



Political economy of media discourse: A comparative corpus-driven analysis of the Israel-Hamas war coverage

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ABSTRACT

Amid a fast-changing media environment, the Israel-Hamas war underscores the intricate connection between language, discourse, and ideological stance. Through political economy of communication, this study interrogates the mediated architecture of geopolitical storytelling by conducting a comparative corpus-driven analysis of Israel-Hamas war coverage in Al Jazeera and CNN between October 7, 2023 and January 19, 2025. The findings reveal that Al Jazeera has approximately equal focus on Gaza and Israel, placing the war in a longer historical and geopolitical context. The outlet's reporting focuses on civilian casualties, identity politics, and territorial dispute, emphasizing casualty counts. In addition, the occurrence of commercially oriented content indicates responsiveness to commercial pressures influencing journalistic priorities. CNN, however, places Hamas' actions at the forefront of its narrative, aligning with a security and terrorism-oriented framework prevalent in Western media. By adopting military rhetoric and the spotlight on U.S. diplomatic reactions, CNN contextualizes the conflict within international political discourse. Hence, fostering media literacy remains essential in navigating the complexities of war reporting in an era of information saturation.

KEYWORDS

media discourse, political economy, corpus linguistics, geopolitical narratives, Israel-Hamas war

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines the political economy of media discourse regarding the Israel-Hamas war. Media is important, especially in an era of overloaded information, in shaping public understanding and influencing narratives. Analyzing media outlets' report on conflict offers valuable insights into how political and economic essences affect news coverage. Nevertheless, media can influence public perceptions and understandings by spreading information in a specific way, creating stories, particularly in the periods of war and conflict. Ergo, media is not impartial or unbiased but is influenced by intricate power dynamics involving political, economic, and cultural factors (Herman & Chomsky, 2008). Therefore, it is important to analyze how these media portray various essences of reality wielding language as their weapons to garner domestic and international support towards their agendas, interests, and ideologies, during this Israel-Hamas war.

The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict trace back to the early 20th century, marked by competing national aspirations and territorial disputes between Jews and Arabs in the

region then known as Palestine. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, following the United Nations partition plan, led to the first Arab-Israeli war and the displacement of a significant number of Palestinians, an event Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, or catastrophe. Subsequent wars in 1956, 1967, and 1973 further entrenched hostilities and resulted in Israeli occupation of territories such as the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem (Shipler, 2014).

However, on October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a coordinated assault on Israel, marking one of the most severe escalations in recent history. The attack involved land, sea, and air operations, including rocket barrages and incursions into Israeli territory. This surprise offensive resulted in over 1,200 Israeli deaths, primarily civilians, making it the deadliest day for Israel since its establishment in 1948. Additionally, more than 240 individuals were taken hostage and transported to Gaza, adding a complex humanitarian dimension to the conflict.

Hamas stated that the attack was a response to ongoing Israeli occupation, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, settler violence, restrictions on Palestinian movement, and the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians. The group aimed to compel Israel to release Palestinian prisoners by taking Israeli hostages. This assault prompted Israel to declare a state of war against Hamas, initiating extensive aerial bombardments on Gaza, followed by a large-scale ground invasion which ended with a ceasefire deal implemented on 19 January 2025.

Thus, the data for this study are op-ed articles and news reports directly align with Israel-Hamas war published online from October 07, 2023 to January 19, 2025, capturing the full duration of the war, from the initial Hamas attack and Israel's military response to the eventual ceasefire implementation, on *Al Jazeera*, and *CNN*, two most prominent international news outlets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The media's role in shaping public opinion and political narratives has been widely explored in relation to conflicts, with scholars emphasizing the intersection of ownership, ideology, and economic interests in news reporting (Herman & Chomsky, 2008). In this context, one of the foundational theoretical frameworks for understanding media discourse in conflict settings is the propaganda model proposed by Herman and Chomsky (2008), which argues that corporate and state interests shape media coverage through five filters: ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology. Indeed, this model has been applied to numerous case studies, thereby demonstrating systematic biases in war reporting (Klaehn, 2009; Pedro, 2011).

Ownership concentration is a key determinant of news framing. Bagdikian (2004) argued that a few conglomerates dominate global news production, leading to homogenized and biased reporting. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in coverage of conflicts where media organizations align with national foreign policies (Cottle, 2006). Hence, comparative studies reveal that Western media outlets tend to portray Israel's actions more favorably while framing oppositions, in this context Hamas, in predominantly negative terms (Philo & Berry, 2011). The relationship between media and government influence is particularly evident in crisis situations, where official narratives often dominate news coverage (Mermin, 1999; Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Therefore, media conglomerates with ties to Western governments and corporate interests often reproduce dominant ideological narratives that align with foreign policy objectives (Miller, 2014).

Extending this focus on ideological framing, Entman (1993) contends that media foreground certain information about an event and background others and frame public opinion. War reporting research also refers to the prevalence of strategic narratives justifying military interventions (Carruthers, 2011). Reese and Lewis (2009) specifically found Western media reporting about the 2008-09 Gaza War highlighted Israeli security concerns and downplayed Palestinian suffering. In this context, corpus linguistics offers an engaging means of studying large samples of media texts (Baker, 2006), enabling researchers to uncover collocations, keyword frequencies, and discourse patterns for representing latent ideologies (Partington et al., 2013). Similarly, comparative corpus studies have also reported variation in coverage of war. KhosraviNik (2015), for instance, used content analysis technique to examine the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in European media and found systematic framing and lexical biases.

