



News-Coverage Analysis for Justice Involved Children & Youth in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County and Ohio

INTRODUCTION

This report is an analysis of digital news coverage for justice-involved youth in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County and the state of Ohio generally. Too often, local news coverage of justice involved youth has presented stories in such a way that young people are conveyed as primary drivers of crime (1,2). This framing of youth as uniquely “dangerous” is incorrect and can heighten public fears around safety and intensify public calls for tougher, more punitive approaches to handling justice-involved youth.

In reality, youth crime compared to other age groups, has seen a significant decrease overall since the mid 1990s (3). Annual youth crime, arrests and incarceration have shown significant decreases since 2000, including an overall decrease specifically in violent crimes (4,5). Following a peak in arrest rate for youth in 1996, there has been a decline in arrest rate by more than 80% since (5). Yet concern that youth related crime may be on the rise post-COVID persists (5,6). In particular, in the last couple of years there has been a growing focus in the media on youth involved in auto theft, car jackings, etc. Indeed, some rhetoric used by local public leaders’ resembled the “super-predator” messaging in the 1990s that led to draconian laws facilitating the treatment of youth as adults both nationally and in Ohio (7).

The Schubert Center for Child Studies (“Schubert Center”) began this research as part of the Greater Cleveland Youth Justice Collective (“GCYJC”), with support from the George Gund Foundation, in order to increase knowledge and understanding of young people in or at risk of entering the justice system. The GCYJC was formed to provide accurate data and information to newly elected local leadership, in part, to counter calls for more harsh treatment of youth with evidence-informed approaches to more effectively addressing and preventing violence involving children and young people. Building from an initial time-limited media review, the Schubert Center continued to collect more comprehensive data on how justice-involved children and youth were presented in the media in order to document this coverage and to better understand how the media may shape public narratives

about these young people. This research informs a broader effort to reframe an increasingly negative narrative in the media into one that more accurately reflects the lived experience of young people and the impact of evidence-based youth justice interventions. The purpose of this study is to capture how the media has covered stories related to children and youth, especially those in or at risk of entering the justice system in Cleveland, Cuyahoga County and the state of Ohio generally. This study covers a 3-year time period of articles published from the beginning of 2022 to the end of 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study focuses on news articles and stories in the Ohio media reporting on children and youth as “offenders”, meaning those youth who have been arrested, charged and/or involved in the juvenile delinquency or criminal court system in some way. This report uses the term “justice-involved children and youth” to broadly reflect the range of juvenile and criminal court system legal involvement. The media review found that most of the news stories had a neutral stance, reporting on incidents as-is with no apparent angle to influence public opinion; however, **the sheer volume of reporting of justice-involved youth brings disproportionate attention to youth crime involvement.** This disproportionate focus on youth is particularly evident given that adults actually account for about 90% of arrests for violent offenses nationally and an even higher proportion in Cleveland, where minors only made up 4% of all arrests and 3% of arrests for violent offenses in 2023 (3,8,9). Moreover, of the remaining (non-neutral) articles in this study, stories with a more negative tone were found to exist in much higher proportion than more positive ones.

Specifically, this study found:

- **Negative stories in Ohio are significantly more common than positive stories on justice-involved children and youth.** This difference would be even more significant but for the work of a couple of reporters, particularly in Cleveland/Cuyahoga county.

- **Accurate statistics are often absent altogether or statistics are cited without providing context** (e.g. not making the distinction between crimes committed by adults and those committed by youth) in the negatively framed stories.
- **A small proportion of reporters and news outlets are responsible for publishing the majority of negatively framed stories about justice-involved children and youth.** Even fewer publish positively framed stories.
- **Coverage of the same event, in some instances, was different in tone depending on the reporter,** suggesting that intention may outweigh objectivity in reporting. This potential bias can contribute to a negative narrative about children and youth who are in or at risk of coming into contact with the justice system.
- **Reporters turn to the same types of public officials for quotes which are often used to reinforce negative perceptions and narratives in stories involving justice-involved children and youth.** These negative tropes can potentially influence public opinion in ways that foster support for punitive system responses.

Given how influential the media and news coverage is in shaping public opinion, and ultimately policies about justice-involved youth, it is important to shed light on some of the inconsistencies and potential bias in this coverage and to educate the public about how to be better consumers of media content. By illustrating the disproportionate media attention on youth crime and the skew towards more negative than positive news stories, this report is both a call for balanced reporting on teen behaviors, and an invitation for journalists to incorporate an understanding of child and adolescent development in the language and framing of stories and events. Balanced reporting should accurately and objectively portray youth crime trends, which includes putting those trends into the larger context of crime data; incorporating differing perspectives from the community, or at least not only prosecutors and the same elected leaders; and, covering positive and promising developments, such as the larger decrease in youth-involved crime, the impact of crime and violence prevention programs and the many stories of justice-involved youth who have successfully turned their lives around.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

This study sought to identify all news articles concerning justice-involved children and youth over a three-year period beginning January 1, 2022 (1/1/22) through December 31, 2024 (12/31/24). Two datasets were created on google sheets – one for retrieved articles covering Cleveland and Cuyahoga County and the other for articles covering Ohio. There were a total of 887 articles in the media scan: 324 Cleveland/Cuyahoga stories and 563 Ohio stories. The following information was captured from the media stories in both datasets:

- Original date of publication
- Media source
- Author/reporter
- City covered in the report (or statewide)
- Article link (where possible)
- Focus of article (summarized)
- Data cited (if any)
- Brief abstract of article/story

- Any other notes of interest, including specific quotes and sources, visuals, etc.
- Overall assessment of article's tone – positive, negative or neutral (discussed below)

Identifying Articles for the Media Scan

Common search terms were identified and used to identify the stories for the media scan electronically. In an initial scan of media coverage over several months in 2022, the terms “juvenile,” “JDC,” “youth crime,” and “delinquent” were searched on local Cleveland news websites. Weekly Google alerts were also set up for terms like “delinquent Ohio,” “youth crime Ohio,” “Detention Ohio,” and “Ohio Department of Youth Services.” A review of these terms revealed that over the course of several months, stories that should have been included in the media scan had been missed. As a result, the search terms were expanded to better capture a more comprehensive media scan. For the Cleveland/Cuyahoga section of the media scan dataset, the search terms “juvenile justice Cleveland,” “juvenile detention Cleveland,” “juvenile arrest Cleveland,” “youth arrest Cleveland,” “delinquency Cleveland,” “juvenile crime Cleveland” were added to the Google news search and reapplied to a search of the preceding months (as well as for the remaining years of the study). The results were filtered by dates such that the resulting articles were those published in a specific month. For the Ohio section of the media scan, the same expanded search terms were applied, substituting the word “Cleveland” for “Ohio”.

