

Framing Conflict: American Media's Framing of the Israel-Hamas War

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Abstract: A content analysis of 335 news articles from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, and Fox News published between October 2023 and March 2024 reveals that Fox News predominantly employs the 'security threat' frame, portraying Israel's actions as necessary defenses, while *The New York Times* and CNN emphasize 'humanitarian crisis' and 'moral responsibility' frames, highlighting impacts on Palestinian civilians and ethical concerns. *The Washington Post* takes a more balanced but critical approach toward the war. We also interviewed 10 journalists from the four media channels, and they confirmed and elaborated on what we found in the content analysis. These outcomes demonstrate that in the coverage of an international conflict media framing may take a bidirectional nature, where media influence public opinion while simultaneously adapting to audience perceptions.

Keywords: Israel-Hamas conflict, American media, media framing, public opinion, international conflict.

The Israel-Palestine conflict has long been one of the most contentious geopolitical issues, shaping the political dynamics in the Middle East and subsequently influencing international relations. With its roots in early 20th-century territorial disputes, the conflict has seen numerous escalations, including wars, uprisings, and complex negotiations, each met with intense media scrutiny. For decades, the U.S. media have played a critical role in framing this conflict, shaping American public opinion and influencing diplomatic relations. The recent outbreak of violence between Israel and Hamas on October 7, 2023, represents a significant escalation that has dominated news cycles.

In times of a crisis, the media serve not only as a source of information but also as a narrative force, emphasizing certain aspects while downplaying others to construct specific viewpoints (Entman, 2007; Roslyng & Dindler, 2023). The media's emphasis on certain frames such as humanitarian crises, security threats, or ethical responsibilities can significantly shape public opinion, often aligning with broader ideological currents or national interests. For the Israel-Hamas conflict, understanding media framing provides insight into Americans' and American Jewish sentiments toward and interpretation of the conflict and the potential ramifications on U.S. foreign policy.

The primary research question guiding this study asks: How does the U.S. mainstream media frame the Israel-Hamas conflict in terms of tone, source reliance, and overall narrative? Specifically, this study examines the coverage by *The New York Times* (hereafter NYT),

The Washington Post (hereafter WP), CNN, and Fox News (hereafter Fox), in order to identify dominant frames, tone, and sources. Each of these outlets occupies a unique ideological position and represents varying journalistic approaches, making them well-suited to illustrate the spectrum of media coverage in the U.S. This study also examines how media frames may reflect shifts in public opinion among American and American Jewish audiences. Previous studies on U.S. media's portrayal of the Israel-Palestine conflict have frequently highlighted pro-Israel biases and the influence of political lobbying (Chomsky, 1999; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). However, recent shifts in American public opinion regarding Israel, particularly among younger and more progressive demographics, suggest that traditional media framing might not be so much persuasive as in the past.

To answer these research questions, this study content analyzed 335 news articles published or broadcast by the four leading media outlets including NYT, WP, CNN and Fox between October 2023 and March 2024 and examined how they framed the Israel-Hamas conflict. This study additionally interviewed 10 journalists from the four media channels to corroborate the content analysis findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research Context – The Israel-Hamas Conflict

The Israel-Hamas conflict, a complex and enduring struggle, has its roots in territorial claims and significant casualties on both sides (Caplan, 2019). The conflict's modern history can be traced back to the early 20th century when worsening conditions for Jews in the Russian Empire, coupled with the decline of the

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Ottoman Empire, spurred the Zionist movement's push for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, which proposed a partition plan supported by the U.S. and the United Nations, marked a critical moment, despite fierce opposition from the Muslim community, who viewed Palestine as a holy land (Gelvin, 2014). Tensions escalated after World War II, leading to the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948.

The conflict further intensified with the Six-Day War in 1967, resulting in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, bringing over a million Palestinians under Israeli rule and leading to the rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (Mock *et al.*, 2014). Despite efforts such as the Oslo Accords in the 1990s to negotiate peace, the situation remained volatile, exacerbated by the Second Intifada, Hamas's rise to power, and subsequent conflicts, including Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and the 2008 invasion of Gaza. The ongoing crisis, fueled by geopolitical interests, continues to evolve.

The October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas, a Palestinian militant group, marked a devastating escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict, resulting in over 1,200 Israeli deaths and more than 200 hostages. In retaliation, Israel has launched severe military operations, leading to around 42,000 Palestinian deaths and worsening conditions for more than 2 million people in Gaza as of October 2024 (Al Jazeera, 2024). The U.N. has described the situation as catastrophic, with Israeli forces targeting civilian areas, cutting off water and electricity supplies, and intensifying their control over Hamas territory (Masoud & Al-Mughrabi, 2023). International efforts to mediate, including those by the U.N. and BRICS, have largely failed, with BRICS condemning Israel's actions as war crimes and calling for a ceasefire. Meanwhile, the U.S. President has advocated for a two-state solution, though substantial military aid to Israel has sparked criticism and highlighted the complexity of global responses to the crisis (Mallinder, 2023).

