



## Constructivist Analysis of Media Framing in the Gaza–Israel War 2023-2026

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### Abstract

*The three questions discussed in this paper are: what are the roles played by framing mechanisms in the social construction of the identities of Israel and Palestine in international media networks? How are international norms of legitimacy defined by dominant media discourses about acts of self-defence, 'terrorism' or 'resistance'? What are the digital media platforms and what are the Global South counter-narratives that have been adopted to contest the framing of the Gaza–Israel war by the Western media? The study draws on constructivist International Relations theory and the work of Wendt, Onuf and Foucault to view the media not as a passive bystander to conflict but as an active participant in the construction of the political reality that audiences use in their interpretation. The methodology is qualitative and based on secondary sources, peer-reviewed academic publications and comparative framing studies of main international outlets. The analysis of the first question suggests that western outlets frame Israel as a legitimate actor under threat while Arab and Global South outlets frame Israel as the aggressor and Palestinians as the victim. On the second, Western coverage includes elements of legitimacy framing that justify Israeli military action as defensive measures and demonize Palestinian resistance as "terrorism," whereas counter framing on the second side appeals to international law and anti-colonial frameworks to challenge these elements of legitimacy. On the third, digital platforms and postcolonial media frames have meaningfully challenged though not displaced the dominance of Western framing, undermined its 'universality' without contesting its hegemonic structure. The study acknowledges its reliance on using secondary sources and its limitation to English and Arabic-language scholarship as the limits of its conclusions.*

**Keywords:** Constructivist, Gaza-Israel War, Global South, International Relations, Legitimacy, Media Framing, Political Reality, Social Construction, Terrorism

### Introduction:

Gaza-Israel is not the conflict that is just about war and politics, but also about meaning, identity, and legitimacy. The information order of the world today means that most audiences are not directly affected by wars. Rather, they are communicated via tv channels, internet information and social networks that define the understanding of violence and suffering in far-

off publics. This is an indirect situation in which media plays an important role in interpreting the conflict, rather than just reporting it, it is selectively represented and framed for global consumption. As previous research on wars coverage indicates, the media's framing of wars is a major determinant of public perception of war (Tumber & Webster, 2006; Entman, 1993). It is to be noted at the outset that the very term describing the conflict is disputed. The Western preferred terminology is "Israel-Hamas war" or "Israel-Gaza conflict", while the Arab media often use terms such as "aggression on Gaza" or "genocide in Gaza" and UN agencies refer to "hostilities in Gaza. This study employs the term "Gaza-Israel war" as a neutral geographically based term, acknowledging that all terms have framing implications, which is a key argument throughout this paper.

Media framing becomes crucial in the construction of conflicting narratives of the same events in the case of Gaza-Israel conflict. A single military incident can be told in very different ways, depending on what editors prefer, what kinds of politics they have, what kind of language they use. Military operations can be called self-defence operations, counter-terrorism operations, collective punishment or mass killings. By the same token, actors are designated using terms that are associated with moral or immoral functions, such as terrorists, militants, resistance groups or freedom fighters. These framing decisions are not without normative implications; they have powerful implications for audience attributions of blame, legitimate behaviour or morality (Entman, 1993; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025). Media, therefore, is a significant place for the production of political meanings.

This variation in depiction provides what are termed competing media realities of the Gaza-Israel war. Various media platforms such as western mainstream media, Arab regional media and global south media can have different narratives about the same conflict as a function of various geopolitical context, ideological and editorial preferences. Recent comparative studies demonstrate that these differences are not incidental, but systematic since they show consistent trends across outlets (Ali, Khan, & Riaz, 2023; Gunay, 2025; Mardiah & Basid, 2025). So, depending on the viewer, whether from the inside or outside, a plural and even at times contradictory truth arises, and the same war is described as a struggle for security and self-defence as well as an occupation and humanitarian crisis.

The dominance of digital media has contributed to this disjointing of narratives. Speed, algorithms and emotion matter in today's media; longer news cycles rule traditional media. Social media highlight specific narratives and exclude other stories, and they push more graphic and dramatic parts of a war. This interaction not only contributes to the spread of the dominant frame but also to the polarization of the scenarios which audiences make up to understand the Gaza-Israel war. In this sense, the media has become more than a passive bearer of information, it has become an arena for active contestation and construction of meaning regarding politics.