Coding for Article Tone

Developing more objective measures for what is in many ways a subjective determination of tone of articles was the most challenging aspect of the study. A set of coding definitions were developed to assess and categorize the tone of the news articles as more positive, neutral or more negative, described in more detail with examples below.

More Positive: Reporter(s) refers to children and adolescents as “youth” or “kids,” cites and explains data, includes community voices, and/or includes research on child development.

Neutral: Reporter(s) tone is generally more factual or report crime/event as it is, mostly shows both sides of the argument (i.e. reports on events and also factors that may lead to such), and refrains from using negative terminology in referring to young people.

More Negative: Reporter(s) uses negative terminology towards children and adolescents (or calls them “men” or “women”), misleading headlines, only cites community voices with a pessimistic/negative connotation, names the youth, and highlights imbalanced data that paints the false picture of youth as drivers of crime.

After the articles were retrieved and coded for tone, a quality review of the coding determination was completed for the database of 887 articles to ensure consistent application of the coding definitions over time. Reliability checks were conducted by the supervisor to confirm coding categories and to spot-check for inconsistencies. Data analysis was conducted using pivot tables and charts on google sheets to identify patterns and themes.

Examples of Coded Articles

This section offers examples of how media coverage was coded as “neutral”, more “positive” or more “negative” to help illustrate the data discussed below.

Positively-Framed Coverage

The headlinesⁱⁱ provided in Figure 1 are examples of articles coded as positive articles due to their focus on efforts at rehabilitation and child development. Young people were not described using inappropriate or derogatory terms (unlike those examples of negative articles noted).

Figure 1: Headlines from some of the articles coded as positive

A look at the ongoing effort to prevent crime in Cleveland with summer youth programs

Delinquent: Cuyahoga’s juvenile system is supposed to rehabilitate youth when they offend. Most of the time it works – Cameron is one example

Cleveland Heights scores \$300,000 U.S. Justice youth grant for Peacemakers Alliance

Negatively-Framed Coverage

In the examples provided in Figures 2–7 the articles were coded as negative for varying reasons.

The narrative in the articleⁱⁱⁱ in Figure 2 stresses the involvement of youth in carjackings; however, the statistics cited do not specify the proportion of carjackings actually committed by minors (versus adults). Whether intended or not, featuring such alarming figures without proper context is misleading for readers who may unknowingly overestimate the proportion of offenses committed by youth.

Figure 2: Excerpt from an article coded as negative

Cleveland saw at least 433 carjacking incidents in 2021, representing a 22% spike from the 355 in 2020, according to data recorded by the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor’s Office.

The 2021 figure represented a 52% spike above the 285 carjackings in 2019.

The headline^{iv} in Figure 3 focuses entirely on a juvenile suspect; however, the content of the article itself reveals that in fact five (5) adults were also charged in the case. While choosing a head-

line that focuses on the young suspect may serve multiple purposes (i.e. to drive click impressions), it is misleading because many readers simply see headlines without reading full stories. As a result, readers may be left with the impression that a young person was responsible for this serious offense, further reinforcing a false narrative that youth are the primary drivers of violent crime.

Figure 3: Headline from an article coded as negative

Juvenile suspect arrested in East Cleveland torture, murder case bound over to adult court

The journalist in the article^v in Figure 4 describes the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) as holding the ‘worst of the worst kids’. Even though the term “kids” is in the headline, the sensational labeling alludes to the detained youth as being irredeemable. In fact, on average, youth charged for violent offenses made up about 39% of the cases filed in the Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court from 2021 to 2023 (10,11,12). The “worst of the worst” characterization not only conveys a false impression of justice-involved youth, but can be fear-inducing which can undermine public empathy for their wellness and support for diversionary programs.

Figure 4: Excerpt from an article coded as negative

The detention center holds the worst of the worst kids charged with crimes.

The journalist in the article^{vi} in Figure 5 attributes the decline in juvenile incarceration to be, in part, due to an ODYS (Ohio Department of Youth Services) program called RECLAIM. The framing of RECLAIM in the article however is an incomplete description and is presented in a way that makes it seem that courts are not holding youth sufficiently accountable; in fact, RECLAIM has been much more successful at improving outcomes and reducing recidivism than incarceration (13). RECLAIM is a funding initiative that encourages juvenile courts to develop or utilize a range of community-based alternatives to ODYS placement to meet the needs of adjudicated delinquent youth or youth at risk of offending (14). By diverting youth from more costly ODYS institutions, youth are often more effectively served closer to home and courts can increase funding available locally for quality programming through RECLAIM dollars.

Figure 5: Excerpt from an article coded as negative

The decline could be attributed in part to an ODYS program called Reclaim, which incentivizes courts to send juvenile offenders to outside rehabilitation programs instead of detention centers with funding.

The article^{vii} in Figure 6 was centered around a pessimistic view of one community member who believes that meetings to dis-

cuss justice-involved youth are counter productive. This member was also of the opinion that the court needs to adopt stricter measures, suggesting that the system is not doing enough to keep youth in detention.

Figure 6: Excerpt from an article coded as negative

“All these different meetings to see what the problem is you know what the problem is and if they don't there's going to be a lot of parents that are going to be burying their children,”

The article^{viii} in Figure 7 refers to each teenager as a “man”. Equating youth to adults suggests that they fully understand their actions and should be held accountable in the same way as an adult, despite a wide body of research demonstrating how teenagers are still developing and are less mature than adults cognitively, neurologically and emotionally (15,16).