Media Framing of War and Public Opinion

During wartime, the media not only relay information but also construct public opinion and encourages engagement in the conflict. However, the media's role is complex and can involve misinformation to serve elite interests, influencing public perception to align with the goals of those in power. Biased or unsubstantiated news about conflicts can have severe

consequences, including escalating wars (Ketitni, 2023). The role of the media in war coverage involves the complications arising from multi-medium and multi-sourced reporting (Sacco & Bossio, 2015). Case studies, such as post-9/11 media practices (Steuter & Wills, 2010), illustrate how the media successfully shape public opinion.

The overarching theoretical framework in this study is the newsroom hierarchy model (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013), which explains how news is selected, processed, and ultimately disseminated to the public. It emphasizes that news content is shaped not only by individual journalists but also by multiple levels of influence, including routines, organizational structures, institutional norms, and broader societal forces. The model has been widely used to explain why certain stories are consistently underreported (e.g., racial injustice), to analyze how ownership concentration affects content diversity, and to explore the impact of digitization and algorithms on traditional newsroom gatekeeping. Vos and Heinderyckx (2015) extended Shoemaker's model to examine journalism in the digital age, and reported that while technological disruptions alter some routines, the hierarchical layers of influence remain intact, albeit reshaped. The model has been employed in studies investigating algorithmic gatekeeping, showing how digital logics (e.g., platform metrics and audience analytics) create new routines and organizational constraints (Anderson, 2013).

While Shoemaker's model has been influential, some scholars argue that the model underplays agency, particularly in non-Western contexts or in alternative media environments (Cottle, 2007). The rise of citizen journalism and social media challenges the centralized and top-down logic of the hierarchy (Hermida, 2010). Nevertheless, the model has proven adaptable. This study pays particular attention to extramedia influences, which encompass various external forces that shape news content. These forces include information sources, interest groups, advertisers, audiences, and other media organizations (Cassidy, 2008). For example, research consistently shows that journalism heavily relies on official sources including politicians, government briefings, and corporations and reinforces established power structures (Cassidy, 2008). The role of interest groups is also important (Cassidy, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Advertising acts as a direct constraint. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) noted that journalists and editors may avoid stories that could alienate advertising sponsors. Commercial imperatives and

audience analytics often influence content selection (Díaz-Cerveró *et al.*, 2022). Today, users substantially affect the news agenda by sharing, commenting, or amplifying stories online.

One prominent extramedia factor is public opinion, which includes societal values, audience expectations, and broader political or cultural pressures. Shoemaker and Reese (2013) conceptualize public opinion as part of the “social system level” of their model, which influences the news indirectly and helps shape the values and norms that media professionals internalize. Public opinion serves as a feedback mechanism: journalists and news organizations often consider prevailing public sentiments to retain credibility, maintain audience trust, and secure financial sustainability (McQuail, 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

How does public opinion affect media framing? Media framing, defined as the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of reality to promote a particular interpretation (Entman, 1993), is closely tied to public opinion broadly in two ways. First, media outlets often adjust or align their frames with dominant public sentiment to remain relevant. This is particularly salient in the digital age, where real-time metrics (likes, shares, comments) provide continuous feedback. Media tend to amplify frames that resonate with audience predispositions. This may cause media framing to mirror the beliefs of target audiences, especially in partisan media ecosystems (Stroud, 2011). Second, public opinion can push specific issues or angles into prominence and influence not just what gets covered but how it is covered. For example, when public concern over climate change surges, news outlets are more likely to adopt scientific or policy-oriented frames rather than skepticism or economic uncertainty frames (O'Neill *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, during periods of political unrest, public outrage may lead to more emotive and dramatic framing, as journalists anticipate or respond to public sentiment (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015).

Framing theory acknowledges the role of culture in shaping frames. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), media frames are influenced by “cultural resonances,” which are deeply embedded in societal values and norms. These resonances make certain frames more effective because they align with the audience's pre-existing beliefs and attitudes. For instance, in the context of American media coverage of Israel, the framing of Israel as a democratic ally

resonates strongly with American cultural values of democracy and freedom. The interplay suggests framing is not just a top-down process imposed by the media but also a dynamic interaction between media narratives and societal values.

The bidirectional relationship between media framing and public opinion shows the complex interplay where each can act as both cause and effect. Media framing does not operate in isolation but is continuously shaped by the feedback it receives from the audience. As public opinion evolves, so does the media's approach to framing issues (Scheufele, 1999). This interaction highlights the media's role not only as a shaper of public opinion but also as a mirror that reflects societal values and concerns (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Moreover, this interaction emphasizes the importance of understanding media framing as a fluid and adaptable process. Rather than being static, media frames are constantly renegotiated in response to the changes in public sentiment, political pressures, and social dynamics (Reese *et al.*, 2001). This adaptability allows media outlets to maintain their relevance to the audience in a rapidly changing environment. However, it also raises questions about the potential for media to perpetuate certain biases or reinforce dominant narratives, particularly when public opinion is strongly polarized (Entman, 1993).