Zhu and Liu (2024) analyzed the Israel-Hamas issue coverage between The New York Times (NYT) and China Daily (CD), and reveal that NYT covers the conflict from a democratic value system discourse with focus on the security needs of Israel, while CD happens to employ in a neutral or even sympathetic tone to Hamas, in alignment with China's non-interference and peace policy. Likewise, comparative media analysis between UK and Lithuania shows that UK media emphasizes on Israel's security, whereas humanitarian concerns were prevalent in Gaza in Lithuanian media (Sutkutė, 2024). In this respect, corpus-based critical discourse analysis has been particularly useful to expose the ideological basis of media coverage. Consequently, through media frames, Liu (2024) examined the framing of the conflict by Al-Jazeera, China Daily, and CNN, and showed that linguistic framing is indicative of latent political positions. The study found Al-Jazeera framed Hamas's actions as resistance while CNN framed them as terrorism and legitimized Western security discourses. This is consistent with earlier research that discovered systematic ideological biases in news coverage, where Western media report negatively about Hamas and Israel as a victim of aggression (Heni & Chandra, 2022).

Media discourse does not merely report incidents but constructs reality. Contemporary research lays how language influences perceptions, be it in political speeches, healthcare interpreting, or war news reporting. Thus, Phanthaphoommee and Thumvichit (2024) excavate the concealed emotional labor underlying translation, demonstrating how migrant healthcare interpreters gain job satisfaction from social ties, self-esteem, and belonging. Their application of Q methodology, a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, illustrates how subjectivity shapes professional narratives. Likewise, media discourse is never neutral; it bears the biases, pressures, and institutional agendas of its producers. Just as interpreters negotiate power relations in hospitals, journalists and editors work within political-economic frameworks shaping war news coverage. Meanwhile, Phanthaphoommee and Munday (2024) analyze pronoun switches in political translations, demonstrating how subtle linguistic decisions such as substituting "Thailand" with "we" heighten agency and legitimacy. Their systemic functional linguistics (SFL) demonstrates that grammar is never naïve; it is a means of persuasion. This is similar to media discourse, where passive voice, in this context of the study, "bombs were dropped" hides responsibility, or loaded terms ("terrorist" vs. "freedom fighter") influence public opinion.

Turning to framing techniques, it can be seen that news reporting significantly influences public opinion. A comparative study of CNN and Al-Jazeera coverage of Hamas's attacks on Israel concluded that CNN focused on Israel's victimhood whereas Al-Jazeera portrayed Hamas as a resistance movement (Rinaldy, 2023). The same results were observed in a comparative analysis of BBC and Al-Jazeera, in which BBC presented Hamas'

activities as unprovoked terrorism, whereas Al-Jazeera presented them as responses to Israeli aggression (Zawawi et al., 2024). The results illustrate the media's contribution in constructing narratives through selective emphasis, omission, and linguistic framing.

Broadening the analytical canvas, media reporting on the Israel-Hamas war also overlaps with wider political and economic agendas. A critical discourse analysis of an international outlet confirmed that mainstream media tend to be supportive of state policy, echoing hegemonic geopolitical discourses (Almustafa, 2024). This resonates with conclusions in previous studies that media sources tend to report state-aligned views and push alternative sources to the margins, specifically those advancing Palestinian discourses (Arvas, 2015). It can be argued that factional Palestinian politics also influences media representation of Hamas. For instance, Saeedi et al. (2024) examined the influence of polarized rhetoric between Hamas and Fatah and determined that intra-Palestinian political discourse has had the impact of political fragmentation within the national movement, undermining it. Foreign media often exploit these internal political divisions to frame Palestinian governance as unstable and fragmented, thereby deepening established geopolitical narratives.

In winding up, with regards to ideological biases, Amer (2017) conducts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of war coverage in *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, which illuminates how ideological frameworks and assumptions determine the nature of coverage. These media centralize Israeli political agency and peripheralize Palestinian voices, thereby reifying a narrative identifying Israel with the quest for peace and Hamas as an obstacle. This difference is in line with the political upbringings of the respective outlets and shows how language operates in larger geostrategic and ideological framework. In line with this, Banikalef and Al-Khawaldeh (2025) focus on accusation strategies over the course of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation using Aristotle's modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. They found that Hamas relies more on emotional and ethical appeals supported by material evidence, whereas Israeli officials use a more balanced triad of logic, emotion, and credibility to persuade global opinion. Such systematic use of accusation speech acts illustrates how language is strategically deployed in conflict discourse to legitimize one's action and delegitimize the opposition.

After analyzing and reviewing the above literatures, it has been seen that no study has been conducted on the political economy of media discourse regarding the Israel-Hamas war, let alone the comparative corpus-driven analysis of the discourse generated by Al Jazeera, and CNN from October 7, 2023 to January 19, 2025. Thus, this study intends to fulfill this gap. Therefore, the study's point of departure is to identify and analyze the political and economic essences influencing media discourse. Crucially, this study endeavors to enhance our understanding of how language serves as a cornerstone in shaping identities and ideologies amidst the backdrop of conflict, thereby illuminating its potent role within the complex tapestry of sociopolitical dynamics.