Figure 7: Excerpt from an article coded as negative

The Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office says Howard, a 17-year-old man and a 15-year-old man carjacked multiple other victims at gunpoint between Nov. 1 and Dec. 11

Neutrally-framed coverage

Articles coded as neutral are factual and report events as-is without making unfounded generalizations or attempting to convey a particular narrative, whether negative or positive. The image in Figure 8 offers an example of an article^{ix} coded as neutral.

Figure 8: An example of an article coded as neutral

CLEVELAND, Ohio (WOIO) - Cleveland Police shot and seriously injured a teen Saturday morning while investigating multiple car break-ins, according to a release.

EMS told 19 News that they responded to the 800 block of East 146th Street around 4 a.m. Saturday for a 14-year-old boy with a gun shot wound.

According to the release, the Cleveland Division of Police Third District Vice Unit was conducting an investigation for over 30 ‘fresh’ care break-ins in the Midtown Neighborhood.

Police said they were able to identify two juvenile suspects with prior arrests for break ins and ankle monitors, which police said were cut off. According to the release, detectives had video that showed at least one of the juvenile suspects was armed with a hand gun.

Around 2 a.m., investigators checked a vacant home in the 800 block of East 146th Street and found a recently reported stolen White Kia Sportage with 3 people inside, according to the release.

Detectives tried to make contact with the people in the car as they exited, but when they saw officers they returned to the car and fled through an adjacent yard, according to the release. Officers attempted to stop the car, but were unable to, according to the release.

An officer fired at the suspect and struck him in the right shoulder, according to the release. Police removed the teen from the car and rendered aid before EMS took him to the hospital. He has since been released, according to the police.

According to the release, a firearm was found inside the vehicle. Cleveland Police said its Use of Force Investigation Team will investigate the shooting.

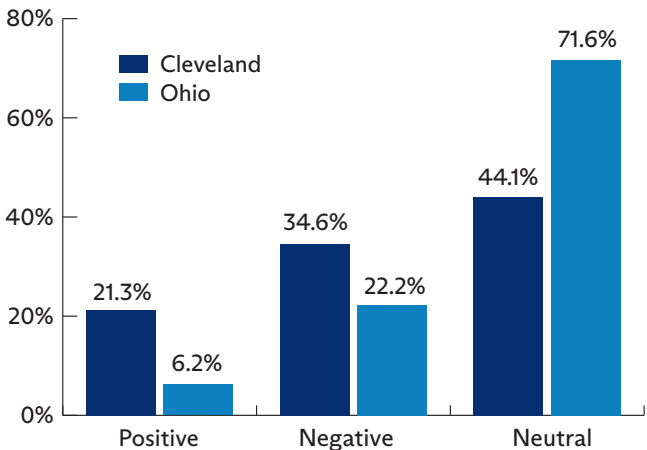
The officer involved will also be placed on administrative leave.

FINDINGS

Tone of Articles

As reflected in Figure 9, of the 324 news articles in the Cleveland/Cuyahoga section, 69 (21.3%) were coded as positive, 112 (34.6%) were coded as negative, and 143 (44.1%) articles were coded as neutral. In contrast, of the 563 articles in the Ohio section, 35 (6.2%) were coded as positive, 125 (22.2%) were coded as negative, and 493 (71.6%) were coded as neutral.

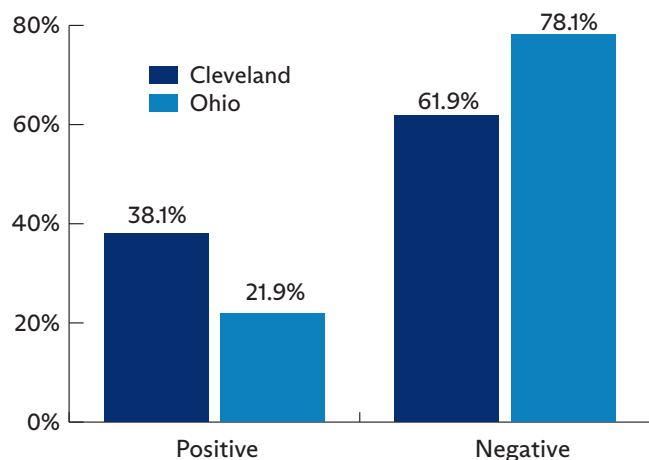
Figure 9: Proportion of tone of news articles in Cleveland/Cuyahoga County and Ohio



Tone of Articles in Cleveland/Cuyahoga (n=234) and Ohio (n=563)

Cleveland/Cuyahoga media publish fewer neutral and more negative articles compared to the rest of Ohio (see Figure 9); however, adjusting for non-neutral articles shows something a bit different. Figure 10 adjusts to only include the non-neutral articles for both sections, revealing that save for its neutral articles, the rest of Ohio publishes more negative articles compared to Cleveland/Cuyahoga county (78.1% v. 61.9%). This illustrates how the publishing of more neutral articles dilutes the reporting pool and possibly minimizes the perpetuation of negative connotations for justice-involved youth.

Figure 10: Proportion of tone of news articles in Cleveland/Cuyahoga County and Ohio



Tone of Non-Neutral Articles in Cleveland/Cuyahoga (n=181) and Ohio (n=160)

In order to better compare the local reporting in the Cleveland/Cuyahoga county section with the rest of Ohio, the articles in the Ohio section were organized by the county of publication. Table 1 shows the proportion of more positive, negative and neutral stories by counties with the most media coverage involving youth. Only counties with 30 or more articles are included in Table 1, which are all counties with large urban population centers.

