kind of district, the county attorney's coming in. That changed the threshold of like what they're going to convict, you know, they upped it to \$1000 for a grand larceny that that deal a date. But if you stole an \$800 iPhone. They were going to not - prosecute it, shoplifting if it didn't meet a certain threshold, even though it legally we have probable cause to make an arrest and take them to court in the court system, because of the different philosophy of the current prosecutor they wouldn't, they would just not-prosecute the case. So we didn't change our policy because of that. But these all had factors in our decision making and legislative changes as well. Obviously, that that was obviously forced down our throats from [REDACTED] the capitol. But now you see almost like a reverse course and in direction because now they're trying to strengthen up these crimes, especially with these retail, organized retail theft crimes because now it's out of control, because there's no there's no accountability. So it's just a revolving door. but there's no singular point. Hmm. Maybe the event with [Location specific event], the officer [REDACTED] and Taser use, I can't remember if that was there was anything to what direct results of policy changes were come out of that. I am not the person, [REDACTED] will probably have that better than me, but I don't have an answer.

- CJ Oakley 08:10 Okay. The last question that I have for you from your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies?
- MA3 Subject 2 08:23 Ok say that one more time.
- CJ Oakley 08:24 So from your position as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies.
- MA3 Subject 2 08:36 it puts ? Okay. So let me let me put it. I understand the national and the global need to be better at policing. I understand that. I embrace improvement. I embrace, too, we can always do better. But sometimes political pressure can go both ways. You can go good, as in to improve, but also can go bad because it's political. There's no there's not an objective reasoning. There's no data. Sometimes there's no data behind the decisions that the politicians or laws are made. It is sometimes based on feelings of the community. And when you deal with that, it makes our jobs a little more difficult. Now, I accept difficult, I accept challenges, but in in recent changes, it has been much more difficult in a negative, because it disarmed, it disarmed our officers to the degree where, it's almost the analogy I can give you was like, we have to fight, police already have to engage with criminals in a in a scene like in a fist fight. We are we're bound by laws. We're bound by policy. We're bound by we're bound by just, you know, obviously accountability. We're professionals, but criminals they're not bound by anything there's no policy for them. They are criminals, the whole thing is anything goes at all costs. And so with the new, recent policies before

that, we were fighting with maybe like one arm behind our back. But now, ever since our policies came through 2020 and 2021, 2022, it's like now you put our guys, you're almost like just taking another arm behind our backs and expecting us to have a fight and call it a fair fight. And that's the best, like the best illustration I can give. You know,

CJ Oakley 10:47 No that's fair.

MA3 10:48 Because it's like we get it. We are the face of the government. We get it. We are supposed to be the one that hold the standard. I get it. We are the ones that should be held at a higher, you know, a higher level, higher ground. But when these laws like, for instance, I give an example of one of the tools that policing is successful means successful is pretextual. Stop So say like tint All right. And window tint or I'm sorry, or expired tags, right? so something for something trivial or and then and we were able to stop those cars and we were able to conduct traffic stops and as they fled we were able to pursue. But that's actually one of those changes in policy that we can no longer pursue for trivial traffic violations. We. We have a higher standard now. Now . Is that a good thing? It reduces crazy out of control traffic pursuits because of you know, expired tag. But sometimes we catch the bad guys who just committed a robbery. Sometimes they have drugs and car guns in the car. But that's not all the time. And we don't have we don't have data, obviously on the drawl back and negatives to prove what could have happened. But it was just a tool that was given to us. But now you took that all away from us. You know, we no longer have that tool. And so then it's one less tool in the tool bag for us to do our job. And so then it's harder. It's a harder hill to climb a steeper hill for us to climb. And was what this? I don't know. I would love to go a little longer, but I'm looking at my clock and two minutes on the clock. But basically, it does. This is not a fair fight. It's just not.

CJ Oakley 12:57 Okay. That's all the questions I have for you. I do. I do appreciate it, my friend.

## APPENDIX J

### *SE2 Teams Interview – Redacted*

CJ Oakley	00:02	Okay. As usual, I will redact anything that identifies you. Identifies your agency to the greatest extent as possible. If you don't want to answer anything, just say I prefer not to answer. Or we could stop the interview at any time. Do you mind if I record this so I can transcribe it and make sure everything's accurate?
SE2	00:24	That's fine.
CJ Oakley	00:24	Okay. So I only have three questions for you. It should be pretty quick. What was the most influential input or recommendation or finding from a professional law enforcement policy organization? And I'm talking about a group such as PERF or NYU Policing Project or a legislative body that prompted adjustments to a use of force policy by your agency. Um.
SE2	00:57	Okay. So I would think that. So the interesting thing with us is that we went through a spate of shootings in 2010, 2009 to 2010. We had a chief at the time that, you know, was, you know, made some pretty public, you know, tough on crime statements. And, you know, you know, when cops hear that, it's like, oh, it's, you know, kind of, you know, yeah, let's do you know? Well, you know, the problem with that is that, yeah, the statements sound great, but then, you know, when you get jammed up, it's, it's like, yeah, well now I just, you know, I, I really can't do anything for you, right? So, you know, and unfortunately, that ended up getting us in a consent decree that, that we were under for about, I want to say 5 or 6 years wasn't, wasn't as terribly long as you see as you see in other agencies. And the thing with our consent decree was that it was it was pretty narrowly focused on officer involved shootings. You know, didn't it didn't really cover, you know, globally, use of force or anything like that. But but the interesting thing about it was that our use of force policy during this period didn't change. Right? It didn't change from, you know, years where we had just a handful of officer involved shootings to where we had about to we had about 10 or 11 within a year and a half period. Right. So so the policy didn't change, but the culture did. So so that, you know, that that came out and in the in the DOJ's findings. And so it just so so they I'd say that the biggest. I'd say that the biggest policy recommendations came from the consent decree itself. So a lot of times, you know, we think of consent decrees as, you know, hey, it's all bad. It's it's you know, they're all punitive. And it's you got to you got to look at the bright side, too, right? So so sometimes you get put under a consent decree and there's stuff that cost money that you've been told, "no, you can't have this" right, before by the city commission. And it's like, well, no, now, now we have to have this right? So so talking about things like span of