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical framework

This study utilizes political economy of communication (PEC) (Hardy, 2014; Mosco, 2009; Wasko, 2005) which studies power dynamics "in the production, distribution, and consumption of media and communication resources within a wider social context" (Wasko, 2005,

p. 44), and is defined by four key essences: history and social change, social totality, moral philosophy, and praxis. However, PEC suggests that media should not be the sole focus of study. Instead, it should be viewed as an integral component of broader societal processes, including social, political, and economic activities. Media not only operates within these processes but also impacts them. Therefore, shifting the focus away from media helps prevent a narrow understanding of its role (Mosco, 2009). Croteau and Hoynes (2005) claimed public sphere model promotes a media system that cherishes cultural diversity and multitude of perspectives in its audience and content, aiming to enhance informed public discourse. Moreover, Ownership (Bagdikian, 2004; McChesney, 2008; Bettig & Hall, 2012; Croteau & Hoynes, 2005), and advertising may shape media concentration and commercialization by undermining media democracy (McChesney, 2004; Smythe, 1977), and government policies favor businesses over people, sustaining anti-democratic media system (McChesney, 2008).

Initially, the history and social change aspect of PEC emphasizes the importance of historical context in understanding media and communication systems. It argues that media structures and practices evolve alongside broader socio-economic transformations, shaped by technological advancements, policy changes, and economic shifts (Mosco, 2009). This perspective underscores that contemporary media institutions cannot be studied in isolation but must be analyzed within their historical trajectories and the social forces that have influenced their development. Furthermore, the social totality principle highlights the interconnectedness of media with various societal structures, including politics, economics, and culture (Hardy, 2014). Rather than treating communication as an independent entity, PEC situates it within the broader capitalist framework, illustrating how media ownership, regulation, and content production are influenced by economic imperatives and political interests.

The moral philosophy aspect of PEC is based on the ethical dimension of media and communication practices with a call towards normative responding to issues such as media concentration of ownership, corporate control, and public interest (Wasko, 2005). The argument asserts that media should serve to respond to democratic and equitable communication at the cost of profit-driven directions. In addition, praxis entails the application of PEC principles to real issues, challenging scholars and activists to engage in critical intervention and policy practice (Mosco, 2009). It highlights the responsibility of researchers to not only analyze media systems but also work towards building a more democratic and equitable communication space.

Cardinally, corpora can “uncover patterns of usage and to test out intuitions about how language is used by specific groups of users” (Jones, 2022, p. 126). By studying top current words and top current phrases in media corpora of conflict discourses, one can learn about the parties and reasons behind the conflicts (Kutter & Kantner, 2012). One of the most fundamental corpus analysis techniques is word frequency analysis in which the words most commonly used in a corpus are determined. The technique serves a crucial role in determining linguistic patterns, discursive tendencies, and topical prominence in a corpus (Baker, 2006). For conflict discourse, high-frequency words can indicate dominant narratives, dominant themes, and leading actors in a conflict (Kutter & Kantner, 2012). Thus, word frequency analysis is a quantitative foundation for additional linguistic research that allows one to examine language use in some contexts.

Multiword expression lists are used to capture fixed or semi-fixed expressions, that is, combinations of words that co-occur a lot together in a corpus. So-called fixed expressions, whether idioms, collocations, and/ or lexical bundles are, of course, very important in

meaning making and discourse building (Biber et al., 2004). Some ideologies, ties with mass media, and firm outlines of rhetoric are usually entrenched in discourse of conflict within the framework of multiword expressions (Stubbs, 2007). This study extracts and analyzes such expressions to unlock understanding of how media manipulates language of conflict and trust, framing narratives and shaping audience perception about a conflict. Concordance analysis, more precisely, analyses all words surrounding the target words or phrases in the different contexts and types of language environments. This enables researchers to analyze features including semantic prosody, collocational patterns, and ideological packaging of words (Sinclair, 1991). Tools like concordance analysis are useful in parsing conflict discourse, as they uncover the assumptions underpinning implicit biases in media discourse; some words collocate regularly with some actors or events (Baker, 2006). By analyzing the context of key-words, this research explores the language employed to counter narratives to conflicts and prevailing discourses.

Overall, the study utilizes word frequency, multiword expression inventories, and concordance analysis together with social totality, moral philosophy, and praxis to examine the media's political economy of discourse amidst the Israel-Hamas war. Through the unveiling of linguistic patterns and ideological framings, this study demonstrates the manner in which the media develops stories and frames the public imagination. The combination of political economy theory and corpus tools guarantees a critical examination of discourse, ethics, and power with a focus on language's function in supporting or contesting prevailing ideologies.