Table 1: Comparisons of tone proportions by county with 30 or more articles

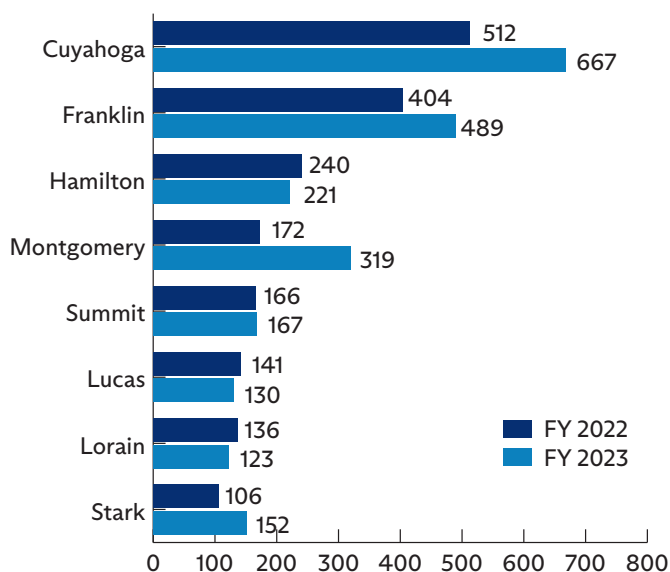
County	Total number of articles	Proportion of Positives	Proportion of Negatives	Proportion of Neutrals
Cuyahoga	324	21.3%*	34.6%	44.1%
Franklin	153	5.2%	32%	62.7%
Hamilton	72	9.7%	23.6%	66.7%
Lucas	36	2.8%	13.9%	83.3%
Summit	35	5.7%	11.4%	82.9%

*Note that 21.3% drops to 15.8% without the “Delinquent Series”, as discussed below.

As Table 1 shows, Cuyahoga County has considerably more coverage of justice-involved youth compared to other large counties, more than double the next highest county of Franklin (324 compared to 153). This increased media attention in Cuyahoga may be related to the fact that more youth are adjudicated for felonies in Cuyahoga compared to other counties in Ohio (see Figure 11). More media coverage of justice-involved youth in Cuyahoga

may also be due to stories in other counties being in local news sources that did not turn up in our media scan. An alternative explanation could also be that some counties with relatively high proportions of youth felony adjudication rates, such as Montgomery and Lorain (Figure 11), simply do not experience a heightened level of media attention of justice-involved children and youth, particularly as compared to the five (5) counties in Table 1.

Figure 11: Number of youth felony adjudications in 2022 and 2023 for the 8 counties with the highest rates in Ohio in these years



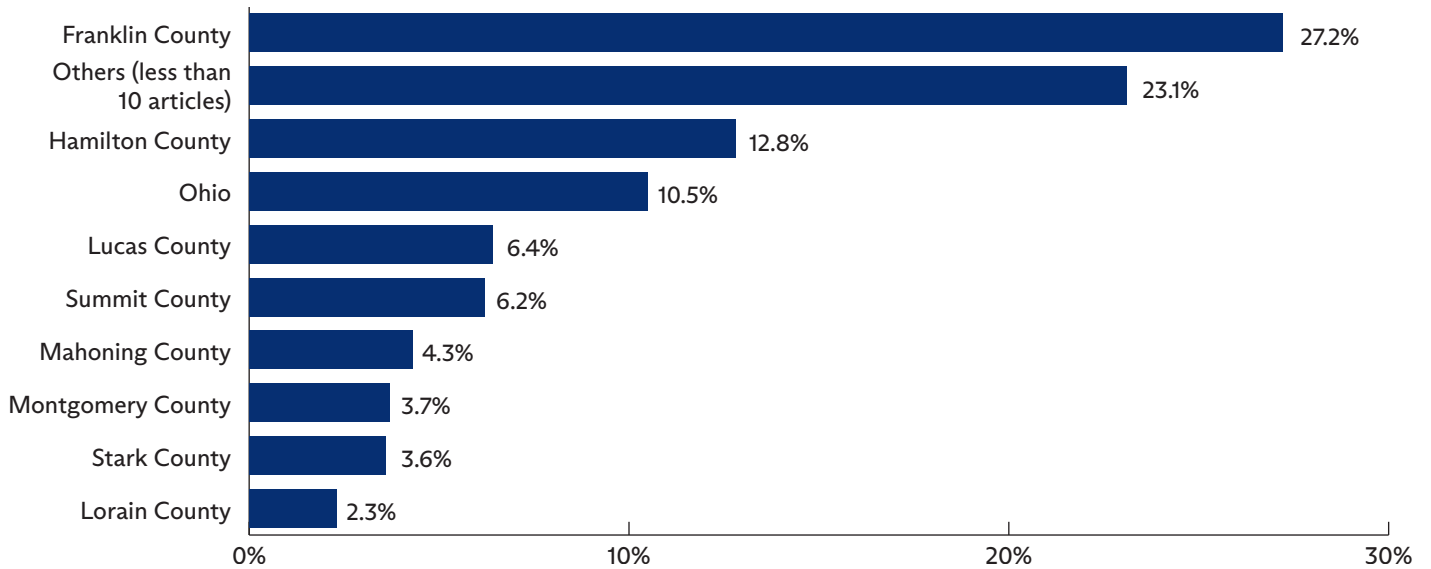
Source: Ohio Department of Youth Services

Counties such as Lucas and Summit have very high proportions of more neutral media coverage (Table 1), despite also having higher youth felony adjudications (Figure 11); as a result, Ohio has an overall higher proportion of neutral articles compared to Cleveland/Cuyahoga county. Other counties with high felony rates but fewer than 30 articles total, such as Mahoning (24 articles), Montgomery (21 articles) and Stark (20 articles), also had high proportions of neutral articles: 70.8%, 90.5% and 70% respectively.

Figure 12 (on the next page) shows the percentage of Ohio articles by county; with one exception (Mahoning), these counties are also the ones with the highest juvenile felony adjudications (Figure 11), suggesting why it was possible to retrieve a significant number of articles about justice-involved youth from these counties compared to the rest of Ohio.

