

# Content Analysis of Cook County Correctional System News Coverage by the Chicago Sun-Times

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## INTRODUCTION

- The globalization of the Black Lives Matter movement in Summer 2020 sparked large-scale discourse on criminal justice system operations and mobilization for reform across a host of social and political mediums (Reny & Newman, 2021)
- The average online news consumer is more likely to only read an article's headline than click and read the article's entire content (Rieis et al, 2015)

This content analysis aims to document and categorize the headline presentation of Cook County Corrections' operations by local Chicago news source The Chicago Sun Times.

- Relevant article headlines were sorted by their connotation and focus categories, observing trends in reporting about Cook County over a period of five years (2017-2021)\*

*\*This is a continuing analysis- please note that only the results for 2019-2021 are considered in the results and conclusions of this report\**

- It is expected that...
  - Trends in connotation will show an increase in more negative reporting over time from 2017-2021
  - 2020's coverage will have a high number of protest related headlines compared to other years
  - Compared to other years, 2020 will have particularly distinct category distributions

## METHODOLOGY

To document the total number of relevant articles per year, "Cook County Jail" was entered into the search engine on the Sun-Times' website, sorted by most recent to least recent.

- For each year 2019-2021, articles were either rated Relevant (1) or Not Relevant (0) in order to create a sample of article headlines reporting on the operations of Cook County Correctional System

- *Relevant (1) example:*

"Kim Foxx defends reforms, calls for focus on data amid Cook County's surge in violent crime"

- *Not relevant (0) example:*

"Bail denied for man charged with shooting that killed woman, wounded another in Gresham"

[Inter-rater Reliability Cohen's kappa = .918]

- Article headlines were then rated by connotation on a scale from 1 to 7, where a rating of 4 = Neutral

Most Negative: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 :Most Positive

- *Most Neg (1) example:*

"Family seeking answers after loved one is found hanged in South Side police cell"

- *Most Pos(7) example:*

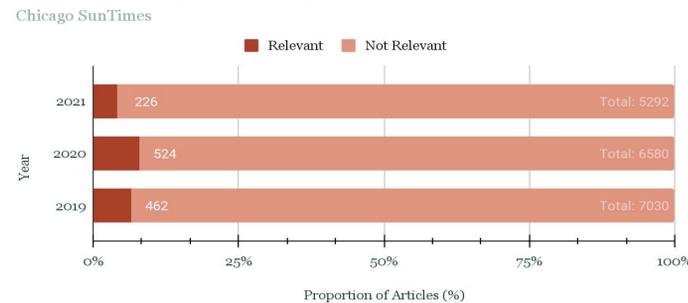
"Criminal justice and police reforms in Illinois sure to lead to a more just world"

- Headlines were sorted into nine focus categories:

- *Call for Reform, Implementation of Reform, Court/Administration Misconduct, Officer Misconduct, Overturned convictions, Police Protest News, COVID-19 News, General Court/Administration Operations, and General Law Enforcement Operations*

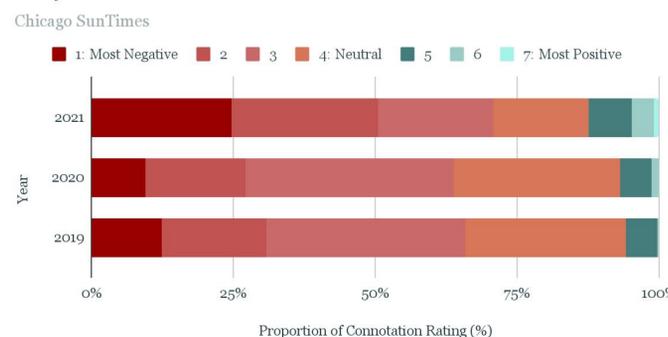
## RESULTS

F1. Proportion of Relevant Articles within "Cook County Jail" Search Results per Year 2019-2021



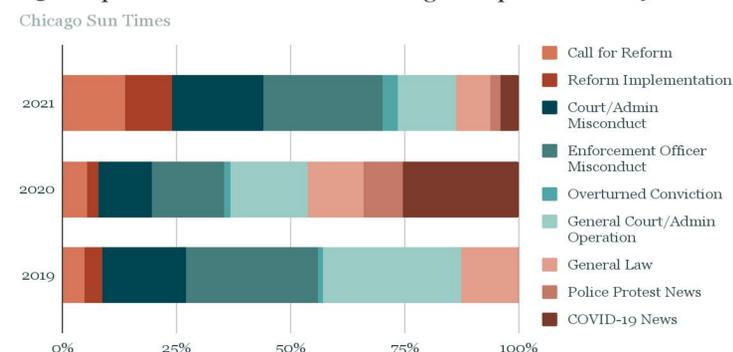
F2. There was a significant effect of year,  $F(2, 1208) = 9.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = .015$ . Post-hoc tests\* revealed that ratings were significantly lower for 2021 ( $M = 2.68, SD = 1.41$ ) compared to 2020 ( $M = 3.08, SD = 1.09$ ) 95% CI mean difference [-.61, -.18] and 2019 ( $M = 2.97, SD = 1.10$ ), 95% CI [-.51, -.07]. \*Tukey's HSD