Sampling and procedure

Al Jazeera and CNN are ideal choices for this study due to their contrasting ideological and geopolitical orientations. CNN, anchored in Western media norms, often mirrors U.S. foreign policy interests, while Al Jazeera foregrounds postcolonial critique and marginalized voices, particularly in the Global South. Their divergent framing of conflict, representation of actors, and lexical choices reflect underlying political economies shaped by ownership, audience, and editorial gatekeeping. This contrast provides a rich discursive terrain for analyzing how media institutions construct and mediate war narratives across ideological divides. Therefore, two corpora were compiled from two distinct news outlets, yielding a total of 3,908 articles comprising 4,771,465 tokens, specifically, 2,815 articles (2,282,720 tokens) from Al Jazeera and 1,093 articles (2,488,745 tokens) from CNN, published between 07 October 2023 and 19 January 2025. The corpus construction and sampling procedures were carefully designed to ensure topic relevance: articles that did not pertain exclusively to the Israel-Hamas war were systematically excluded by analyzing the headlines. Archival data were retrieved using the Wayback Machine tool, targeting the following URLs at specific temporal snapshots: <https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/israel-palestine-conflict/> and <https://edition.cnn.com/world/middleeast/israel>. Retrieved articles were stored in separate UTF-8 encoded plain text files and subsequently cleaned using the jusText demo tool to remove boilerplate content. The final corpora were subjected to quantitative analysis using AntConc's suite of tools to extract frequency, concordance, and collocational data.

For word frequency analysis, the "word" tool identifies the top 10 most frequent words, excluding function words. Likewise, for multiword expressions, the "n-gram" tool examines five-word sequences. Lastly, the "KWIC" tool explores the contextual usage of the lemma "war" in the study. Across all three tools, repetitions are filtered out, ensuring the results align with the war discourse. A cross-corpus comparison (linguistic strategies, frequency of

key terms, and discourse structures) was also conducted between Al Jazeera and CNN corpora to identify significant differences and commonalities. Exploring recurring themes and narratives within each corpus, the study examined how these themes differ among the two corpora.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency analysis

The findings obtained by conducting frequency analysis of both Al Jazeera and CNN's Israel-Hamas war corpora present an eye-opening glimpse into the agenda-setting role of the media in public discourse. The analysis also shows how media reports are constructed, in whose interests they are constructed, and the ideological implications thereof. The results reveal the editorial salience and agenda-setting dynamics embedded in each network's discourse, yet its interpretive boundaries must be critically upheld: while lexical prominence indicates topical emphasis and ideological leanings, these patterns do not confirm intent, bias, or pragmatic stance without corroborative contextual and qualitative analysis which is a limitation of this quantitative analysis.

Table 1. The Comparison of Top 10 Most Frequent Words between Al-Jazeera and CNN Corpora

<i>Al-Jazeera</i>			<i>CNN</i>		
<i>Word</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>NormFreq</i>	<i>Word</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>NormFreq</i>
Israel	23372	10238.663	Gaza	27023	10858.083
Gaza	22824	9998.598	Israel	26177	10518.153
Palestinian	9597	4204.195	Hamas	14511	5830.650
People	8938	3915.504	People	9721	3182.729
War	8811	3859.869	Military	7720	3101.965
Hamas	7250	3176.036	Rafah	7031	2825.119
Advertisement	7170	3140.990	Palestinian	7016	2819.092
Killed	6409	2807.615	War	6959	2796.188
Military	5147	2254.766	Aid	6817	2739.132
October	3891	1704.545	Netanyahu	6686	2686.495

The frequency data indicate that Al Jazeera's coverage puts "Israel" and "Gaza" on roughly equal footing, at 23,372 and 22,824 respectively, while CNN gives a bit more prominence to "Gaza" (27,023) over "Israel" (26,177). This balance in Al Jazeera's coverage is consistent with its position as a network attempting to appeal to a broad base, both to Arab audiences as well as to a global audience skeptical of Western media biases. CNN's growing focus on Gaza, meanwhile, could be evidence of yet another strategic editorial agenda, perhaps driven by a desire to emphasize humanitarian aspects of the war and appeal to its international audience. In this context, sympathy for civilian sufferings typically outweighs political narratives but do not contest dominant geopolitical interests.

The presence of "Hamas" further elucidates these ideological and editorial priorities. CNN's frequency of "Hamas" (14,511) is significantly higher than Al Jazeera's (7,250),

suggesting that CNN's discourse may be more oriented toward framing the conflict through the lens of Hamas' role, potentially portraying it as the primary agent in the violence and building moral frames of responsibility and aggression. This could align with the broader patterns observed in Western media's conflict framing, where terrorism-related narratives often dominate coverage of Middle Eastern conflicts (Herman & Chomsky, 2008). Al Jazeera's comparatively lower frequency of "Hamas" may suggest a different editorial choice, possibly aiming for a more neutral or locally resonant portrayal that does not reduce the conflict to a simplistic binary of state versus non-state actor.

