

Eximia journal

www.eximiajournal.ro

Vol. 14/2025

PLUS
COMMUNICATION P



International
Communication & PR

The News Rhetoric on Gaze War and Its Influence On 2024 US Elections. A Case Study On CNN

Mohammed Alanazi

The University of Southern Mississippi

m7mmed82@gmail.com

Abstract. This study aims to explore the relationship between CNN's rhetorical framing of the Gaza conflict and its potential influence on electoral decision-making. It investigates whether CNN's emphasis on humanitarian narratives, international responsibilities, or political accountability might polarize or news coverage. By examining the intersection of media narratives, the study sheds light on how global conflicts become focal points in shaping the U.S. political landscape, particularly during election years. This study focuses on CNN, a prominent U.S. news network, and its coverage of the 2023-2024 Gaza conflict, investigating how its framing strategies might influence the 2024 U.S. presidential election

Keywords. CNN, Gaza conflict, media framing, U.S. elections, discourse analysis

Introduction

Over the years, the issue of media bias has elicited mixed reactions from various scholars. The debate has often been met with defensive sentiments, particularly with many arguing that news reporting is characteristically subjective. As such, it depends on the approach used by each reporter. However, this sentiment is usually challenged by the idea that reporting is typically structured around specific regulations and practices that seek to enhance impartiality (Tasseron, 2021). International conflicts often become focal points of domestic political discourse in the interconnected global media ecosystem. Media outlets play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions by selecting, framing, and emphasizing particular aspects of events. This study focuses on CNN, a prominent U.S. news network, and its coverage of the 2023-2024 Gaza conflict, investigating how its framing strategies might influence the upcoming 2024 U.S. presidential election. The "CNN effect" is a term that has been used to describe the influence of 24-hour news coverage on foreign policy decision-making, particularly in the context of the United States. The term was coined in the early 1990s following the Gulf War. CNN's live coverage of the conflict was widely credited with shaping public opinion and influencing US foreign policy decisions (Tomja, 2023). The Gaza conflict, marked by intense violence, humanitarian crises, and international debate, has garnered widespread attention (Pons Rafols, 2024). While the immediate focus remains on the region's geopolitical complexities and humanitarian dimensions, the ripple effects extend far beyond the Middle East, particularly into the U.S. political arena. With America's deep-rooted involvement in Middle Eastern, the way

the conflict is reported by leading media outlets has the potential to influence public opinion on key policy issues, including U.S. foreign policy, national security, and human rights (Imam & Tijjani, 2024).

This study seeks to understand the relationship between CNN's rhetorical framing of the Gaza conflict and its potential impact on electoral decision-making. It investigates whether CNN's emphasis on humanitarian narratives, international responsibilities, or political accountability might polarize or news coverage. By examining the intersection of media narratives, the study sheds light on how global conflicts become focal points in shaping the U.S. political landscape, especially during the election year. This study focuses on CNN, a prominent U.S. news network, and its coverage of the 2023-2024 Gaza conflict, investigating how its framing strategies might influence the 2024 U.S. presidential election.

Literature review:

The pervasiveness of both the media and conflict, the question has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. From a political theory perspective, it is fair to say that conflict is inevitable, both domestically and internationally. For democracies and democratizing nations, conflict lies at their political core goals over sees (Reuben, 2009). Conflict is also a type of media framing that is employed in the production of news. Framing refers to the ways that newsmakers cast stories, highlight what is figure and ground, and impute meaning and motives. "Figure" is what takes center stage in how one sees a situation, while elements that form "ground" fall to the background or the periphery of a situation. Aspects of a story that become figure often influence how newsmakers cast the definition of an issue, problem, or event. Framing a situation as a conflict highlights incompatibilities, disagreements, or oppositional tensions between individuals, groups, and institutions. In the U.S., conflict is one of the most commonly used media frames in coverage of politics and crime, second to a responsibility frame.¹ A responsibility frame focuses on what or who was responsible for the problem, who should alleviate it, and what type of action is needed to address (Putnam & Shoemaker, 2007).