This study uses a qualitative research method based on secondary sources. These include academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, published research in international relations and media studies, and news reports from various international media outlets. These were used to compare differences between geographical regions and editorial viewpoints. The analysis draws on Entman's (1993) framing theory and aspects of critical discourse analysis to examine language, narrative, and representation in media coverage across different media and geopolitical contexts. However, there are some limitations. The analysis is based on secondary academic texts and not on the direct examination of primary media texts. Comments on media-specific language therefore reflect citations from existing research rather than independent observations. The study is limited to English- and Arabic-language sources; coverage in Hebrew, French, Turkish, Urdu, and other languages is not considered. Reception data is not included;

statements about how a global audience interprets media reports are therefore inferred rather than empirically verified. Since most of the sources date from 2023 to 2025, the full development of the interpretive frameworks during the period from 2023 to 2026 cannot be fully traced. However, these limitations do not diminish the theoretical and analytical value of the study, but simply define the parameters within which the results should be interpreted.

Taufiq, Alam, and Dermawan (2025) used a qualitative descriptive method to analyse the constitutive nature of the media narratives about the Israel-Palestine conflict from a constructivist perspective, highlighting three key components that shape the media discourse: an unchanging media mainstream bias in favour of Israel, the use of emotional language and selective reporting, as well as the use of social media for the purpose of activism, as seen in the All Eyes on Rafah campaign. The study suggests that mainstream media frames geopolitical discourses in a selective manner, thereby reinforcing dominant discourses, and that social media has provided alternative discursive spaces, which allow Palestinian voices to be heard and grassroots counternarratives to be amplified. The explicit incorporation of constructivist theory in the paper with media analysis is its major contribution, as it shows the process of narrative production in media discourse cannot be estranged from the process of the construction of social reality in international politics. The study is by description and is therefore not systematically discoursed or framed analysed, and therefore the findings are somewhat impressionistic and overall, less analytically precise. Despite this, its theoretical basis of constructivism and the focus on the tension between mainstream framing and digital counter-narratives is highly pertinent to the current research.

Iqbal and Farukh (2025), analyse media texts by using Conceptual Metaphor Theory to identify the metaphors that are used by The Times of Israel, Al Jazeera, and CNN in news articles from October 2023 to April 2024. The authors contend that metaphors are not simply stylistic tools, but they are political tools which structure audience interpretations and moral judgement of the actors in conflict. They conclude that Al Jazeera is more likely to use the language of occupation and destruction, The Times of Israel stresses loss and resilience, and CNN exhibits primarily a state-centric and an Israeli perspective, each of which signals a specific ideology. The most valuable part of the study is the introduction into conflict media analysis of metaphor theory, which goes beyond content categorization and points towards the cognitive and ideological role of language in political news. The biggest limitation of the paper is that it is a relatively small sample size and the conclusions drawn from it cannot be generalised across the span of the war. Despite this, the paper provides a methodologically innovative way that can supplement framing analysis used in the present research in illuminating the linguistic mechanisms in media coverage of the Gaza-Israel war in which political meanings are being produced.

Ali, Khan, & Riaz (2023) examine the qualitative content analysis of news coverage and the transition of language, images and tone of the news story in BBC, France24, Voice of America and Al Jazeera news footage during the escalation of the conflict in October-November 2023. The central thesis of the study is that media framing is not a neutral way to get information across but rather an active process which affects global legitimacies, victimisations, and responsibilities in the minds of others. According to its findings, Al Jazeera provides relatively balanced coverage, while BBC, France24 and VOA consistently report the war in a way that emphasizes and supports Israel and degrades Palestine, reflecting the outlook and political views of each outlet. The paper makes a novel contribution to the comparative framing literature by systematically comparing four large international outlets, on the same time period, and thus offers a first-hand point of comparison between regions. The focus of the research is primarily on the output of the texts,

and the institutional and ownership contexts that give rise to the differences in their framing has not been fully explored, resulting in a less sophisticated structural analysis. However, the study has a very appreciable relevance to the present study since it provides the findings of an empirical study on the systematic framing differences between Western and Arab media in the Gaza-Israel context.