In terms of social totality, the way conflicts are framed is not merely a matter of journalistic choice but a reflection of power relations, media ownership, and audience demographics. CNN, as part of the larger corporate media landscape, operates within a framework where geopolitical interests, advertising revenue, and potentially state influence shape its narratives. The prominence of terms like "Military" (7,720), "Netanyahu" (6,686), "Rafah" (7031) and "Aid" (6,817) suggests a focus on governance, military actions, and humanitarian discourse aligning with Western policy interests that often emphasize state actors and diplomatic efforts rather than grassroots or resistance movements. Al Jazeera, by contrast, shows a different discursive strategy, where terms like "Killed" (6,409), "people" (8938), and "Palestinian" (9,597) appear more prominently, indicating a possible emphasis on civilian impact and identity politics. This aligns with the network's broader approach to representing conflicts in the Global South. Accordingly, the presence of "Advertisement" (7170 occurrences in Al Jazeera) suggests an awareness of commercial pressures that shape content, aligning with research on media commercialization and its impact on journalistic autonomy (McChesney, 2004). The existence of economic necessities implies that even international news channels are under monetary strain when handling politically sensitive topics.

Praxis is also observed in the ways that these media reports are being translated into political action, public debate, and policy-making influence. The difference between Al Jazeera's and CNN's coverage reflects broader patterns of media influence on public opinion, policy-making, and diplomacy. The salience of "Aid" in CNN's discussion indicates an effort to involve audiences with humanitarian issues, perhaps influencing global pressure for intervention or humanitarian intervention. Al Jazeera's invocation of "Palestinian" and "Killed" can be one dimension of a wider discursive strategy in universalizing Palestinian experiences, thereby influencing advocacy and activism in other geopolitical arenas. Media discourse, as noted by Curran (2002), is not independent; it engages with political institutions, civic society, and economic power to determine empirical consequences.

It is evident that media coverage of conflicts is not neutral but is strongly embedded in media institutions' political and economic interests. Herman and Chomsky (2008) contended that media, particularly in liberal democracies, function in a system of elite consensus, whereby certain reports are privileged over others due to political and economic pressures. These forces are reflected in the contrasts between Al Jazeera and CNN, each working within its own institutional and ideological limitations, and thus with different priorities regarding different aspects of the conflict. Likewise, Said (1997) explains how Middle Eastern coverage by the media is framed within Orientalist constructs, where Muslim actors are represented within certain, usually negative, tropes. CNN's greater frequency of "Hamas" can be accounted for here, where the emphasis put on Islamist groups supports dominant Western narratives regarding extremism and security threats.

However, similarities between the two networks also emerge, particularly in their focus on the major actors: Israel and Gaza suggesting that despite ideological differences, both networks recognize the centrality of these entities in shaping audience perceptions of the conflict. The word “War” is used extremely commonly in both corpora, appearing 8,811 times in Al Jazeera and 6,959 in CNN, which suggests that both networks are characterizing what is happening as a war and not just a conflict or escalation. This has international perception ramifications, as characterizing events as “war” legitimizes particular actions within international law and shapes diplomatic reactions.

Lastly, both networks reflect general trends in international media coverage of crisis news, where specific events like military confrontations or high casualty events are overemphasized, and more general structural problems like occupation, blockade, and historical grievances can be underreported. This is consistent with the “CNN effect” (Robinson, 2002), whereby media coverage of humanitarian crises is argued to influence government responses, particularly in liberal democracies where policy is sensitive to public opinion. The focus of Al Jazeera and CNN on war, casualties, and military action suggests that the two networks are engaging in public discussion in a way that would influence diplomatic efforts, international aid distribution, and military interventions.

Multiword expression list

Table 2. The Comparison of Top Ten Five-Grams between Al-Jazeera and CNN corpora

Type	Freq	Range
<i>Al-Jazeera</i>		
in the occupied West Bank	769	456
Israel s war on Gaza	668	554
Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu	567	551
the international court of justice	386	344
since the start of the	250	220
secretary of state Antony Blinken	234	227
the start of the war	233	205
and do not necessarily reflect	210	210
expressed in this article are	210	210
Al Jazeera s editorial stance	209	209
<i>CNN</i>		
Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu	1500	492
secretary of state Antony Blinken	802	284
the Israel defense forces IDF	727	359
in the occupied West Bank	353	147
the international court of justice	332	103
CNN has reached out to	331	207
in Tel Aviv Israel on	300	119
relief and works agency for	283	126
ministry of health in Gaza	260	173
in Khan Younis Gaza on	248	62

The prominence of the phrase “in the occupied West Bank” in Al Jazeera’s coverage, appearing 769 times across 456 different contexts, suggests a strong emphasis on the broader territorial and political dimensions of the conflict beyond Gaza. This aligns with the network’s established editorial stance, which often highlights the Palestinian experience in a way that contextualizes the immediate war within the larger framework of Israeli occupation and apartheid discourses. By contrast, CNN’s coverage mentions “in the occupied West Bank” only 353 times with a more limited range, indicating that the network gives comparatively less attention to this aspect of the conflict. This discrepancy reflects broader tendencies in Western media, where discussions about Israeli military operations often focus on immediate events rather than the structural conditions of occupation. Scholars such as Philo and Berry (2011) have previously noted that Western media’s framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often privileges momentary outbreaks of violence over the underlying historical grievances that drive them, thereby maintaining a narrative that centers state security over settler-colonial dynamics.