Baum and Zhukov (2019) examined relationship and differences in ownership of media enterprises in shaping news coverage of international conflict using a dataset of 591,532 articles on US-led multinational military operations in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo, published by 2,505 newspapers in 116 countries. The findings that ownership chains exerted a homogenizing effect on the content of newspapers' coverage of foreign policy, resulting in coverage across co-owned papers that is more similar in scope, focus (how much "hard" relative to "soft" news they offer), and diversity (the breadth of topics they include in their coverage of a given issue) relative to coverage across papers that are not co-owned.

In its search for media influences in violent conflict, Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2018) compared the contents of both domestic and foreign opinion-leading media coverage across six selected conflicts over a time range of 4 to 10 years. They conducted a diachronic, comparative analysis of 3,700 semantic concepts raised in almost 900,000 news texts from 66 different news media. Based on this analysis, they trace when and to what extent each outlet focuses its attention on the conflict, highlights specific aspects (notably, violence and suffering, negotiations and peaceful solutions), and presents relevant in- and out-groups, applying different kinds of evaluation. The analysis generally corroborates the media's tendency to cover conflict in an event-oriented, violence-focused and ethnocentric manner, both during routine periods and – exacerbated merely by degrees – during major escalation. At the same time, the analysis showed important differences in the strength and appearance of these patterns, and

points to recurrent contingencies that can be tied to the specific contextual factors and general journalistic logics shaping the coverage. Fathir et al. (2022) argues that western media entities are often likely to frame the Gaza Strip conflict in ways that show Israel as a victim. They portray Palestine as a violent entity whose actions prompt military retaliation from Israel. In such instances, the country is often depicted as a victim of terrorism from its Palestinian counterpart.

Using news photographs, Fahmy, S., & Neumann, R. (2012) analyzed the extent to which the Gaza War (2008-2009) was represented as war versus peace journalism in the three leading Western newswires (Associated Press, Reuters, and AFP/Getty Images). Findings indicated that all three wires combined provided a variety of visual frames to communicate a comprehensive coverage of the event. This observed pattern therefore highlights the role of gatekeeping in providing a broad-based understanding of conflicts. In other words, it becomes crucial to note that photo selections in terms of war versus peace journalism ultimately has an impact in shaping public opinion and influencing perceptions of news events. According to Imam & Tijjani (2024),

The war on Gaza, caused by a recurring occupation of Palestinian land by Israel, has long been a focal point of international attention and debate where the impact of the Massacre in Gaza on US presidential elections has also reverberated across the global political landscape. The study was conducted with a focus on the electoral dynamics, public opinion, and policy responses. Through a comprehensive review of literature and analysis of electoral outcomes, the study explored the ways in which the War on Gaza has influenced electoral campaigns, candidate positions, and voter perceptions, and assesses its implications for US foreign policy towards the Middle East.

Theoretical Framework:

The capabilities of traditional media as digital space have encouraged scholars to studying and examining media narratives, and the digital media has enabled legacy media agencies such as CNN to reach more large audiences through their social media platforms. The news headlines and stories being shared across the globe through the click of a button would rapidly take hold considering the public increasingly consumes online news content from these media giants (Jungblut & Zakareviciute, 2019). This research is grounded in a theoretical framework that integrates concepts from critical discourse analysis (CDA), media studies, and framing theory. According to Al-Sarraj and Lubbad (2018), CDA, in particular, provides a lens for analyzing how language functions in the construction of social reality. CDA explicitly intends to incorporate social-theoretical insights into discourse analysis and advocates social commitment and interventionism in research. The main programmatic features and domains of enquiry of CDA are linked by emphasizing on attempts toward theory formation by of CDA's prominent scholars (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2009). The critical discourse analysis (CDA) has become a well-established field in the social sciences. CDA can be defined as a problem orientated interdisciplinary research programmer, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods, and agendas. The manifold roots of CDA lie in rhetoric, text linguistics, anthropology, philosophy, sociopsychology, cognitive science, literary studies, and sociolinguistics, as well as in applied linguistics and pragmatics (Wodak, 2014). Analyzing language use in news at CNN online platform, particularly the headlines to news items, could help unearth the core elements of CNN nature rhetorical narratives on Gaze war. This could also aid to understand how such news headlines and articles are used by media agencies to shape public discourse (Rahman & Emadi, 2018). Alternately, media studies as a

concept help determine the impact of media organizations on society. This could be achieved by examining how such media outlets operate. In this case. It could help in illustrating how CNN operates when covering the conflict in Gaza.