#### **Research Questions:**

1. In the Gaza–Israel war, what are the roles played by framing mechanisms in the social construction of the identities of Israel and Palestine in international media networks?
2. How are international norms of legitimacy defined by dominant media discourses about acts of self-defence, 'terrorism' or 'resistance'?
3. What are the digital media platforms and what are the Global South counter-narratives that have been adopted to contest the framing of the Gaza–Israel war by the Western media?

#### **Theoretical Framework:**

##### **Constructivism:**

This study is primarily theoretically grounded in the constructivist approach of International Relations. Constructivism contrasts with realism and liberalism which foreground material power, institutions, and strategic interests, and emphasizes ideas, identities, norms, and shared meanings as the central features of international politics (Wendt, 1999). It claims that reality in the politics of the world is not absolute and it is not objective, but it is socially constructed as a result of interaction and interpretation. This, in the context of the Gaza-Israel war, means that conflict is not only a material struggle but a discursive one too, in which "seeing" the conflict in the media is a fundamental part of understanding the war internationally.

Alexander Wendt's theory of social construction of international system, rather than material conditions, is relevant here. It implies that people all around the world don't really have access to a "true" reality of war but rather read a socially constructed version. Media framing thus plays a vital role in the Gaza-Israel conflict in its depiction of actors as victims, aggressors, terrorists, or resistance groups. Thus, the media is a direct participant in the construction of political identities and in the legitimization and/or non-legitimization of these. (Wendt, 1999).

Nicholas Onuf's constructivist perspective builds on this theoretical foundation and concentrates on the role of language as a means of producing social reality. Onuf (1989) believes that language is not only a means of describing reality, but it is also a means of creating reality, through speech acts. The words "terrorist," "militant" "occupation" and "self-defence" are not neutral terms but rather have a very normative and political connotation in the news coverage of the Gaza-Israel conflict. The decisions regarding the use of these linguistic choices influence the way the audience understands responsibility and morality, and their recurrent use creates a particular understanding of the conflict over time (Iqbal & Farukh, 2025).

The notion of discourse and power as used by Michel Foucault also constitutes a critical addition to this analysis. Foucault (1980) suggests that knowledge is created within a system of power, that is, that dominant narratives determine what is accepted as "knowledge" and alternative narratives are marginalized. One of the reasons for this is the geopolitical hierarchy in which certain interpretations of events are highlighted, and others are consistently underrepresented in the media coverage of the Gaza-Israel war (Mardiah & Basid, 2025). This results in an unequal narrative structure, in which the legitimacy and truth are socially produced, within a power relation embedded in media systems.

**Media Framing Theory:**

This study is analysed using the theoretical framework of Robert Entman's framing theory. Framing is the process of making some aspects of a perceived reality more salient in a communication text than others, so as to promote a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation (Entman 1993). The definition of violence as "terrorism," "resistance," "occupation" or "self-defence" is contextually defined by the Gaza-Israel framework. This model originates from Goffman's (1974) broader sociological framework of frame analysis and provides a systematic set of categories for comparing media coverage across different media and geopolitical contexts. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) expand this model by showing that frame effects operate through complex processes of frame-building and frame-setting, involving media institutions, journalistic norms, and the audience's interpretative practices. Using Entman's model in conjunction with constructivist theory, this study suggests that media does not simply reflect about Gaza-Israel war but actually helps constructing the war meanings, identities, and legitimacy in global discourse.

**Analysis: Media Framing in the Gaza-Israel War****The Role of Media in Conflict Representation:**

Today, in the international political arena, especially in the field of armed conflict, media institutions are at a pivotal place. In contemporary wars, the space of conflict is not only geographical, but also a space of information and symbolism, a space of stories making, sharing and contestation. Media, TV and Online media are not only a medium of information, but also a stakeholder in the determination of perceptions of conflict to the domestic and international public. The meaning-making function of media is clearly seen when it comes to the conflict between Gaza and Israel, where all editorial decisions are politically charged because of the opposing political agendas and ideological differences.

This idea of the media as active producers of political meaning has been a staple in the domain of critical media theory. The meanings of media texts are not always a representation of reality but rather created with codes and conventions using the producers' ideologies (Hall, 1980). The viewers who read these texts have their own culture and politics and so read these texts in many different ways. In the context of the Gaza-Israel conflict this means that the media is not politically neutral, but it is always enmeshed in webs of power, interest and interpretation.