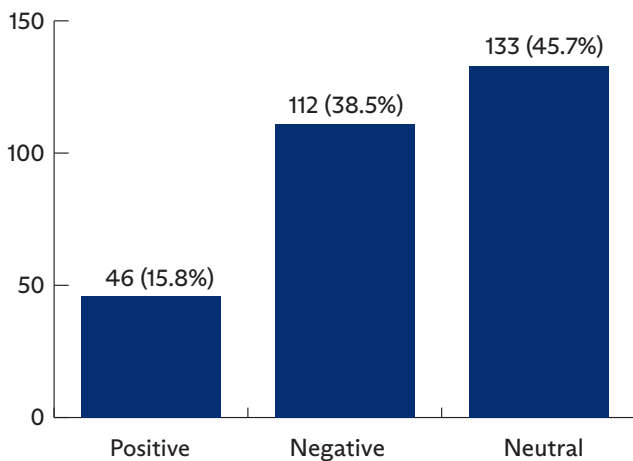
Turning to positive media coverage,^x the Cleveland/Cuyahoga county section notably has more positive articles (21.3%) than other counties, as noted in Table 1. This is mostly due to the coverage of just a couple of reporters. For instance, two reporters accounted for 29 (42%) of the total 69 articles coded as more positive in this section. Thirty-six (36) reporters were responsible for the remaining 40 articles, the vast majority of whom only wrote one positive article. More specifically, the two reporters with the more positive media coverage authored the “*Delinquent Series*”^{xi} over the course of three months in the spring of 2024. This in-

Figure 12: Proportion of articles in the Ohio section by counties¹⁰ (n=563)



depth investigative series explored Cuyahoga County's juvenile justice system and the experiences of various court and community stakeholders, as well as the children and youth who have gone through it. Had this special investigative series not been published, then the more positive media would account for only 15.8% in the Cleveland/Cuyahoga county section (see Figure 13). Furthermore, the "*Delinquent Series*" accounted for an additional ten (10) neutral articles of the total articles in the series. Essentially, but for the thoughtful investigative work of just a few journalists, particularly in Cleveland/Cuyahoga county, the proportion of more positive articles overall would be significantly lower.

Figure 13: Proportion of tone of news articles in Cleveland/Cuyahoga county, showing impact of the "*Delinquent Series*"



Tone of Articles in Cleveland/Cuyahoga (n=291, without the "*Delinquent Series*")

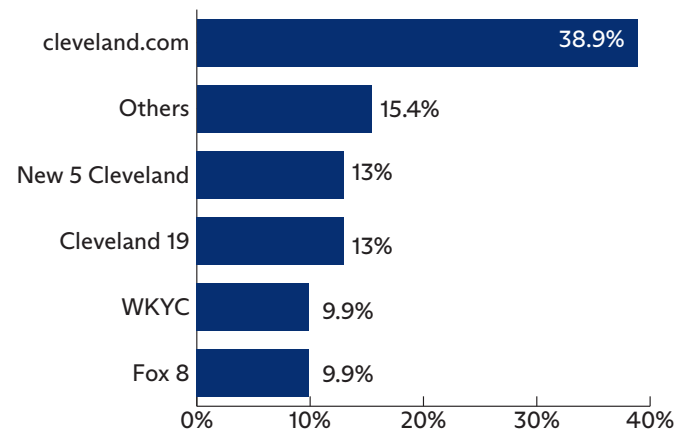
Analysis of Articles with a Negative Tone

The overall proportion of negative media coverage in Cleveland/Cuyahoga county (34.6%) is comparable to Franklin county (32%) (Table 1); both counties have considerably higher negative coverage than the rest of Ohio (22.2%) (Figure 9). A deeper exploration of these more negatively framed articles is described below.

Media Source

There were 34 Cleveland/Cuyahoga county news sources/media outlets analyzed in this review; of these, just five news outlets were the major contributors to the total number of articles (see Figure 14), with cleveland.com responsible for the majority of coverage (38.9%). Included in the "others" category are news sources with less than 10 articles. Together these five news sources accounted for 84.6% of the total number of stories in this section.

Figure 14: Proportion of articles in the Cleveland/Cuyahoga section by news source



News Source of Articles in the Cleveland/Cuyahoga Section by Percentage of Total Articles (n=324)

Table 2 (on next page) presents the coded tone of articles from the five Cleveland/Cuyahoga county media outlets responsible for the largest portion of articles, specifically, 274 of the 324 stories (84.6%) during the 3-year review period. In order to better quantify the effects of the in-depth, 3-month “*Delinquent Series*”, Table 2 presents the data from Cleveland.com in two ways: 1) all of the articles, including the “*Delinquent Series*” (126 in top row), and 2) all of the articles except those in the “*Delinquent Series*” (93 in second row). Without the “*Delinquent Series*”, Table 2 shows that the proportion of negative stories from this news source increased about a third (from 23.8% to 32.3%), while the proportion of positive stories decreased by nearly half (from 31% to 17.2%). This suggests that without the investigatory work of these two reporters, negatively framed articles at this news source are published at a considerably higher proportion than positive articles.

Table 2 also shows that in terms of proportions, Fox8 is responsible for the highest percentage (71.9%) of negatively framed news stories, followed by Cleveland 19 (54.8%), WKYC (40.6%), News 5 Cleveland (31%) and Cleveland.com. These news outlets also publish considerably lower proportions of positive stories. For instance, of justice-involved children and youth related articles, less than 5% of those articles were positive for Cleveland 19 and WKYC and not a single more positively framed media story was aired/published by Fox8 (0%) over the three-year period.

Ninety-two (92) news sources/media outlets were identified in the Ohio database. Of these, 11 news sources each had more than 15 articles related to justice-involved children and youth. Together, these 11 sources accounted for 310 (55%) of the total 563 articles in this section (Figure 15). Included in the “others” category below are news sources with 10 or less articles. (24.9%).

Table 2: Assessment of the tone of articles from the 5 largest Cleveland/Cuyahoga news sources

News Source/ Media Outlet	Total number of articles	Proportion of Positives	Proportion of Negatives	Proportion of Neutrals
Cleveland.com ^a	126	31%	23.8%	45.2%
Cleveland.com ^b	93	17.2%	32.3%	50.5%
News 5 Cleveland	42	21.4%	31.0%	47.6%
Cleveland19	42	4.8%	54.8%	40.5%
WKYC	32	3.1%	40.6%	56.3%
Fox8	32	0%	71.9%	28.1%

a. Analysis include articles from the “*Delinquent Series*”

b. Analysis does not include articles from the “*Delinquent Series*”

Similar to results from the Cleveland/Cuyahoga county article database, there was significantly less positive coverage of justice-involved children and youth reflected in articles from news sources in other areas of Ohio (see Table 3). Over a third (36.4%) of these news sources with 15 or more articles, WKYC, WTOL11, Cleveland19 and WLWT5, did not publish a single positive story within the 3-year time period that data was collected. More than