Framing theory, which examines the strategies and methods used to present news stories, will serve as a key component of the theoretical framework for this study. Framing theory mainly touches on the imagery and language that news agencies use to convey a given perspective (Alkalliny, 2017). According to Alkalliny (2017), the framing of news sources has the power to influence how the audience interpret the events being covered. For example, the Gaza conflict, when viewed from a framing theory lens, could illustrate how media bias in conflict situations often serves to shape public perception. This could be achieved using rhetorical devices, imagery, and language choice. Scheufele (1999) developed a process model of framing theory, identifying four key processes that should be addressed in research: frame building, frame setting, individual-level processes of framing, and a feedback loop from audiences to journalists.

Framing Theory and frame analysis has been found functional and suitable for researching complex social media communications and also the interplay of the social media with mainstream traditional media. As a result, frame analysis presents an even broader potential for the research of dynamic communication processes in the fast lives of virtual communities and the vast effects of online interaction of social, political, commercial institutions (Güran & Özarslan, 2022).

Research question

This study will answer the question as follows:

Q1: what's the nature of CNN narratives on the Gaza war during 2024 US election?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis of CNN's online content on CNN.com, where the digital articles contain news titles posted from October 2023 to November 2024. The sample includes diverse content, including news reports, expert commentary, and opinion pieces. Key themes in the study are rhetorical devices, and visual elements are identified and analyzed to uncover dominant framing strategies. According to Maretha and Kongthai (2017) the use of verbal rhetorical devices in news headlines contributed to create relevance of the topic, thus, aided the readers to perceive intended meaning, which might influence the establishment of power to construct their ideology.

Additionally, public opinion data and polling trends are analyzed to correlate media framing with shifts in voter preferences. The research incorporates qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis, and quantitative assessment of polling data to provide a comprehensive understanding of media influence. Public opinion polling must be recognized as having its setting in a society and as being a function of that society in operation. The function and role of public opinion is determined by the part it plays in the operation of the society. If public opinion is to be studied in any realistic sense of its depiction, it must be faithful to its empirical character (Blumer, 1948).

Sampling and content analysis:

The dataset includes CNN's online content on CNN.com, where the digital articles contain news titles posted. This period was chosen to capture CNN's initial framing of the Gaza conflict and its ongoing coverage leading up to the US election from October 2023 to November

2024. The sample forms 439 digital articles from *Nexis Uni* database (formerly Lexis Nexis Academic), focusing on titles that contain the Gaza conflict and related U.S. policy, including breaking news, panel discussions, and interviews. The qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes, rhetorical narratives, and visual elements. Qualitative content analysis consists of conventional, directed and summative approaches for data analysis. They are used for provision of descriptive knowledge and understandings of the phenomenon under study (Assarroudi et al, 2018). Thematic framing will include examining how the conflict was framed language and tone analyzing the emotive language, headlines, and choice of imagery. Actor representation will include “Palestinian civilians,” “Israeli government,” “IDF” and “U.S. politicians” because they are prominently featured and portrayed in the conflict.

Discourse Analysis:

Discourse analysis was used to explore the underlying ideological and political messages in CNN’s narratives. This involved assessing how power dynamics, moral responsibility, and U.S. foreign policy were discussed. The attention was also given to expert commentary and editorial pieces, which often signal the network’s interpretive stance on complex issues. To contextualize CNN’s rhetoric, comparisons were made with coverage on the suffering of the Palestinians, and they are being covered by CNN and portrayed. This comparative element helps situate CNN’s narrative within the broader media landscape and assess its unique influence. Qualitative interviews with a sample of CNN viewers to understand how the network’s coverage influenced their perceptions of the Gaza conflict and U.S. policy.

Data Coding and Analysis:

The data was coded using Excel software to systematically categorize themes and rhetorical patterns. Each segment of the coverage was tagged with descriptors, such as “Gaza war,” “policy critique,” “war in Middle East,” or “candidate response,” to identify correlations between framing and voter sentiment. The coding also includes categories and themes, which group similar codes into categories and identify overarching themes with iterative process where refining codes and themes through repeated analysis by going back to the data multiple times to ensure a comprehensive and accurate representation of the findings. The themes will be coded if the reputation occurs for three times or more.