Changing Public Opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The current study focuses on how American media's framing of the Israel-Hamas war can be understood in terms of its interconnection to Americans' and American Jewish sentiment about the war. In general, there are parallels in how Americans' and American Jews and American media approach Israeli issues. But differences also exist, mainly driven by varying interests of American Jews and the diverse nature of both the Jewish community and media organizations.

One parallel often drawn between American Jews and the American mainstream media's coverage of Israel is the generally pro-Israel stance that has been strong in history. This alignment is rooted in the deep-seated historical support for Israel within the American Jewish community, which has consistently sought to ensure the security and prosperity of the Jewish state (Feingold, 2017; Sachar, 1993). For many American

Jews, Israel represents not just a nation-state, but a crucial element of Jewish identity and survival (Katz, 1979). As a result, advocacy efforts within American communities often emphasize Israel's right to defend itself against external threats. This perspective is often reflected in the mainstream media whose narratives often foreground Israel's security concerns (Chomsky, 1999; Kumar, 2021). This influence has been reinforced by powerful lobbying organizations, such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which have played a pivotal role in advocating for robust U.S. support for Israel. AIPAC and similar organizations have successfully mobilized political and financial resources to ensure that American policymakers maintain a pro-Israel stance, which in turn has shaped media narratives (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). Media outlets, often influenced by these pro-Israel organizations, have tended to present Israel in a favorable light (Kumar, 2021).

The alignment between American Jewish perspectives and mainstream media coverage has been captured and researched by several scholars. For example, Roy (2012) uncovered that many U.S. news media framed the Israel-Palestine conflict between 2009 and 2011 to shape intercultural communication in alignment with the dominant groups and political parties in the U.S. Blankfort (2003) and Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) have argued that the long pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. has significantly influenced both media coverage and political discourse, which resulted in a generally favorable portrayal of Israel in the American press. This influence is particularly evident in American media's consistent framing of Israel as a democratic ally. In such narratives, Israel has often been depicted as a bastion of democracy and stability, juxtaposed against its neighbors or Palestinian groups, which have been frequently portrayed as aggressors (Chomsky, 1999).

Recently, Americans Jews perspectives have somewhat changed. Today, not all American Jews support the Israeli government's policies unconditionally, and there is a rising diversity of opinions. A 2021 survey by Pew Research Center found that 45% of U.S. Jewish adults said caring about Israel is "essential" to what being Jewish, 37% said it is "important, but not essential" and 16% said that caring about Israel is "not important" (Nortey, 2021). The survey also reveals that American Jewish community encompasses a wide range of views on Israel. This diversity is increasingly visible as younger American

Jews, particularly those aligned with progressive movements.

Recently, American mainstream media, while generally supportive of Israel, also reflect dissenting voices within the Jewish community. Telhami (2013) argue that while American mainstream media coverage of Israel is often sympathetic, there is a growing awareness of the Israel-Hamas conflict's nuances. She argues that the evolving geopolitical landscape, along with increased activism and advocacy from diverse groups, has pressured media outlets to address the complexity of the conflict more thoroughly. Additionally, American public opinion on Israel has become more divided recently than in the past, with a significant portion of the population now expressing sympathy for the Palestinian cause (Rascius, 2025). This division is pronounced especially among younger Americans and certain demographic groups. Moreover, Jewish organizations such as *J Street* and media outlets such as *Jewish Currents* provide platforms for more critical voices within the Jewish community and influence the broader media narrative about Israel.

Taken together, the longstanding alignment between American mainstream media coverage and pro-Israel perspectives, shaped by historical ties and political lobbying, continues to be a dominant narrative. However, alternative viewpoints are gradually being raised, including those that are sympathetic to Palestine causes.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the dominant frames used by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, and Fox News in their coverage of the recent Israel-Hamas conflict?

RQ2: When covering the recent Israel-Hamas War, did *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, and Fox News show positive, or neutral or negative tone towards Israel?

RQ3: When covering the recent Israel-Hamas War, what sources did *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, and Fox News rely on for news gathering?

RQ4: How do these frames and tone align with or differ from the public opinion within the American Jewish community?

METHOD

Content Analysis

This study first employed a content analysis to examine how NYT, WP, CNN, and Fox framed the recent Israel-Hamas conflict. This method allows researchers to identify and analyze specific themes, patterns, and frames within a given set of texts (Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The sample for this study consists of all the news articles related to the Israel-Hamas conflict published by the four news channels between October 7, 2023 and March 30, 2024. Articles were retrieved from the news channels' official websites and archives. Articles where the conflict was mentioned in a passing manner or as opinion leader were excluded from the analysis. In total, 335 articles were selected for final analysis. Each article was coded for the presence/absence of specific frames, tone and sources. The unit of analysis is each news article.