control in an operational units, you know, having having no more than than eight officers reporting to a first line supervisor which, you know applied for applied to patrol that applied to our our proactive teams, like our problem solving teams, our tactical units, like our tactical robbery unit or our felony apprehension team, etc., and implementing training, you know, to where we're covering use of force policies, de-escalation, you know, not just not just teaching the policy. Right, but but driving that culture and the training itself. So yeah, I think that was the that was the biggest nudge for us to, you know, as far as our policy and culture was concerned.

- CJ Oakley 04:17 Okay, that's great. So this next question, you've pretty much already answered it, but I'll ask it just to remain consistent. Can you pinpoint a focusing event that led to your revisions in your agency's use of force policy? You know, what was this incident?
- SE2 04:38 Um, yeah, it was it was a string of incidents that that led to the consent decree.
- CJ Oakley 04:47 Okay, perfect.
- SE2 04:49 And I can actually while we are going into the next one. Let me see if I can pull up that original report.
- CJ Oakley 04:54 Okay.
- SE2 04:56 And I can send that to you.
- CJ Oakley 04:58 Oh, yeah, that'd be great. The third question is, from your vantage point as a public administrator, how do you perceive the influence of societal pressures on law enforcement policies?
- SE2 05:45 So, yeah, really, really glad you asked this question, right? Because it's something that that I answered as best I could in the in the survey. But but a point that I really want to drive home. So. So we've been very lucky here. We're we're not a city that's really deep red or deep blue. Been a purple city for a long time. So, you know, we you know, not to get political in my answer. Right. But I'm saying that, you know, for example, the defund movement here just never, never really took root. Right. We like it was something. And when we talk about [REDACTED], we're not just talking about the city. Right. The city of [REDACTED] being the largest city within the county. But, you know, we have [REDACTED] County, which has a large police, very that functions like a sheriff's office. It'll be it'll be renamed a sheriff's office later this year. Long story behind that. But they're larger than we are. And then we got 32 cities within the county. Right. And that's, again, [REDACTED] by far being the largest. But you've got some there as small as ten sworn officers. You got some that are a few hundred officers. And really nowhere in [REDACTED] County, at least that I can remember. Definitely not in the [REDACTED] County government. But did the you know, what was the idea of defunding the police ever really given any any serious consideration at all? So, you know, we've we've had. You know, we do have pressure that gets put on us. If you do have, you know, a questionable shooting, if you do

have a, you know, an ugly use of force incident. But I really I got to tell you that just the political climate, even even the media here, they're just not. They're not, you know, that like, you know, they don't jump to that knee jerk reaction of of indicting us, you know, and that court of public opinion before all the facts are out. Like they're very good about treating incidents as, you know, individual incidents. Eventually. Yes. If you got a you got an agency that that has, you know, a disturbing string of individual incidents while, hey, that's that's what we call a pattern. Right. But but but, you know, the idea that, you know. That like we're like walking on eggshells with the public here, Right? It's just not the case.

- CJ Oakley 08:24 Okay. So you think a lot of it might be driven through that media interaction and that that relationship that you guys have with the media?
- SE2 08:35 I think that that that's a huge help. I think that, you know, the fact that that we do have a very good relationship with it with our media outlets here. We you know, we don't we don't try to play hide the ball with them. Right. If you know, if we are if we're wrong, you know, we admit we're wrong. Right. But we do maintain those relationships. Really don't "No comment" our way out of anything. You know, we've learned right through through the years and through through hard experiences that, you know, you know, comment anything. Right. That that that that two minute report or that minute and a half report that's got to be filled up with something. So if it's not you, it's not your PIO behind that microphone. They're going out in the street and they're going to put that microphone in somebody else's face. Right. And so you get out, you can either tell your own story or have somebody else tell it for you. But yeah, our relationship with the media is, you know, very open, very just a very collaborative working relationship, I think.
- CJ Oakley 09:40 Oh, great. And your political their political environment, there is supportive of law enforcement?
- SE2 09:47 Not to say that it's perfect. We do have our we do have our issues. You know, I think I think every every elected body does. But but yeah, it's and it's it's really, really independent of of political affiliation. Right. It's it's I think, you know, it's a culture that, you know, socially, economically you can you can believe what you want. Right. We got people with Rs and Ds all over the place, you know, behind their names, you know, and in city government and at the county and state government. But but there kind of seems to be this crazy shared idea amongst everybody that if you commit a felony should go to prison or should be put on probation at least. What kind of while. Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- CJ Oakley 10:35 All right. I'm going to Those were my question. I'm going to stop the recording right now.