Findings

When analyzing both media houses, the sources of their information could also contribute to perceptions of bias in the coverage of the Gaza conflict. For example, considering CNN largely relies on official government and military sources, they are likely to report on the conflict using biased information. The governments on both sides of the conflict would report the developments in a way that portrays them in positive light on international media (Fathir et al., 2022). Similarly, the military would avoid depictions of human abuses in the conflict, especially when such abuses touch on civilian members of society. As such, CNN's news coverage of the conflict would be anchored around faulty and inaccurate information owing to the erroneous sources of data used in the coverage. CNN has linked the role of news to its influence on U.S. elections where it involves exploring the ways media shape's public opinion, and the overall political process. (cite and edit)

In this finding, they established that media entities such as CNN were likely to frame the conflict from the perspective of Israeli's right to self-defense, despite the numerous civilian casualties of the war in neighboring Palestine. Various human rights tenets, such as the right to

life ought to have been used to censure Israel for its use of force against unarmed civilians. Instead, the media coverage of the conflict paints Palestine as the villain, an aspect that helps to justify such ruthless use of force. For instance, CNN is likelier to frame the conflict as a military struggle. As such, most of its news items would focus on the military strategies, casualties, and advances made in the war. The Network's focus was on the humanitarian angle of the air raid. It sought to highlight the loss of life associated with the military strike and bring the global attention to the reality on the ground regarding the Gaza conflict.