The representational practices of media institutions are also constrained by their structural conditions. The ownership, financing, government laws and policies, and political economies of the media influence the content of reporting, what is reported and who is included and excluded. There are institutional pressures that are distinct for state-funded (or state aligned) outlets such as Al Jazeera and the Western outlets such as CNN and the BBC, which are commercially driven. These variations lead to different and unique editorial cultures, which in turn has a systematic and predictable impact on the coverage of Gaza-Israel conflict (Ali, Khan, & Riaz, 2023), as reflected in comparative studies of the media on the subject (Günay, 2025).

The role of the media in how conflicts are portrayed goes beyond individual editorial choices and also includes the broader institutional routines through which journalism is practiced. Beat structures, source hierarchies and the reliance on official government and military spokespeople as primary sources all systematically shape what gets reported and how. In the Gaza-Israel conflict, this reliance on official sources means that the way events are framed often reflects the priorities and narratives of state actors rather than the experiences of civilians. As a result, frames that serve certain political interests gain institutional authority while appearing to meet objective journalistic standards (Taufiq, Alam, & Dermawan, 2025).

**Framing Theory in Practice:**

Entman's framing theory is an important analytical instrument to understand the role of media in producing meaning in the event of a conflict. This model sees frames serve four functions, all of them interrelated: agenda setting, problem diagnosis, moral judgement and solutions/ consequences. From the headlines chosen to the images employed, to editorial commentary to sources cited, these roles are all at play with the Gaza-Israel war.

A media outlet that characterizes Israeli military operations as a response to terrorist attacks, or as a defensive move, describes the issue as a security issue, identifies Hamas as the problem, and implicitly or explicitly suggests that Israel should keep going with military strikes, is solving a security problem. In another outlet, however, the same strikes are described as collective punishment against a civilian population under illegal occupation, in which case the issue becomes a humanitarian and legal crisis, the violence is blamed on Israeli state policy, there is a moral condemnation of the violence, and there is an implicit high call for international action. The two framings of the same event present two different realities, and they elicit different political responses (Entman, 1993; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025).

The constructive power of the frames is further enhanced if they are repeated and consistent over the years. When that framing is repeated on various platforms, often with expert commentary, and becomes a journalistic convention, it can creep into common sense and make alternative framings partisan, extreme, or illegitimate. This normalization process is one of the ways in which the media help to socially "construct" reality of conflict, and to influence short- and long-term collective understandings of the Gaza-Israel conflict.

**Security-Centred Narratives in Western Outlets:**

The Western mainstream media, including The New York Times, CNN, BBC and The Guardian have been narrating the Gaza-Israel war. Such outlets always tend to portray the conflict in a security-centric lens focusing mainly on the defensive side of the Israeli narrative and the Palestinian act as being dangerous to Israeli security as observed in some studies (Günay, 2025; Ali, Khan & Riaz, 2023). It is a framing pattern, which is expressive of deeper structural connections within the relationship between Western media institutions, their governments and geopolitical orientations in the Middle East.

A significant trend has been reported in the study of framing immediately following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack. The focus of Western media coverage was primarily on the intensity of the attacks, the number of casualties suffered by Israeli communities and the psychological trauma they dealt Israeli communities. Generally, it was reported as a terrorist attack and little or no historical context was provided. Although this coverage showed some real concern for Palestinian civilians, one might infer from the even coverage of similar Palestinian civilian harms that there was a consistent pattern of differential coverage. The use of passive constructions to report Palestinian civilian deaths instead of using specific names and qualifications about the use of civilian infrastructure by Hamas were common (Taufiq, Alam, & Dermawan, 2025).

This framing of the issue is one of security and has important political implications. The constant equation in the western press of Palestinians as victims of Israeli military action and Hamas as a primary instigator of violence contributes to a moral and political reality that implicitly or explicitly legitimises Israel's military response and undermines Palestinian resistance. This story is kept alive by many means over a long period of time, and it impacts on international policy decisions, on public opinion in western democracies and on the diplomatic context in which the war is channelled internationally.