Accordingly, Al Jazeera’s frequent mention of “Israel’s war on Gaza” (668 occurrences) reflects a framing that attributes agency to Israel as the aggressor, aligning with an editorial stance that amplifies the war’s humanitarian implications. Meanwhile, CNN emphasizes “the Israel Defense Forces IDF” (727 occurrences), suggesting a military-centered perspective that aligns with Western media traditions of state-centric war reporting (Herman & Chomsky, 2008). Furthermore, the frequency of references to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu provides further insight into the distinct editorial priorities of both networks. CNN mentions “Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu” 1,500 times with a range of 492, whereas Al Jazeera refers to him 567 times across 551 different contexts. This indicates that while CNN’s coverage places a stronger emphasis on Netanyahu as a central figure in the war, Al Jazeera presents a more varied discourse around him, embedding references to Netanyahu within a broader spectrum of political and legal discussions. This difference can be interpreted through the lens of social totality, as political economy scholars argue that media coverage is shaped by the larger ideological and economic systems in which news organizations operate. CNN, as a U.S.-based corporate media entity, operates within an ecosystem where political figures like Netanyahu are central to diplomatic and military narratives. In contrast, Al Jazeera, with its Qatar-based sponsorship and broader Middle Eastern audience, situates Israeli leadership within a more dispersed set of power relations, including international legal challenges and regional geopolitical tensions.

The second significant difference in the two networks is the term “the international court of justice”, which is used 386 times in Al Jazeera’s coverage in 344 contexts but just 332 times in CNN with a smaller range of 103. This indicates that Al Jazeera places tremendous value on legal aspects of the war, possibly within a discourse that attempts to place Israeli military actions within the framework of international law and human rights violations. The more limited use by CNN can be seen in the general hesitation of mainstream Western media to view Israeli military action through the lens of legal accountability, as opposed to adhering to state-centered parameters of military action, diplomacy, and security. This concurs with earlier research by Wolfsfeld (1997), who contended that media reporting on conflicts is regularly influenced by the political culture of the state where the publication is based, with Western media giving emphasis to Israeli security issues and minimizing legal objections to its actions.

The frequent mention of U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in both networks' reporting also indicates their geopolitical leanings. CNN mentions Blinken 802 times with a variance of 284, while Al Jazeera mentions him 234 times in 227 contexts. This indicates that CNN's reporting places great emphasis on U.S. diplomatic engagement, reaffirming the narrative that the United States is at the forefront of managing and brokering the conflict. Al Jazeera, also noting U.S. involvement, assigns comparatively less significance to American mediation, perhaps echoing its editorial stance within a more general internationalist or Global South framework that does not inevitably favor American mediation. This variation in focus aligns with the moral theory of media reporting, in which CNN's emphasis on U.S. officials is a frame that is defining the war within the context of U.S. foreign policy interests. And Al Jazeera's more varied reporting may be consistent with a framework that places greater stress on Palestinian agency and international law norms.

The phrase "since the start of the" (250 occurrences) and "the start of the war" appears frequently in Al Jazeera's coverage (233 times across 205 contexts), suggesting an emphasis on the temporal dimensions of the conflict and its origins. This aligns with the network's broader approach to conflict reporting, which often situates contemporary events within historical and geopolitical contexts. CNN, by contrast, does not feature this phrase as prominently, reflecting a tendency in Western media to focus on immediate events rather than deep historical causes. This divergence is significant within the context of praxis, as media discourse not only shapes public perceptions but also informs political actions, advocacy, and policy decisions. By framing the war with a clear temporal reference, Al Jazeera's coverage implicitly invites audiences to consider causality and responsibility. However, CNN's more event-driven reporting may reinforce a sense of inevitability, where the war is depicted as an isolated event rather than a consequence of longstanding political and military dynamics.

Al Jazeera's corpus also contains key meta-discursive phrases such as "Al Jazeera's editorial stance" (209 times) and "expressed in this article are" (210 times), reflecting an awareness of its own role in shaping discourse. The presence of these phrases suggests an explicit engagement with media ethics and the construction of narrative authority, which is less pronounced in CNN's corpus. This aligns with research by Curran (2002), who argues that non-Western media, particularly those operating in contested geopolitical spaces, often engage more explicitly with their editorial role. Nevertheless, western media tend to present their coverage as neutral or self-evident.

In contrast, CNN's reliance on phrases such as "CNN has reached out to" (331 instances) indicates another way of claiming journalistic authority, one based in sourcing and institutional legitimation. The phrase, common in Western media reports, is symptomatic of an epistemological style in which information is claimed as authoritative largely through institutional legitimation and not through legal code or historical frame. This imbalance echoes Herman and Chomsky's (2008) notion that mass media sources reproduce information in manners that legitimize existing power relationships instead of questioning them.

Both networks feature geographical specificity in their coverage, though with different emphases. Al Jazeera mentions "in the occupied West Bank" more frequently than CNN, reinforcing its broader focus on Palestinian territorial struggles. CNN, on the other hand, includes phrases such as "in Khan Younis Gaza on" (248 times), which suggests a focus on specific locations within Gaza, potentially highlighting humanitarian aspects of the conflict rather than its geopolitical dimensions. Similarly, the high frequency of references to Tel Aviv (300 occurrences) in CNN's corpus suggests a geographical focus on specific locations,

possibly reflecting where the majority of its correspondents are embedded. The presence of “relief and works agency for” (283 times in CNN) and “ministry of health in Gaza” (260 occurrences) further indicates a humanitarian framing, which aligns with Western media’s tendency to cover Middle Eastern conflicts through the lens of humanitarian crises rather than political struggles (Said, 1997).