Figure 15: Proportion of articles in the Ohio section by news source (n=563)

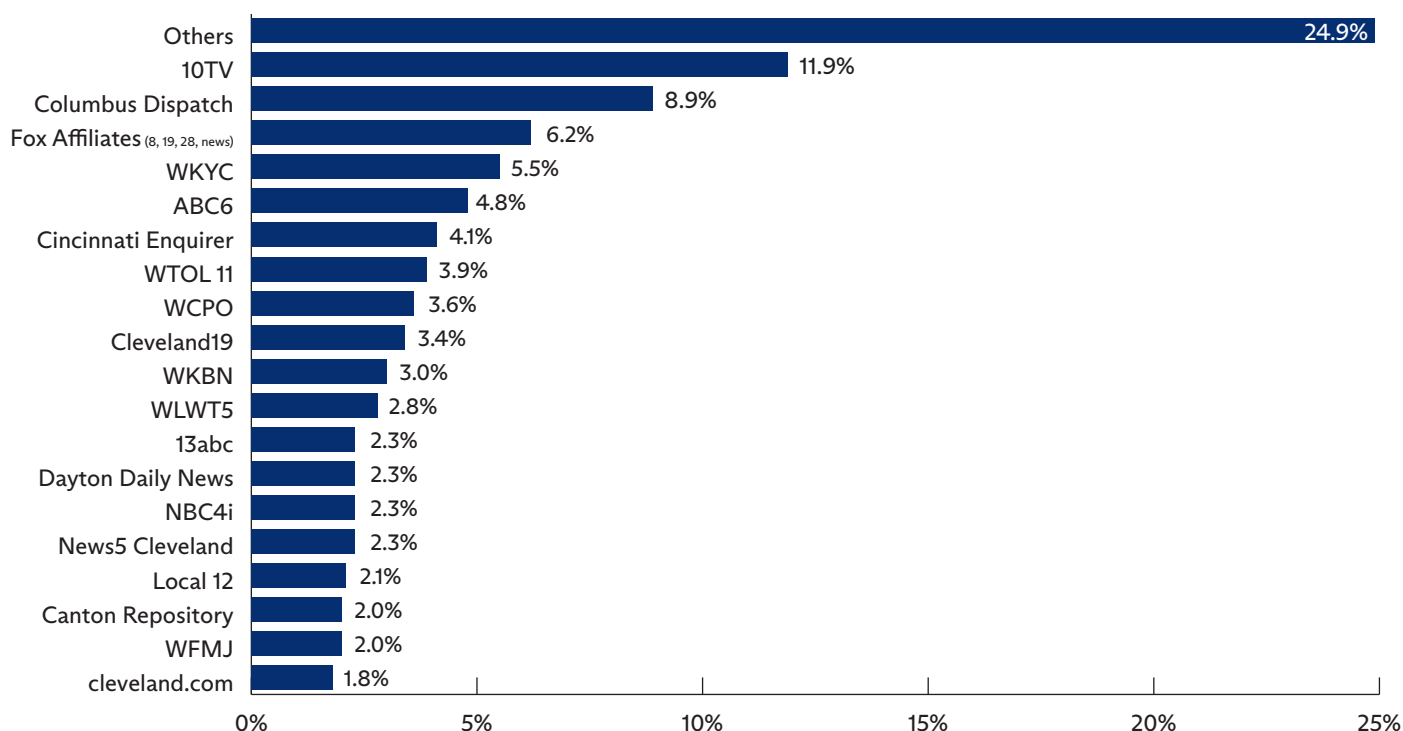


Table 3: Assessment of the tone of articles from the 11 largest Ohio news sources

News Source	Total number of articles	Proportion of Positives	Proportion of Negatives	Proportion of Neutrals
10TV	67	4.5%	26.9%	68.7%
Columbus Dispatch	50	6%	30%	64%
Fox Affiliates (8,19,28,news)	35	2.9%	22.9%	74.3%
WKYC	31	0%	16.1%	83.9%
ABC6	27	3.7%	51.9%	44.4%
Cincinnati Enquirer	23	8.7%	21.7%	69.6%
WTOL11	22	0%	13.6%	86.4%
WCPO	20	10%	15%	75%
Cleveland19	19	0%	42.1%	57.9%
WKBN	17	5%	17.6%	76.5%
WLWT5	16	0%	18.8%	81.3%

half of these news outlets published significantly higher proportions of negative articles relative to the positive articles. See Table 3, for example: ABC6 (51.9% versus 3.7%), Cleveland19 (42.1% versus 0%), Columbus Dispatch (30% versus 6%), 10TV (26.9% versus 4.5%), Fox affiliates (22.9% versus 2.9%) and Cincinnati Enquirer (21.7% versus 8.7%). Notably, Cleveland19, in addition to publishing large proportions of negative stories concerning justice-involved children and youth in the Cleveland/Cuyahoga county area, is also among those outlets with disproportionately negative coverage for other areas of Ohio (compare Tables 2 and 3).

Reporters/Journalists

A relatively small number of reporters/journalists account for the majority of negative articles captured during the 3-year review period. In the Cleveland/Cuyahoga county section, while 62 reporters/journalists accounted for the 112 articles coded as negative, five (5) reporters were responsible for 48 (43%) of these 112 negative articles (see Table 4: reporters were coded by letter and number). Each of these five reporters were responsible for seven (7) or more negative news stories. Of the 64 remaining negative stories, 41 reporters authored just one story and 16 reporters authored between 2–4 negative stories.

Table 4: Reporters contributing the most to negative media coverage in the Cleveland/Cuyahoga county section

Reporter ID	News Source	Number of Negative Articles	Reporters % of Negative Coverage in News Source
E01	Fox8	13	E01 contributed to 56.5% of the negative stories from Fox8
K02	Cleveland 19	11	K02 contributed to 47.8% of the negative stories from Cleveland 19
O03	Cleveland.com	9	O03 contributed to 30% of the negative stories from Cleveland.com
P04	Fox8	8	P04 contributed to 34.8% of the negative stories from Fox 8
D05	WKYC	7	D05 contributed to 53.8% of the negative stories from WKYC.