### **Language, Labelling, and the Construction of Legitimacy:**

A particularly obvious example of the frames used in the Gaza-Israel conflict was the language used to characterize the main actors and events. The normative connotations of the term used to describe a group as a terrorist organisation, a militant group or a resistance movement are deep and impactful in audiences' attribution of legitimacy and moral status. Such labels are not merely descriptive, but political and function as a means of ranking actors in a moral order that empowers some to engage in acts of violence, while others are not empowered to do so. (Onuf, 1989; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025).

The official policy of the Western countries in describing Hamas as a terror group has been broadly accepted by the outlets of these countries which means that Palestinian armed resistance could not be treated as a legitimate political response to the act of occupation. Israeli military actions, on the other hand, are often characterized in terms that imply legality and proportionality, despite the high number of casualties that result from them. The use of precision strikes, and targeted operations and defensive military action, all have normative significance that legitimates the use of force while at the same time making Palestinian deaths accidental but acceptable collateral damage of legitimate military action.

Another important aspect of the western way of constructing victimhood. Victimhood in the representation of victims in the media is not just bestowed upon those who suffer harm but is created by narrative decisions as to who gets to see who suffering, who gets to hear a story told with emotion and in detail, with whom you empathize, whose suffering you can understand. Research on the Gaza-Israel conflict has repeatedly identified a differential treatment of the victims in terms of individualization, humanization, and emotionality, which sustains asymmetric victimizations and moral attributions (Ali, Khan, & Riaz, 2023) (Mardiah & Basid, 2025).

### **Al Jazeera and the Construction of Palestinian Identity:**

The Qatar-based international news network Al Jazeera has become one of the most important counter-narratives to the Western mainstream narrative on the Gaza-Israel war. Al Jazeera has been a potent force in the international press since it was founded in 1996, which has been questioning the monopoly of Western media in defining the agenda of international news, especially with regard to the conflict involving Arab and Muslim communities. Al Jazeera consistently emphasises Palestinian civilian suffering in its reporting on the Gaza-Israel conflict, situates Israeli military operations within the wider history of occupation and displacement, and provides prominent voices to Palestinian officials, civil society groups and voices on the ground (Ali, Khan, & Riaz, 2023).

Al Jazeera's framing practice, from a constructivist theory, helps to create a unique Palestinian identity centred on resilience, feeling like victims under occupation, and the legitimacy of resistance. This identity construction is in direct tension with the dominant Western framing which generally sees Palestinian identity as an identity of terror and security threat. Al Jazeera's reporting paints a different social portrait of the conflict, in which Palestinians are people with historical rights, political grievances, and all the complexity of human beings – not just a sideshow to the conflict.

There are limitations to this counter-narrative function as well. Al Jazeera's editorial slant is that of Qatar, a Gulf nation with specific political orientations in the region. Al Jazeera's reporting is more inclined to be sympathetic with Palestinian views, but its reporting can also contain certain political leanings, according to critics, which render it not neutral. But in the wider media world, Al Jazeera's contribution of an alternative context to the Gaza-Israel conflict has been huge, especially in the Arab world and in Muslim communities around the world.

**Global South Media and Postcolonial Framing:**

Not just Al Jazeera, however; media in the Global South has been growing in its stories of the Gaza-Israel war to diversify international accounts. A postcolonial lens has been seen in South Asian, African and Latin American newspaper coverage of Palestinian issues, which explicitly compare the Palestinian dispossession with other experiences of colonialism, land dispossession, and resistance to foreign occupation. Such a framing places the Gaza-Israel war in a historical context, a very different one than the security-focused or humanitarian-crisis frames used by Western and Arab media, respectively, that situates it in a long global history of colonial violence and anti-colonial struggle.

Digital platforms and social media have been particularly enabling for global south counternarratives, in that they can bypass gatekeeping by mainstream media. For instance, the All Eyes on Rafah campaign, which went viral in 2024 on social media platforms, helped to demonstrate the strength of digital activism in developing robust counter-narratives, introducing a human element to Palestinian victims, and rallying international support beyond borders and cultures (Taufiq, Alam, & Dermawan, 2025). This is an important development in today's global media landscape, as increasing numbers of non-institutional actors are now involved in the reality of a conflict, in addition to institutional media.