Concordance analysis

Table 3. The Comparison of Top Ten Concordances of the Lemma “War” between Al-Jazeera and CNN Corpora

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
<i>Al Jazeera</i>		
Israelis and foreigners kidnapped, according to Israeli authorities. Israel’s	war	on Gaza has killed at least 32,975 people, mostly women
held captive. The Committee to Protect Journalists says the Israel	war	on Gaza has taken a “severe toll on journalists”.
reaction to the Hamas-led incursion and the subsequent Israeli	war	on Gaza has been “based on [Serbia’s] traditionally
the 1990s, which led to the Oslo Accords. Israel’s	war	on Gaza has killed more than 33,600 Palestinians and injured
the largest medical facility in the coastal enclave. Israel’s	war	on Gaza has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to
usable items from the rubble of demolished houses. Israel’s	war	on Gaza has displaced 85 percent of the territory’s
and she has to flee quickly, she said. Israel’s	war	on Gaza has driven more than 90 percent of its 2.3
Israel’s war on Gaza: 12 months, 12 pictures Israel’s	war	on Gaza has killed at least 45,541 Palestinians and wounded 108,338
and wounded 108,338 since October 7, 2023. Published On 31 Dec 202431 Dec 2024 Israel’s	war	on Gaza has left a trail of devastation with
adequate healthcare for the Palestinian population,” Turk said. Israel’s	war	on Gaza has killed more than 45,500 people in the
<i>CNN</i>		
Institute, but still nearly half hold that view. Israel’s	war	in Gaza has killed tens of thousands – the majority
must ensure that aid flows safely into Gaza. Israel’s	war	in Gaza has erased entire families, decimated the health

to another with the children and my mother again.” The	war	in Gaza has also exacted a heavy toll on
suffered so much,” UNICEF said in a statement Wednesday. The	war	in Gaza has been especially hard on children. UNICEF
cable obtained by CNN. Domestically, meanwhile, the reaction to the	war	in Gaza has served to reveal already wide ideological
The	war	in Gaza has been raging for six months and
in Gaza, on October 11, 2023. Mahmud Hams/AFP/Getty Images The	war	in Gaza has been raging for six months and
war in Gaza Analysis by CNN’s Ivana Kottasová The	war	in Gaza has been raging for six months and
to a UN-backed report published last month. Israel’s	war	in Gaza has killed more than 33,400 Palestinians – the majority
man makes tea outside his tent on Wednesday. Israel’s	war	in Gaza has displaced most of the enclave’s

In Al Jazeera, the lemma “war” is overwhelmingly tied to humanitarian devastation, loss of life, and displacement. The repetition of phrases such as “has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians” and “has displaced 85 percent of the territory’s” highlights a discourse centered on human suffering and structural violence. CNN, while also acknowledging casualties, introduces framing that reflects a more neutral or balanced tone, evident in phrases like “has erased entire families” and “has been especially hard on children”. This suggests an implicit recognition of the war’s human cost while still maintaining the broader discourse of political events and military objectives.

From the social totality perspective, war news cannot be detached from the wider socio-political reality of media institutions. News media work within national and global power formations that shape editorial decisions. Al Jazeera, as a state-funded Qatari institution, tends to incorporate news that highlights Palestinian suffering and criticizes Israeli policies. Its concentration on words like “Israel’s war on Gaza has displaced 85 percent of the territory’s” demonstrates a consistent effort to emphasize the asymmetry between Israel and Hamas. Conversely, CNN, as a U.S.-based organization, is working within a media culture influenced by Western geopolitics. This is not so much an automatic monolithic pro-Israel bias, but a framing that is within the overall U.S. foreign policy interests, commonly balancing Israeli security concerns with humanitarian suffering. The discursive distinction follows studies highlighting how ownership and geopolitical alignment influence coverage. For example, Boyd-Barrett (2015) contends that Western corporate media are structurally biased to highlight at center stage those narratives that serve the interests of Western hegemony, especially during wars and conflicts with U.S. allies.

Moral philosophy is among the determining factors of how war is constructed in media discourse. Moral considerations in war reporting determine the choice of sources, the construction of victims and perpetrators, and moral implications inherent in narrative. Al Jazeera’s reportage of the “severe toll on journalists” and the devastation of Gaza’s health infrastructure falls within a moral stance that prioritizes Palestinian victimhood. This moral

paradigm is echoed in Chouliaraki's (2006) media and humanitarianism critique that emphasizes the processes by which media discourse of suffering operates within a moral economy that decides who should be empathized with and who is excluded from the discursive center. CNN ethical coverage is more complex, both recognizing Palestinian suffering and placing the war within the framework of a larger geopolitical crisis. This is evident in such phrases as "reaction to the war in Gaza has served to reveal already wide ideological" differences, which reflect an effort to frame the conflict in terms of U.S. domestic political conflicts instead of purely as a humanitarian disaster.