In the Ohio database, 87 reporters accounted for the 125 articles coded as negative during the 3-year period. Of these, six (6) reporters were responsible for 39 (31.2%) of the total Ohio articles coded as negative (see Table 5). Each of these reporters wrote three or more negative articles (others were responsible for two or less negative articles).

Across Ohio and in Cleveland specifically, it appears that a small number of reporters and news outlets are disproportionately represented in those that more often publish negatively framed stories. Even far less news outlets publish positively framed stories about justice-involved children and youth.

Table 5: Reporters contributing the most to negative media coverage in the Ohio section

Reporter ID	News Source	Number of Negative Articles	Reporters % of Negative Coverage in News Source
L06	10TV	13	L06 contributed to 72% of the negative stories from 10TV
B07	Columbus Dispatch	8	B07 contributed to 53.3% of the negative stories from Columbus Dispatch
S08	ABC 6	7	S08 contributed to 50% of the negative stories from ABC 6
K02	Cleveland 19	4	K02 contributed to 50% of the negative stories from Cleveland 19
L09	Columbus Dispatch	4	L09 contributed to 26.7% of the negative stories from Columbus Dispatch
C10	Columbus Dispatch	3	C10 contributed to 20% of the negative stories from Columbus Dispatch

Use of Public Leadership Opinions

An analysis of the narrative content of the statewide and local news coverage found that quotes from public officials are often used to reinforce negative perceptions and narratives, particularly of justice-involved youth in stories. For example, an analysis of 62 articles that included public leadership quotes in the Cuyahoga section found that 51.6% of the quotes were negative, 27.4% were neutral, and 21% were positive. The quotes below are examples of some of those coded as more negative in the media scan:

- “What we’re dealing with today in the city of Cleveland are urban terrorists.”*
- “It is clear that often times, juveniles are crime drivers.”*
- “There is a financial benefit to not send kids to ODYS and I think that equation needs to be eliminated.”*

- “If you know that you can break into these cars and nothing’s going to happen to you, why shouldn’t you?”*
- “Everybody in this room knows about the terror that’s going on in this community from people who use their age as some kind of shield for committing criminal acts.”*
- “It is just a catch and release system.”*
- “These are not little kids, these are teenagers. Some of these teenagers are bigger than us.”*

Reporters have choices not only about which quotes to include but who to interview and seek statements from when covering specific news events and stories. Quotes from public leaders can lend credibility to news stories and are valuable perspectives to offer; however, over-relying on harsh, punitive and, in many cases, false narratives can be misleading to the public and shape public opinion. A cursory review of the electronic links and comments embedded in some of these new stories, including those found under posts made directly by public leaders through their official channels, suggests that at least some portion of the public relies on the posts and quotes of these public leaders in constructing their own beliefs and perceptions about the juvenile justice system. The disproportionate spotlight on negative opinions and narratives can foster collective public demands for a more punitive approach toward youth crime,^{xii} even where those approaches are shown to be less effective overall.

Different Approaches to Covering the Same News Story

The media scan revealed how negative bias can influence how events are presented in the news, even when reporters are covering the same story. The following two examples illustrate this point: (1) a student’s graduation in a detention center (Figure 16), and, (2) the release of Governor DeWine’s Juvenile Justice Working Group report (Figure 17).^{xiii xiv}

Figure 16: Two different headlines covering the same event but highlighting the point about intention vs objectivity in reporting¹⁴

Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center celebrates first college graduate

First college graduate at Cuyahoga Juvenile Detention Center accused of murder

Figure 16 presents two different headlines covering the same event—the first youth to receive a college diploma while being held at the Cuyahoga County juvenile detention center (JDC). The first headline was for an article that was coded as positive, rather than neutral, as the focus of the story was not only on the event itself but also “celebrating” the possibility of successful rehabilitation for a justice-involved youth. According to this story, the young graduate had never considered getting a college education when he entered the JDC three years earlier. Nevertheless, he decided to focus on his education and went on to graduate with an Associate of Arts degree—the first ever earned from detention in the county and the first for his family. In contrast, the second example was from a story that was coded as negative be-

cause rather than focus on the graduation event itself, the headline highlights the youth's charges (for which trial is still pending). Focusing on the youth's violent charges undermines the youth's rehabilitative effort, as well as the support provided by the JDC to try and set the young person on a more positive track. This casting of a negative light on any positive youth progress can also convey a broader harmful message to the public: that youth who are in the justice system are less valued and beyond redemption.

Figure 17: Two different headlines covering the same event but highlighting the point about intention vs objectivity in reportings¹⁵

DeWine presents findings from working group to transform juvenile justice system

The seemingly endless cycle of reforms in juvenile justice

Figure 17 presents headlines from two different articles that cover the same event: the release of recommendations of the Ohio Juvenile Justice Working Group created by Governor DeWine to transform the state and local juvenile justice system. The first article was coded as neutral because the journalist simply reports on the recommendations of the group without any commentary, as also reflected by the headline. However, the second article was coded as negative because it presents an unnecessarily pessimistic opinion of the recommendations, suggesting with the “seemingly endless cycle” that other efforts for reform were not successful and so the public should be skeptical about this latest attempt. The reporter seems to take issue particularly with the workgroup’s recommendation to replace large juvenile correctional facilities with smaller ones, drawing on unfounded comparisons with another state that tried to implement a similar downsizing initiative with mixed results and was soon faced with challenges such as understaffing and violence. While presented as a cautionary tale for adopting a “smaller is better” approach, a close read of the example presented in the article actually highlights the problems with large correctional institutions, which is precisely part of what the “smaller is better” recommendation aims to address.

DISCUSSION: CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEDIA, PUBLIC LEADERS, YOUTH JUSTICE STAKEHOLDERS & THE PUBLIC

This analysis of the media coverage of justice-involved children and youth in Ohio and in the greater Cleveland area reveals how bias can promote especially negative narratives about young people, undermining state and local youth justice policy that is informed by best practices and objective data. Finding that the media disproportionately focuses on youth crime and that there were significantly more negatively framed articles about justice-involved children and youth than positive ones raises several considerations for local and state media outlets, journalists, public leaders, youth justice stakeholders and the broader public.