These Global South framings have constructivist implications as they can challenge the domination of the Western narrative structures and bring other knowledge structures into the discussion of the global. These counter-narratives are rooted in postcolonial analysis, international law and draw on lessons learnt from recent history and contest the moral and political viability of Israeli military operations, which are either ignored or systematically excluded from security-centric Western frames. The accumulation of these alternative frames in the global media discourse has over time helped to alter the international public opinion on the Gaza-Israel war, especially amongst young and non-Western viewers.

**Constructing Victimhood and Aggression:**

One of the most far-reaching and significant effects of media framing in the Gaza-Israel conflict is the formation of the identities of both the victim and the aggressor. The differences are not obvious, but systematic differences in the language used, presentation of visuals, choice of sources, and focus on aspects of a story that occur in various media systems. The innocent victim/violent aggressor dichotomy is important in defining moral responsibility and political legitimacy for the struggle that audiences across the globe can draw from.

As previously mentioned in the previous chapter, the main victimhood of Israelis has been attributed to the western media while Palestinian rights have been played second fiddle or qualified in a context. This one-sidedness is not simply one of individual journalists' bias, but one of tendencies in news production in certain political economies and geopolitical situations. The use of passive voice in news reports of death, the level of personalisation and description, and the nature of photographs accompanying news stories of death and the relative salience of different casualty statistics all contribute to a hierarchy of victimhood that is complicit with the overall political agendas of dominant media institutions.

The media of the Arab and Global South invert this hierarchy: the Palestinian civilian population are the principal victims of Israeli state violence and Israeli military operations can be considered as aggressive acts that violate international humanitarian law. That these conflicting constructions of 'victim' and 'aggression' are not just conflicting opinions on the same events but rather, as seen in a constructivist framework, different social realities whose mobilisation leads to different political responses, diplomatic stances and to different international political outcomes (Wendt, 1999) (Foucault, 1980).

**Legitimacy, Resistance, and the Politics of Labelling:**

The political dynamics of labelling in the media and the Gaza-Israel conflict relate to the wider issues of political legitimacy in international relations. Legitimacy, as a status, is not given to actors as properties of the thing itself, but it is a product of social construction and can be given, called into question and withdrawn through discourse and interaction (Wendt, 1999) (Gebrael, 2025). A key component of this process of legitimacy construction is the media framing of the situation that provides the normative framework for audience judgements of political actors.

Hamas' political and military actions are a major battleground in the discourse of media in the Gaza-Israel war. In this context, and in a framework that considers Hamas to be a terrorist organization, Western media systematically delegitimize all Palestinian armed resistance, even if there were legal and political justifications for it in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law. This delegitimization is not only done by the explicit labelling, but by the overall narrative in which Hamas's actions are embedded, that highlights the violence, extremism and kidnapping, while minimising political grievances, historical context and the military imbalance.

On the other hand, Al Jazeera and most outlets in the Global South narrate Hamas's actions in terms of legitimate resistance to occupation and collective punishment, using the language of international law and human rights discourse as well as anti-colonial political philosophy. This alternative legitimacy framework is not just another view on the same events but is an alternative normative reality in which the moral judgment of violence is contingent on the historical and political circumstances. All these contesting legitimacy discourses can be found in global media and this is because of the extremely contentious nature of the Gaza-Israel war as a political and moral issue, where media framing is not a comment on the conflict, but a proactive part of the conflict itself.

**Findings:**

The analysis results in a series of findings that are grouped according to the three research questions that are followed by this study. The first deals with the social construction of identities of Israel and Palestine through international media networks and the framing mechanisms that have been applied. The second is the question of how international norms of legitimacy are established through dominant media constructions of acts of self-defence, terrorism and resistance. Entman's four framing functions are interpreted within a constructivist framework of theory and addressed through all three questions.

The study's findings on RQ1 are that media networks build sharply contrasting identities for the actors of the conflict through the problem definition. The Gaza-Israel conflict is usually portrayed in Western mainstream media outlets as a security problem for Israel, with Israeli self-defence at the centre, effectively casting Israel as a legitimate state actor to defend itself against Palestinian armed groups as the trigger that began this conflict. By contrast, Arab regional and Global South outlets view the problem as a humanitarian and political crisis, framing Palestinians as victims of state violence and Israelis as perpetrators of systematic dispossession and occupation. They are not just alternative emphases; they are alternate social constructions of what the parties to this conflict are essentially.