F2. Proportion of Relevant Headline Connotations per Year 2019-2021



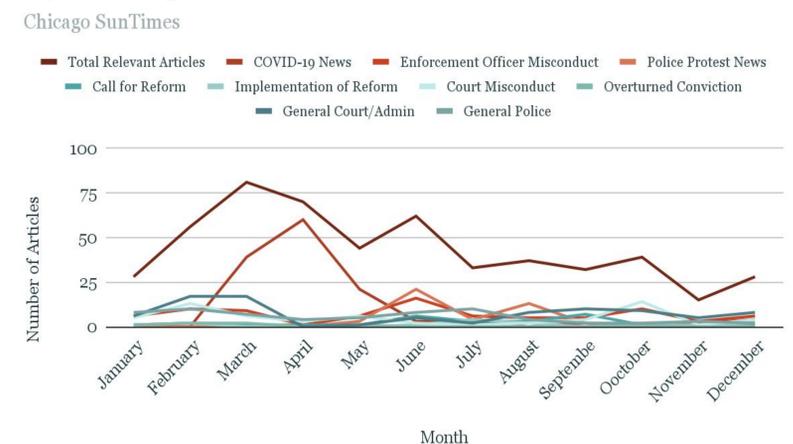
F3. Results are consistent with expectations of smaller proportions across all categories in 2020 than other years, with a large proportion of the year's total headlines within the COVID-19 News category.

F3. Proportion of Article Focus Categories per Year 2019-2021



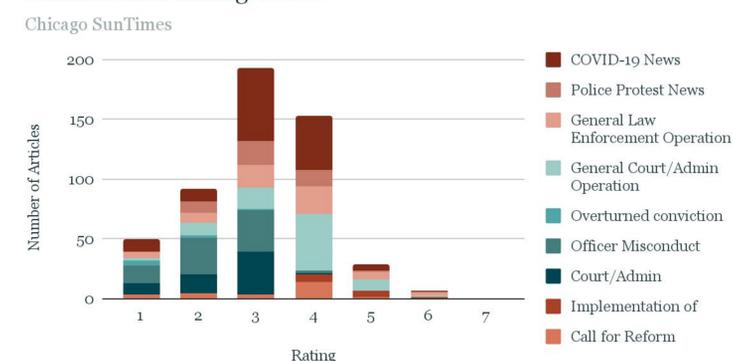
F4. Consistent with expectations, the number of COVID-19 News headlines spikes in March of 2020 as the number of articles decreases within all other categories during the same month. Results also show an increase in articles about protest and police misconduct during June and July, during the height of BLM protests.

F4. Articles per Month 2020



F5. Distribution of focus categories within each connotation score group in 2020 shows the majority of relevant headlines being rated as negative, with a large number of these headlines rated as 'slightly negative', one step below neutral.

F5. Number of Headlines in each Focus Category per Connotation Rating: 2020



## CONCLUSIONS

Please note that these are interim conclusions, as this analysis is ongoing.

It was expected that the total number of relevant headlines would show a general increase in reporting of Cook County Corrections news over time. As reported in Figure 1, the results do not reflect this. However, Figure 2 shows there are a higher number of more negative article headlines reported in 2021 than those of the previous years. It is possible that this increase in negativity was influenced by increasing number of collective outcries against police and general system misconduct through the globalization of Black Lives Matter.

Another notable set of results are these of Figure 4, which show a large increase in article headlines about COVID-19 News through March of 2020 as well as a decrease in headlines within every other category during the same time frame. This same observation can be made for June and July of 2020, where COVID-19 reporting rapidly decreases as the number of headlines about Police Protests and Police Misconduct spiked. This interaction of spotlighting and side-tabling certain categories regarding criminal justice reporting is worth investigating within other years and across several news sources, as it could speak volumes to what quick judgements and beliefs online news consumers may be adopting through the headline presentations of their local criminal justice news reporting.

## REFERENCES

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