We used both inductive and deductive methods to identify the major frames for our content analysis. First, we drew common frames about war from prior research. We also read through 30% of our sample before the actual content analysis and identified key frames. Through this process, five frames were decided for coding and analysis. "Democratic Ally Frame" emphasizes Israel as a democratic nation aligned with American values of democracy and freedom. It portrays Israel as a bastion of stability in a volatile region and as a critical ally of the U.S. "Security Threat Frame" focuses on the threats faced by Israel from Hamas and other adversaries. It highlights Israeli security concerns, the impact of violence on Israeli civilians, and justifies military actions as necessary for national defense. "Humanitarian Crisis Frame" emphasizes the humanitarian impact of the conflict, particularly on Palestinian civilians. It illuminates humanitarian issues such as civilian casualties, displacement, and the destruction of infrastructure in Gaza. "Moral Responsibility Frame" addresses the ethical and moral dimensions of the conflict, including debates about the proportionality of Israel's response, the treatment of Palestinians, and the broader implications for human rights. "Political Critique Frame" reflects criticism of the Israeli government's policies, including settlement expansion, the occupation of Palestinian territories, and the treatment of Arab citizens within Israel. It may also highlight critical voices toward the war.

In addition to framing, this study examined the tone of news and the sources cited within each article, which

is crucial for comprehending the overall narrative and bias present in media coverage, as these elements can significantly influence public perception of issues (McCombs & Reynolds, 2009). The tone was coded as positive, negative, or neutral, based on the overall sentiment towards the Israeli government policies. The positive tone was observed from the articles emphasizing Israel's democratic values, resilience, or successful defense strategies. The negative tone was coded from the articles criticizing Israel's military actions, highlighting civilian casualties, or discussing humanitarian crises in Gaza. We coded the neutral tone if an article presents a balanced view or lacks any discernible positive or negative bias toward Israel. The sources cited within each article were also analyzed to determine the diversity and balance of perspectives represented in the media coverage. Each source was identified and categorized based on its affiliation (e.g., government official (Israel, U.S., foreign countries), military representative, humanitarian organization, (academic, expert, activist, etc.).

The coding process involved several steps. First, a coding scheme was developed based on existing literature and the specific frames identified for this study. The coding scheme included detailed definitions and examples of each frame. Both the tone and source analysis was integrated into the broader content analysis framework. Next, two coders were trained to apply the coding scheme to the articles. Training involved reviewing sample articles and discussing any ambiguities in the coding process. Each article was independently coded by the two coders. Any Kappa scores higher than 0.6 were considered good while scores above 0.75 were considered excellent (Bakeman & Quera, 1992). Our Kappa scores ranged between $\kappa = .64$ and $\kappa = .82$. Regarding RQ4, we also collected various polls about how American Jewish perceive Israel and its conflict with Palestinians since 2000.

Interviews

In November 2024, we conducted interviews with 10 journalists from NYT, WP, CNN and Fox, who have had direct and indirect experience of covering the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas. We randomly contacted 40 journalists and received responses from 10 – 2 from NYT, 2 from WP, 4 from CNN, and 2 from Fox. The average journalism experience was 8.5 years. The average age was 37.4 years. Interviews were conducted via email. We asked questions about how they perceive the conflict, what

factors they think important in the coverage, who are responsible for the conflict, and how public opinion and media framing interact. Analysis of the responses focused on the four research questions.

Findings

To account for the different total numbers of articles from each media channel, we converted the counts to proportions and then performed a chi-square test with these proportions. This method ensures that the comparison is fair and not biased by the unequal sample sizes (Franke *et al.*, 2012). Regarding RQ1, the results were significant, ($\chi^2(3, N = 335) = 151.61, p < .001$), indicating that the distribution of frames differed significantly across the four media channels.

NYT (46.51%), WP (56%) and CNN (42.5%) used the humanitarian crisis frame most frequently, while Fox used the security threat frame (49.42%) most frequently. WP published more stories with the humanitarian crisis frame and moral responsibility frame and less stories with the security threat frame than the other news channels. CNN published more stories with the democratic ally frame (8.75%) and the political critique frame (16.25%) than the other news channels. The use of the democratic ally frame was least in NYT (1.16%). Fox published less stories with the 'political critique' frame (3.44%) than the other news channels (Table 1).

We also conducted a chi-square test for each media frame. The test revealed no significant difference in the use of the democratic ally frame among the media channels, $\chi^2(3, N = 335) = 6.50, p = .0896$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted using Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) test with Bonferroni correction to control for multiple

comparisons. The adjusted alpha level was set at .0083. The analysis found no significant differences between any pairs of media channels in their use of the democratic ally frame.

The chi-square test revealed a significant difference in the use of the security threat frame among the media channels, $\chi^2(3, N = 335) = 38.88, p < .001$. The post hoc analysis (Bonferroni alpha .0083) reported significant differences between the following pairs of media channels: NYT (18.6%) vs WP (3.6%), NYT vs Fox (49.42%), WP vs CNN (22.5%), WP vs Fox, and CNN vs Fox. There was no significant difference between NYT and CNN. Fox showed a particularly high usage of this frame (49.42%) compared with the other media channels.

The chi-square test revealed a significant difference in the use of the moral responsibility frame among the media channels, $\chi^2(3, N = 335) = 15.96, p = .0012$. The post hoc analysis (Bonferroni alpha .0083) showed significant differences between the following pairs of media channels: NYT (18.6%) vs CNN (6.25%), NYT vs Fox (4.59%), WP (23.17%) vs CNN, WP vs Fox. We found no significant differences between NYT and WP or between CNN and Fox.