These identity constructions are reinforced by the causal interpretations created by the different media systems. Western outlets blame Hamas and Palestinian armed groups and see Palestinian agency almost entirely in violent terms. Arab media attributes that to Israeli state policy, as the occupation, the blockade, the cumulative history of dispossession creates Palestinian agency as a reaction to structure violence. Such causal attributions have a direct

impact on the audience's perceptions of historical responsibility, and thus their views of a fair settlement of the conflict.

The moral evaluations which are part of media coverage is where the construction of legitimacy norms becomes most visible (RQ2). Western media framing always humanizes Israeli civilian suffering more, giving it more emotional depth, than Palestinian civilian suffering, thus creating a hierarchy of grievable lives and, by extension, an implicit norm that Israeli civilian suffering is a grievance whereas Palestinian civilian suffering is a context. This hierarchy is turned on its head in Arabic and Global South media. The asymmetry is not incidental but is how media framing affects the audience's understanding of legitimate use of force and who is a legitimate victim.

These frames are complemented by the treatment recommendations that they imply, also providing a complete picture for RQ2. Western coverage also implicitly validates Israeli military operations as legitimate and necessary responses to security threats and thus constructs a norm in its narrative structure that defines military action as self-defence and Palestinian armed resistance as "terrorism". Arab & Global South outlets say otherwise: Ceasefire, international accountability, and that Palestinian resistance is legally and politically justifiable in response to occupation and violence. Altogether, these findings support the claim that media framings of the Gaza-Israel war are not a neutral reportorial practice but a norm-producing one that systematically moulding which acts are legitimate, which actors have a standing and what types of international responses are thinkable.

Research into RQ3 reveals that while platforms of digital media and Global South outlets are capable of making significant incursions into the framing hierarchies of the West, they are not necessarily able to completely replace them. The virality of the All Eyes on Rafah campaign in 2024 illustrated how non-institutional actors can create counter-narratives, which are able to mobilize transnational solidarity, more rapidly and on a larger scale than traditional media, cutting past editorial filters and humanizing Palestinian victims for the global public. Meanwhile, South Asian, African and Latin American media have reimagined the conflict in postcolonial terms that place Palestinian dispossession in the context of a longer history of colonial violence than is seen by security-focused Western media. What matters to a constructivist is not that these developments do not directly challenge dominant frames, but that they threaten their universal claims and that the social construction of the Gaza-Israel war is at least an unfinished process and a process which is actually contested, and not a foregone conclusion of Western media power.

**Recommendations:**

The findings have several recommendations for scholars, media practitioners, policy makers and educators.

Firstly, future research needs to broaden the scope of comparative studies on media framing by also involving other national/regional media outlets, especially those from underrepresented Global South contexts. While the current study has concentrated on the main international outlets, the many new digital media outlets have led to a growing diversification of the global media landscape which calls for broader comparative study. Media from South Africa, Turkey, Malaysia and Brazil could give a more diverse picture of the world's variety of frames on the Gaza-Israel conflict.

Second, media outlets and journalists reporting on the Gaza-Israel conflict and other similar conflicts need to critically reflect on the choices of framing that are implicit in their reporting activities and routines. The understanding of the constructive potential of language, labelling, visual selection and source attribution to shape public views of conflict is a necessary

first step towards responsible and ethically informed journalism. Media framing theory and the constructivist view should be incorporated in professional journalism training programs to enable future journalists to critically think about implications of their representation of choices in the political arena.

Thirdly, international policy makers and diplomats need to be more sensitive towards the role of media framing in creating conditions for conflict resolution. The polarization of international publics is so great over the Gaza-Israel war that it is difficult to reach a consensus on the issue diplomatically. Thus, strategies for bridging the gap between narratives and establishing discursive spaces to hear, assess, and negotiate competing claims to legitimacy should be also included in efforts to build international agreement on conflict resolution. It is important that international institutions, like the United Nations, and regional institutions engage in media monitoring and cross-cultural dialogue projects that can contribute to the identification of common normative foundations of different media systems.