- Journalists and editors should resist sensationalized reporting about young people and be attentive to more balanced reporting on crime and violence, especially stories concerning

justice-involved children and youth, to better reflect the reality in Ohio and its local communities. This includes use of credible data, including trend data, to provide context that more accurately informs readers and media consumers.

- The media industry should support investigative journalism that goes beyond documenting crime, or spurring false narratives of youth as primary drivers of crime, to reporting that illuminates context and explores potential solutions based on promising evidence of success. This kind of reporting could shed light on why and how youth come in contact with the justice system, thereby identifying potential intervention points. It could also better inform the public about the differences between justice-involved children and youth and justice-involved adults and why developmentally appropriate, evidence-based approaches lead to better outcomes than a blanket punitive approach.
- Public and civic leaders should ensure that their concern for public safety and youth wellness is not undermined by using misleading or emotionally charged rhetoric, particularly demonizing or “adultifying” language in referring to justice-involved children and youth. This is especially concerning where misleading media headlines and soundbites are often used as “click-bait” to attract consumers. As savvy media consumers themselves, public officials should avoid allowing sensationalized reporting, without solid evidence, drive policy decision-making.
- Youth justice stakeholders, including juvenile court players, child and youth programming staff, and advocates could challenge misleading news coverage, especially inflammatory language and inaccurate use of data, and be more proactive by sharing credible data and compelling stories about young people in their communities. This includes reaching out to willing reporters and editorial boards to encourage more thoughtful reporting. This could involve sharing what is working with justice-involved children and youth, conveying factors that contribute to problematic and offending youth behaviors, and shedding light on how children and youth are victimized and harmed by violence and other forms of systemic neglect. Such partnerships could lead to more in-depth and nuanced reporting, such as the “*Delinquent Series*”, to better inform public understanding and perceptions about children and youth who come in contact with the justice system.
- The public as media consumers should call for more balanced coverage of stories involving crime and justice-related topics, particularly when children and youth are involved. Media consumers should strive to resist sensationalized headlines as “click-bait” and be vocal about challenging media outlets when misleading media coverage is presented.

LIMITATIONS

While efforts were made to ensure that this media scan captured all of the articles on justice-involved youth over the 3-year time period, some articles may have been missed, especially those stories that were published in local news sources in counties other than Cuyahoga. Also, reliance on digital media coverage necessarily meant that articles published in the print media alone were not included in this analysis. We acknowledge that the process of coding an article as more neutral, negative or positive is subjective; however, given that the majority of the articles

were categorized as neutral suggests that the coding criteria was tailored sufficiently to minimize misidentification of tone in retrieved articles.

FURTHER AREAS FOR RESEARCH & CONCLUSION

This media scan primarily focused on reporting of justice-involved children and youth as “offenders.” Future research could explore reporting on children and youth as victims of violence, as well as victims of broader system disinvestment. This may provide a useful opportunity to compare the tone of media narratives when young people are on different ends of the justice spectrum. Future research on local media coverage in other Ohio counties (beyond Cleveland and Cuyahoga county) may also offer more insight on the tone of media narratives about justice-involved children and youth, especially if compared to the local juvenile arrest, adjudication and victimization data. Further, a comparable review of media coverage of justice-involved adults, compared to the local adult crime data, could shed more light on how children and youth are covered differently by media outlets.

Nonetheless, a key contribution of this research is that it sheds light on the over-attention to youth-related crime by the media in general and to the fact that there is a significantly larger proportion of negative stories about justice-involved children and youth than positively themed articles, both in Cleveland/Cuyahoga county and in Ohio generally. This coverage contributes to a biased negative narrative about young people who are in or at risk of coming into contact with the justice system. Shaping public opinion in this negative direction can also put misguided pressure on the juvenile justice system and public leaders, leading to more punitive, less effective approaches at the expense of its rehabilitative mandate. Ultimately, children and youth who would benefit from evidence-informed programming may be deprived of effective interventions, resulting in deeper criminal justice system involvement at higher public costs without making the youth or communities more safe. Simply producing more ‘neutral’ coverage alone would not resolve this concern. While maintaining ‘neutrality’ when reporting serves a useful public benefit, it also leaves room for misinterpretation or misuse. Beyond merely documenting crimes, hearings and other court procedures, balanced reporting should explore some of the contributing factors that lead to criminal involvement. Better understanding the why and how children and youth get caught up in the justice system offers a more practical utility in helping to prevent future harm and system involvement.(17)

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ENDNOTES

- i (see e.g. [Anti-crime group says they don't like children being called animals, demands change at Cleveland City Hall](#))
- ii – [A look at the ongoing effort to prevent crime in Cleveland with summer youth programs](#)
– [Delinquent: Cuyahoga's juvenile system is supposed to rehabilitate youth when they offend. Most of the time it works – Cameron is one example](#) – [cleveland.com](#)
– [Cleveland Heights scores \\$300,000 U.S. Justice youth grant for Peacemakers Alliance](#)
- iii [Cleveland battles carjacking surge as city mourns slain off-duty police officer](#) | Fox News
- iv [Juvenile suspect arrested in East Cleveland torture, murder case bound over to adult court](#)
- v [More violence at Cuyahoga County juvenile center, officials push to stop it](#)
- vi [Cleveland police battle surge in repeated crimes by juveniles](#)
- vii [Records show teen shot by Cleveland police was AWOL from home detention](#)
- viii [Bond set at \\$100K for man charged in Cleveland carjacking of Ohio State coach](#)
- ix [Cleveland Police shoot 14-year-old while investigating car break ins](#)
- x Ohio in this chart represents articles covering Ohio generally.
- xi The series can be found at <https://www.cleveland.com/delinquent/>
- xii See e.g. Facebook group called “Juvenile Court Injustices, Cuyahoga County Edition”.
- xiii Note: Schubert Center for Child Studies Policy Director served on the Ohio Juvenile Justice Working Group
- xiv [Cuyahoga County Juvenile Detention Center celebrates first college graduate – cleveland.com](#)
[First college graduate at Cuyahoga Juvenile Detention Center accused of murder](#)

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