The chi-square test revealed a significant difference in the use of the humanitarian crisis frame among the media channels, $\chi^2(3, N = 335) = 35.55, p < .001$. The post hoc analysis (Bonferroni alpha .0083) indicated significant differences between the following pairs of media channels: NYT (46.51%) vs Fox (4.59%), WP (56%) vs CNN (42.5%), WP vs Fox, and CNN vs Fox. There was no significant difference between NYT and WP, and between NYT and CNN.

Table 1: News Frames in the Four Media Channels

Frame	Media Channels				Total
	The New York Times	The Washington Post	CNN	Fox News	
Democratic Ally	1 (1.16%)	2(2.43%)	7 (8.75%)	4(4.59%)	14 (4.18%)
Security Threat	16 (18.6%)	3 (3.65%)	18 (22.5%)	43(49.42%)	80 (23.89%)
Moral Responsibility	16 (18.6%)	19 (23.17%)	5 (6.25%)	4(4.59%)	44 (13.13%)
Humanitarian Crisis	40 (46.51%)	46(56%)	35 (42.5%)	4 (4.59%)	125 (37.31%)
Political Critique	9 (10.46%)	8 (9.75%)	13 (16.25%)	3 (3.44%)	33 (9.85%)
Other	4(4.65%)	4 (4.87%)	2 (2.5%)	29 (33.33%)	39 (11.64%)
Total	86	82	80	87	335 (100%)

(5, N= 335) = 151.61, $p < .001$.

The chi-square test revealed no significant difference in the use of the political critique frame among the media channels, $\chi^2(3, N = 335) = 6.98, p = .0725$.

These results suggest that most American media, except Fox, showed a critical stance toward Israeli action, by addressing the moral responsibility of Israeli action toward Palestinians and paying attention to the humanitarian impacts of the war on civilian casualties and the destruction of the living in Gaza. The leading news outlets have also been hesitant to framing Israel as a democratic ally of the U.S. However, it should be noted that they have not directly criticized the Israeli military action, as seen in the rare use of the political critique frame.

Regarding RQ2 (tone differences), a chi-square test of independence was conducted. The analysis found a significant difference among the four channels, $\chi^2(6, N = 335) = 177.24, p < .001$. Post hoc pairwise comparisons with Tukey's HSD test with Bonferroni correction (alpha .0083) show that Fox articles contained significantly more positive articles (74% of the entire articles) than other news channels: NYT (4.65%), WP (4.48%), and CNN (10%). WP (52.43%) and CNN (55%) published negative stories more than positive stories. Only 3.44% of Fox articles contained negative tone. These results suggest that American mainstream media are not viewing Israel's action as positive as far as it is about conflict with Palestine,

aligning with the results of RQ1. Overall, 33.43% of the entire articles showed negative tone toward Israel. Only Fox maintained a supportive tone toward Israel (Table 2).

Regarding RQ3, the chi-square test revealed significant difference in the use of the sources among the media channels, $\chi^2(15, N = 832) = 77.11, p < .001$. The analysis indicates that on average 29.93% of the news sources were Israeli officials: NYT (29.74%), WP (26.59%) and CNN (36.45%) relied upon Israeli officials as primary sources for their news, while Fox (32.71%) depended upon U.S. officials as the major source. On average, U.S. officials explained 20.07% of news sources, followed by Palestine officials (14.78%) and international organizations (12.5%). The least used source was foreign government officials (average 6.25%). CNN has the highest proportion of pro-Israel sources at 35.45%. NYT, WP, and Fox have similar proportions, ranging from 26.59% to 29.74%. CNN also has the highest proportion of pro-Palestinian sources at 21.69%. Fox has the lowest proportion of pro-Palestinian sources at 3.74%. NYT and WP have moderate proportions, at 13.38% and 15.73%, respectively (Table 3).

The results suggest that regardless of political stances American mainstream media tend to rely on Israeli and U.S. government officials when they cover the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Use of international organizations and foreign government

Table 2: Tone in the Four Media Channels

Tone	Media Channels				Total
	The New York Times	The Washington Post	CNN	Fox News	
Positive	4(4.65%)	4(4.48%)	8(10%)	64 (73.56%)	80 (23.89%)
Negative	23(26.74%)	43(52.43%)	44 (55%)	2 (2.30%)	112 (33.43%)
Neutral	59(68%)	35(42%)	27 (35%)	21 (24.14%)	142 (42.39%)
Total	86	82	80	87	335 (100%)

$\chi^2(6, N = 335) = 177.24, p < .001$.