Fourth, all educational institutions should be focused on developing citizens' critical media literacy at all levels. The ability to critically assess media framing, identify editorial tendencies and pursue different information sources is a crucial democratic skill in a time when media polarization is intensifying and social realities are conflicting. Media education curricula need to incorporate the theory of framing and a social constructivist analysis, in order to enable students to understand not only what is being said about conflicts such as Gaza-Israel, but also how and why this is being said and what political and social implications result from such representational choices.

Fifth, international relations and media studies disciplines need to further evolve towards more integrated theories that link the analysis of media framing with concerns of constructivist theory on identity, norms and the social construction of international political reality. The Gaza-Israel war has been a particularly telling instance of such a theoretical endeavour, though the conclusions drawn from such a study have implications for many other current conflicts in which media framing is similarly constitutive. It is one of the most significant intellectual agendas for the research community in this era to develop a more robust and interdisciplinary scholarship that will integrate the study of media and constructivist IR theory.

#### **Conclusion:**

In addition to a material struggle over and for control of land, security and political rights, this study has suggested that the Gaza-Israel war can also be understood as a discursive production, of a media competition of different media frames. The analysis has been based on the Constructivist International Relations theory, Entman's framing model, and featured three research questions: what are the roles played by framing mechanisms in the social construction of the identities of Israel and Palestine in international media networks? How are international norms of legitimacy defined by dominant media discourses about acts of self-defence, 'terrorism' or 'resistance'? What are the digital media platforms and what are the Global South counter-narratives that have been adopted to contest the framing of the Gaza-Israel war by the Western media? In all three questions, the media institutions play an active role in shaping the social reality of the war, in creating a victim and aggressor identity, in contesting and granting legitimacy, in defining a normative framework for the global audience to evaluate the war. Such media framing is not "extra-political" but an aspect of the politics of the Gaza-Israel war, which sets up opportunities for some kinds of political response and forecloses others.

However, a comparison of the media coverage of western countries, Arab countries and Global South countries points to the systematic presence of differential framing, related to underlying geopolitical hierarchies and editorial tendencies. Western mainstream outlets see the

war through a security lens and focus on Israeli defensive rhetoric, whereas Arab regional and Global South media create alternative narratives that focus on the Palestinian struggle, occupation, and the plight of the Palestinian people. Not only do these competing frames just present different interpretations of the same events, but they also create different social realities, different moral hierarchies, and different notions of legitimacy that have important implications for international political discourses.

In theory this study is an integration of the constructivist approach and framing theory which is complementary in the analysis of media and conflict. This study aims not only to document the media bias but also to incorporate the idea of framing into constructivism's ontological commitments to analyse the media's role in the ongoing social construction of international political reality in more detail. This holistic perspective can be extended and applied beyond the Gaza-Israel context and can be a valuable model for future research in media, conflict and identity in world politics. Its limitations in terms of language and periodicity of media texts determine the boundaries of the validity of these findings and make it clear to researchers what empirical, primary sources of media texts they should aim for in future studies.

This study's findings have a number of implications for future research and policy. As digital media becomes more and more the only source of information for the world and the number of competing frames about the Gaza-Israel conflict proliferates, there is likely to be even more tension between competing frames, and algorithmic curation and the commercialization of emotionalized material will further exacerbate polarization and make common normative frameworks less viable. From a constructivist point of view, the issue of this fragmentation is not purely technical; it is also political: If the result of this is actually incompatible social realities, then the conditions of diplomatic consensus and conflict resolution are also affected by which media frame is dominant. Thus are three aspects that are not sufficiently investigated and should be explored in the future. The comparative range would be expanded next, to include more media systems in the Global South; South Africa, Turkey or Southeast Asia, for instance, and provide a more comprehensive picture of the cross-regional dynamics of which this paper is but a first approximation. Second, longitudinal analysis would reveal changes in framing patterns that would not be revealed by cross-sectional analysis, as these changes would occur over the course of different periods of the conflict. Third, further theoretical research into the role of the normative institutions, such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice in stabilising or challenging competing claims to media legitimacy is justified, as these represent some of the few stages where the constructive force of media discourse is brought into relation with the formal international laws.

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