Praxis, the deployment of media discourse and political action, demonstrates that war reporting is not simply descriptive but actively constitutes public opinion and policy debate. The focus on casualty numbers in Al Jazeera is not merely a journalistic decision but a strategic discursive practice aimed at galvanizing international condemnation and political pressure. The formal, tiring references to "more than 45,500 individuals killed" are a rhetorical device intended both to underscore the scale of destruction and to justify calls from protestors for an end to the violence and international intervention. By contrast, the language CNN uses like "The war in Gaza has been raging for six months" is a more event-based. This is in line with mainstream Western news reporting, which usually frames conflicts based on how long they have persisted, and on major occurrences, rather than by the structural conditions leading to them. This distinction is reminiscent of Herman and Chomsky's (2008) propaganda model, which posits that mainstream Western media operate within a framework that privileges elite consensus and strategic narratives over radical power critique.

The analysis of war propaganda from Piers Robinson (2017) highlights how different media utilize specific framings that either legitimate or delegitimize military actions. The data set here illustrates such a case of this phenomenon occurring clearly in action, whereby Al Jazeera espoused a discussion of the conflict which they portrayed as a humanitarian crisis while CNN approached the topic of discussion within a general political and ideological context. In the same way, Lynch and McGoldrick's (2005) theory of peace journalism contends that media reporting is not just a matter of reporting facts, but also of subconscious decisions on the part of journalists about how to frame conflict. Al Jazeera's emphasis on casualties and refugees is within a peace journalism frame seeking to emphasize the human cost of war, while CNN's coverage is more akin to the conventional war journalism tradition of reporting events and political response.

Despite these differences, both sources construct a narrative that embraces the catastrophic humanitarian cost of the war, suggesting that there is unity in media discourse when human suffering assumes an undisputable scale. This is in agreement with Hallin and Mancini's (2004) notion that while media systems differ in relation to political and economic structures, circumstances of profound crisis cause temporary homogenization of discourse across ideological fault lines. The data set reveals that even as ideological fault lines persist, the sheer magnitude of the Gaza conflict has rendered even mainstream Western media more skeptical, though within the constraints of their institutional settings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, media reporting should not be considered neutral but a carefully selected and ideologically motivated account that echoes and supports geopolitical interests. Lukin (2019) contends that ideology is inextricably connected with language, which consequently influences the ideological dimension of public discourse. The comparative examination of

the coverage provided by Al Jazeera and CNN of the Israel-Hamas war illustrates this dynamic, revealing how the selection of vocabulary builds the portrait of conflicts in keeping with wider political, financial, and institutional agendas.

Al Jazeera's near-equal attention to both Gaza and Israel suggests a deliberate attempt to present a balanced perspective. However, its account is largely framed around issues of human suffering, identity politics, and structural violence. By repeatedly referring to the occupied West Bank and placing great stress on civilian casualties, Al Jazeera situates the conflict within a broader historical and territorial context, thus furthering narratives that highlight the plight of Palestinians. Additionally, its explicit acknowledgment of the commercial implications within media coverage accentuates the impact of economic incentives on journalistic agendas, which aligns with broader critiques of media commercialization (McChesney, 2004).

CNN's coverage, also more focused on humanitarian issues, presents a clearly different framing. The network's report focuses more on Hamas, as there are patterns in Western media where reporting on Middle Eastern conflicts tends to prioritize security matters and counterterrorism narratives. The prevalence of military terminology, specifically mentions of the Israeli defense forces, indicates a state-aligned framing that values institutional power. Finally, increasing emphasis on American diplomatic involvement highlights CNN's congruence with U.S. foreign policy rhetoric, positioning the conflict in the broader framework of international mediation and geopolitical maneuvering.

These results confirm that conflict news coverage in the media is destined to be political economy, institutionally driven, and vulnerable to strategic narratives in an attempt to influence public opinion and policy agendas. As argued by Bhatia (2005), power rests in the control of discourse, where framing of conflict dictates not just the way things are understood, but also how they are recalled and acted upon. The competing narratives offered by Al Jazeera and CNN illustrate how media institutions navigate these ideological battlegrounds, using language to construct reality in ways that serve their respective audiences and stakeholders.

While this study provides critical insights into the political economy of war reporting, it is not without its limitations. The analytical focus is limited to language patterns and framing over a particular time frame and geopolitical issue, and reception among varied groups of such narratives needs to be examined further. Subsequent studies can examine how media audiences interpret and consume such representations, using audience analysis and ethnographic methods to gauge the influence of war reporting on public opinion and policy activism. Furthermore, multimodal elements are not incorporated into this study; therefore, future investigations can examine how visual, auditory, and interactive components shape the production, circulation, and reception of war reporting, particularly in digital and hybrid media environments.

In light of these observations, media literacy needs to become a priority as a chief means of understanding complicated geopolitical stories. It is, therefore, very important for news consumers to go out and find diverse opinions, aggressively question media bias, and use various sources as a means of arriving at a balanced perspective of global conflicts. The media organizations also have to strive for more transparency in editorial policy, more explicitly outlining the ideological underpinnings of their reporting to allow for a more informed and critical public discourse. As Liaropoulos (2022) suggests, information handling has forever been a double-edged sword, one that can enlighten and hide, empower and oppress, depending on who wields it.

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