Table 3: Sources in the Four Media Channels

Sources	Media Channels				Total
	The New York Times	The Washington Post	CNN	Fox News	
Israeli Officials	80 (29.74%)	71 (26.59%)	67 (35.45%)	31 (28.97%)	249 (29.93%)
U.S. Officials	55 (20.45%)	53 (19.85%)	24 (12.70%)	35 (32.71%)	167 (20.07%)
Palestinian Officials	36 (13.38%)	42 (15.73%)	41 (21.69%)	4 (3.74%)	123 (14.78%)
Foreign Government Officials	26 (9.67%)	20 (7.49%)	3 (1.59%)	3 (2.80%)	52 (6.25%)
International Organizations	39 (14.50%)	46 (17.23%)	15 (7.94%)	4 (3.74%)	104 (12.5%)
Other	33 (8.94%)	35 (13.11%)	39 (20.63%)	30 (28.04%)	137 (16.47%)
Total	269 (100%)	267 (100%)	189 (100%)	107 (100%)	832 (100%)

$\chi^2(15, N = 832) = 77.11, p < .001$.

officials as sources was not common. Liberal media outlets (NYT and CNN) showed more reliance on Palestine officials than the other two outlets (WP and Fox).

The interviews are generally consistent with the framing patterns observed in the coded data. Journalists from NYT, WP, and CNN frequently cited the unprecedented scale of civilian casualties in Gaza as the main reason for emphasizing humanitarian frames in their coverage. "It was impossible to ignore the sheer devastation in Gaza, such as flattened hospitals and displaced families. Any frame that didn't highlight the human toll felt morally compromised" (Journalist #3, CNN). A WP correspondent echoed this: "Many people witnessed the human suffering in Gaza from our articles. It is the right decision for readers to see Palestinians as people, not as statistics" (Journalist #2, WP). This finding helps explain why the humanitarian-crisis frame was used most frequently in NYT (46.5%) and WP (56%).

We also found that many journalists used the moral responsibility frame as a buffer. Several journalists admitted that invoking moral discourse allowed them to raise questions about Israeli conduct even though they do not directly challenge Israel's legitimacy. A journalist who wanted to remain anonymous said, "We were walking a very fine line. There was mounting pressure to acknowledge the civilian toll in Gaza, but outright criticism of Israel's military strategy was something the newsroom was extremely cautious about. So instead, I leaned into international humanitarian law and moral reasoning. I'd write about the Geneva Conventions, proportionality, the ethics of targeting infrastructure, but always couched in broader moral terms, not political accusations. Framing it that way allowed us to raise red flags without appearing to undermine Israel's right to defend itself, which would've triggered a whole different level of scrutiny internally." This quote indicates that some journalists relied on the moral-responsibility frame when avoiding the more overtly oppositional political-critique frame.

The interviews also confirmed Fox's emphasis on the security-threat frame. Both Fox journalists revealed that their institutional framing was pre-established, with the expectation that Hamas be treated as a terrorist threat and Israel's actions be contextualized as national defense. A Fox staffer noted, "Humanitarian angles weren't suppressed, but they were secondary. We focus on Israeli security because that's what our viewers care about." This aligns with Fox's heavy use

of the security-threat frame (49.4%) and its overwhelming positive tone toward Israel (73.6%).

Interestingly, most journalists avoided using the democratic ally frame, even when sympathetic to Israel, citing audience skepticism and editorial caution. "The idea of Israel as a democratic beacon has lost resonance, especially among younger readers. We couldn't just say that and move on" (Journalist #4). "Post-judicial reform protests and Netanyahu's hardline cabinet made it hard to push that narrative without sounding tone-deaf" (Journalist #6). This helps explain why the democratic ally frame was minimally used across all the outlets (only 4.18% overall).

Despite growing public criticism of Israel's war strategy, most journalists said direct political critique was institutionally discouraged. "We could question tactics, but not strategy. Criticism of the Israeli state itself or of American support was mostly relegated to op-eds or quote-attribution" (Journalist #5). One CNN journalist noted, "Every time we pitched something more critical, it got watered down in edits. Editors feared accusations of antisemitism or bias." This aligns with the low use of the political-critique frame across all outlets (9.85%), suggesting internal constraints despite emerging dissent in public discourse.

Journalists admitted a structural over-reliance on official sources, especially from Israel and the U.S. government. "We had 24-hour access to IDF spokespersons. Palestinian contacts were much harder to reach, and the risk of unverified information was high" (Journalist #8, WP). "You don't want to be accused of plat forming Hamas, so the fallback is always U.S. or Israeli voices" (Journalist #1). The sourcing data from content analysis confirms this pattern: Israeli and U.S. sources together accounted for up to 50% of all citations.

Several journalists said their framing shifted in response to audience metrics and backlash, confirming the bidirectional framing-opinion feedback loop. "When our Gaza story got record clicks and reader comments demanding more coverage of the humanitarian toll, it clearly influenced what we prioritized next week" (Journalist #2). "We ran a story critical of Netanyahu, and the hate mail was enormous. We still covered it, but the follow-up was way more neutralized" (Journalist #1).

Overall, the journalist interviews triangulate with the content analysis findings. They reveal that media framing during the Israel-Hamas conflict was shaped

not only by ideology and source access, but also by ethical imperatives, editorial constraints, and audience pressures. In particular, the humanitarian-crisis and moral-responsibility frames were employed as morally safe but affectively potent tools. The security-threat frame was institutionally favored at Fox to match audience ideology. The democratic ally and political critique frames were minimized because of declining cultural resonance and editorial aversion to reputational risk. Source selection reflected structural and logistical asymmetries, privileging Israeli and U.S. voices. These insights confirm the bidirectional nature of framing, where journalists adapt their coverage in real time based on perceived audience expectations and public backlash.

Regarding RQ4, we examined various public polls showing Americans' views on Israel. Most American Jews have always felt close to Israel. The 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Survey (Kadushin *et al.*, 2005) found that roughly seven out of ten Jews said they felt "very" (32%) or "somewhat" (37%) emotionally attached to Israel. In 2013, Pew Research Center (2013) found almost identical results, with about seven out of ten American Jews (69%) saying they were "emotionally very attached" (30%) or "somewhat attached" (39%) to Israel.

However, the 2019 survey by Pew Research Center reports a drop of American Jewish attachment to Israel, with 58% saying they are very or somewhat emotionally attached to Israel (Nortey, 2021). A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that 55% of Americans had a favorable view of Israel, while 41% had an unfavorable view. Particularly, only 41% of those aged 18-29 had a favorable view of Israel, compared with 69% of those aged 65 or older (Dinesh & Silver, 2023). Only 48% Americans had a favorable view of Israel's government. The Gallop poll in February 2023 found that 58% of Americans have a "very favorable" or "mostly favorable" view of Israel, down from 68% last year. According to Gallup, Israel's score, which has usually hovered around 65% on average, was its lowest in over two decades (Jones, 2024).

According to a recent survey in November and December 2023, far more Americans (65%) say Hamas bears a lot of responsibility for the current conflict than say that about the Israeli government (35%). Majorities of both Republicans and Republican-leaning independents (73%) and Democrats and Democratic leaners (62%) say Hamas has a lot of

responsibility for the conflict. But Democrats (50%) are more than twice as likely as Republicans (21%) to say the Israeli government bears a lot of responsibility (Pew Research Center, 2023). According to a 2024 February survey by Pew Research Center, 58% Americans say Israel's reasons for fighting Hamas are valid. But how Israel is carrying out its response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack receives a more mixed evaluation. About 38% American adults say Israel's conduct of the war has been acceptable, and 34% say it has been unacceptable. The remaining 26% are unsure (Silver *et al.*, 2024).

Overall, the polls show that Americans and American Jews' views on Israel remained very strong until 2020. But in the last few years, their perspectives have somewhat changed, showing a decline in their support for Israel. Also American show a mixed evaluation of the Israel-Hamas War. Our results that American leading media channels show a negative stance toward the Israeli action may reflect this changing public opinion of Americans.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings offer significant insights into the theoretical implications of media framing in international conflict contexts. Overall, this study shows that U.S. major media outlets' selection and salience of specific frames around the Israel-Hamas War align with the view that framing functions as a selection process that emphasizes certain aspects of reality to guide the public's understanding (Entman, 1993). We found that five frames stand out most in the coverage—democratic ally, security threat, humanitarian crisis, moral responsibility, and political critique. Beyond that, this study also illuminates how these frames are intertwined with existing societal values, journalistic norms, and the shifting dynamics of public opinion.

One notable finding is that the humanitarian crisis frame stood out most except for Fox. More than 37% of the articles analyzed were coded as highlighting the toll of the war on the lives of Palestinians in Gaza. For example, many articles included detailed accounts of civilian suffering, displacement, and infrastructure destruction, emphasizing the humanitarian aspect of the conflict. This emphasis was also corroborated in interviews with journalists who stated that media frames on war must highlight the human toll (e.g., Journalist #2 and #3). Although this frame has been frequently observed in American media's coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflicts in the past several

decades (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023), it has rarely been the most dominant frame. Its current prominence suggests a meaningful shift in both editorial priorities and the perceived expectations of the public.

Additionally, the moral-responsibility frame was the third most dominant frame (13.13%) in our analysis. This frame serves as an ethical discourse, emphasizing civilian welfare without directly challenging Israel's legitimacy. Multiple journalists described using this frame as a strategic tool. This demonstrates how journalists negotiated newsroom constraints and anticipated backlash by invoking moral, rather than political, critique. According to Kumar (2021), moral-responsibility framing allows the media to navigate sensitive topics by appealing to moral judgments without alienating audiences with strong pro-Israel views.

This claim can also be supported by our finding about news tone. The four media outlets maintained a negative tone (33.43%) toward Israeli action more frequently than a positive tone (23.89%). Neutral tones were observed in 42% of the articles. These findings align with the moral and humanitarian emphasis in framing and suggest an overall shift in editorial orientation toward more critical, but cautiously constructed, narratives about Israel's military conduct. Several interviewees explicitly noted that editorial teams were "extremely cautious" about overt critique and preferred "safer" moral frames to avoid accusations of bias (Journalist #5 and #7).

As seen in recent public polls, Americans are showing a growing responsiveness to narratives that center on Palestinian suffering. For example, a 2022 survey by Pew Research Center (Dinesh & Silver,

2023) reports that 41% of Americans have an unfavorable view toward Israel, although 55% view the country favorably. A 2024 survey by Pew Research Center (Silver *et al.*, 2024) shows that 34% of Americans think Israel's military action is unacceptable, while 38% think otherwise. These mixed evaluations parallel our findings that American media may increasingly reflect these ambivalent or critical attitudes, suggesting a feedback loop between public sentiment and media emphasis.

Although more evidence is needed through additional research, we argue that our findings support the bidirectional nature of framing, where media influence public opinion while simultaneously adapting to audience sentiments. This may indicate a feedback mechanism where public opinion shapes media framing just as framing shapes public opinion (Dharta, 2024; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). Journalist testimony further confirmed this dynamic: "When our Gaza story got record clicks and reader comments demanding more coverage of the humanitarian toll, it clearly influenced what we prioritized next week" (Journalist #2).

However, it should also be noted that all four media channels continued to utilize traditional pro-Israel frames. The security threat frame was the second most frequent (23.89%) and dominated coverage on Fox News (49.42%). Interviews with Fox journalists clarified that this frame was institutionally embedded. For example, "We focus on Israeli security because that's what our viewers care about," one journalist said. Despite limited usage (4.18%), the democratic ally frame was occasionally invoked across outlets. Journalists explained its diminished use by citing declining cultural resonance (e.g., Journalist #4).

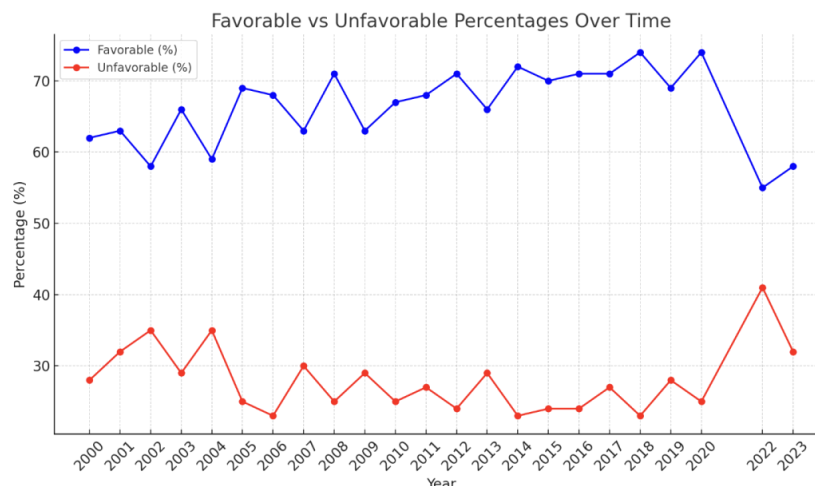


Figure 1: Views of Israel, 2000-2023 based on McCarthy (2020), Pew Research Center (2022), and Gallop (2024).

The source analysis complements this framing pattern. The leading media channels relied heavily on Israeli and U.S. officials (totaling about 50% of all sources). Interviewees acknowledged this imbalance, citing both logistical and editorial factors (e.g., Journalist #8). CNN's higher proportion of pro-Palestinian sources (21.69%) aligns with its broader use of critical frames, while Fox's minimal use (3.74%) reinforces its pro-Israel narrative. Overall, these findings affirm that framing is not only a discursive practice but also structurally enabled by access and institutional priorities (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

Moreover, the ideological function of framing becomes clear when analyzing how different outlets used the same event to project contrasting narratives. Fox's dominant use of the security threat frame and its limited reliance on Palestinian sources reinforced a conservative worldview. By contrast, NYT, WP, and CNN's emphasis on humanitarian and moral frames reflects more liberal editorial norms. These editorial decisions were not made in a vacuum. Journalists repeatedly cited reputational risks, audience sensitivities, and internal vetting processes that constrained their framing choices (e.g., Journalist #7).

Reese *et al.* (2001) assert that media frames must continuously evolve to maintain relevance, particularly in rapidly changing socio-political contexts. However, Fox's consistent pro-Israel framing, especially through the security-threat frame, suggests that deeply embedded ideological positions can override responsiveness to audience change. This emphasizes the dual role of framing as both a reflection of audience values and a reinforcement of entrenched media biases.

Overall, this study makes theoretical contributions to understanding how American media outlets navigate international conflicts through framing. By incorporating interview data into a content analysis framework, we highlight the interplay between discursive strategies, institutional pressures, and audience feedback. The findings suggest that media framing is a fluid and adaptive process, though not uniformly so, reflecting both ideological commitments and emerging shifts in public sentiment.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the four media outlets offer diverse perspectives, they may not fully capture the spectrum of narratives present in American media. A second limitation is the exclusive focus on media framing

without a direct analysis of audience reception or engagement. While this study identifies prominent frames and tone variations, it does not account for how audiences interpret and interact with these frames. Future studies could employ survey or experimental methods to examine how different frames affect audience perceptions of the Israel-Hamas conflict. Future research could also explore the longitudinal shifts in framing strategies to further understand how media narratives evolve in response to public and political changes.

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