Chart: 2.1

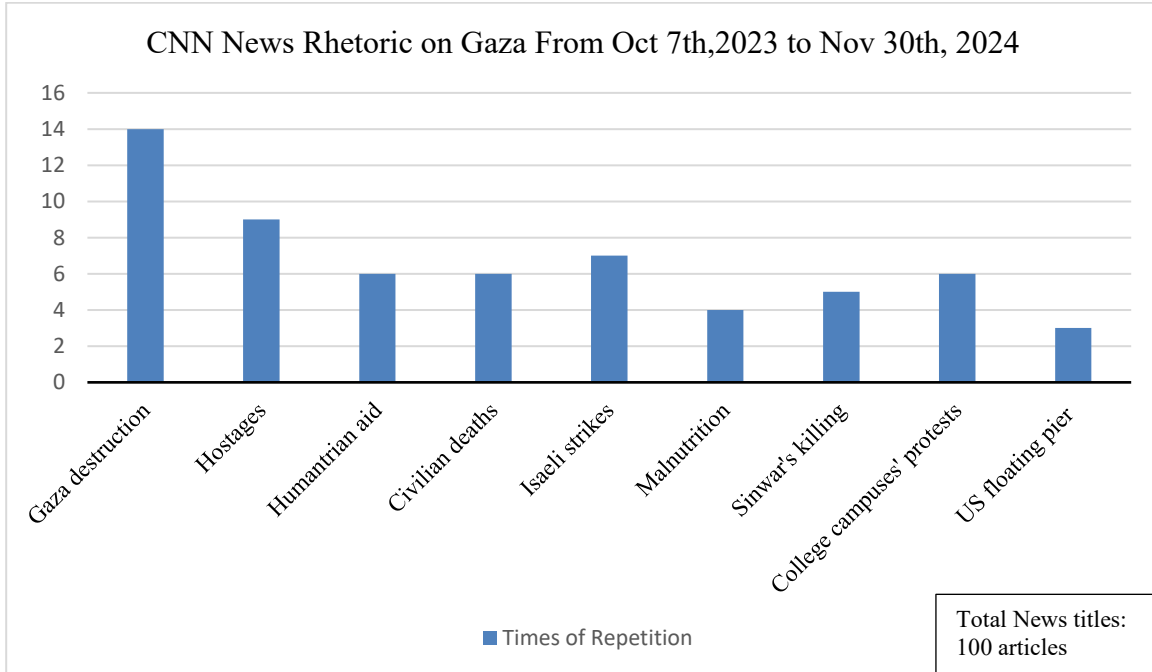
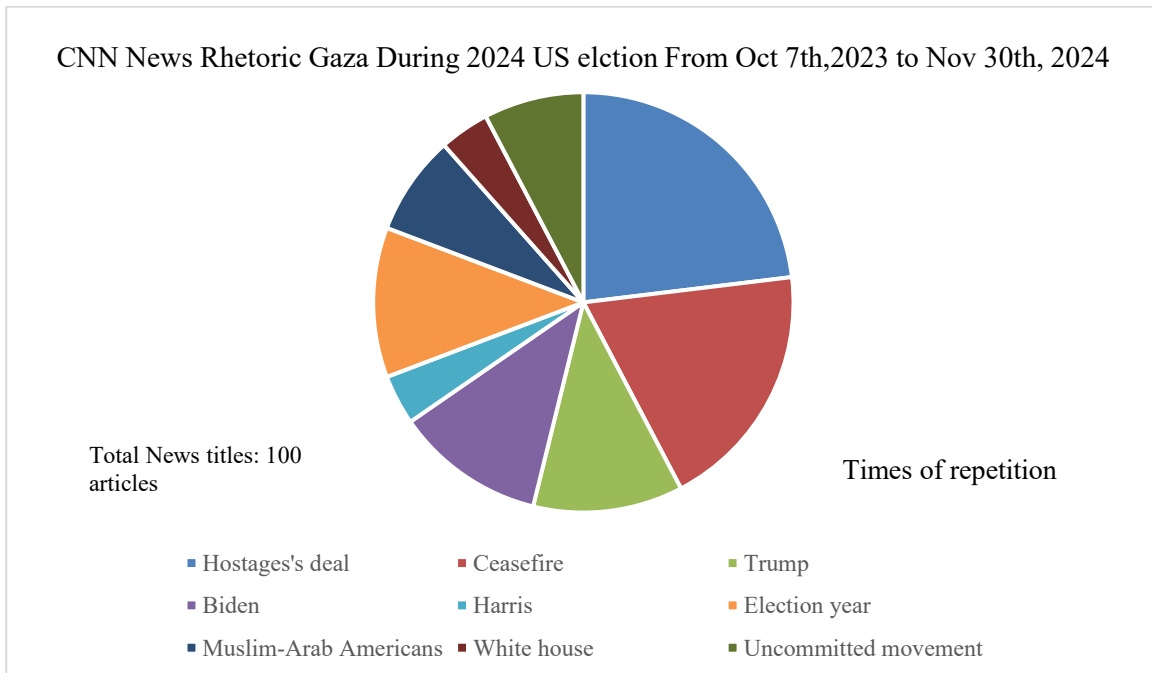


Chart: 2.2



Discussion:

Limitations:

While the study offers a robust analysis, it acknowledges several limitations such as the sample focuses exclusively on CNN, which may not capture the broader media ecosystem's influence. Moreover, polling data and interviews may not fully account for the factors influencing voter behavior and the study period may exclude later conflict development in Gaza or new US administration policies.

References:

- [1] Tasseron, M. (2021). Reporting Under the Microscope in Israel-Palestine and South Africa. *Journalism Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1966643>
- [2] Tomja, A. (2023). The “CNN Effect” and Its Influence on US Foreign Policy Decision-Making. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research and Development*, 10(1 S1), 19-19.
- [3] Pons Rafols, X. (2024). The war in Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: A turning point in the midst of an endless cycle of violence.
- [4] Imam, M., & Tijjani, C. B. (2024). The impact of the war on Gaza on the US presidential election. *Journal of Global Social Sciences*, 5(17), 128-134.
- [5] Reuben, R. C. (2009). The impact of news coverage on conflict: Toward greater understanding. *Marq. L. Rev.*, 93, 45.
- [6] Putnam, L. L., & Shoemaker, M. (2007). Changes in conflict framing in the news coverage of an environmental conflict. *J. Disp. Resol.*, 167.
- [7] Fahmy, S., & Neumann, R. (2012). Shooting war or peace photographs? An examination of newswires' coverage of the conflict in Gaza (2008-2009). *American Behavioral Scientist*, 56(2), NP1-NP26.
- [8] Baum, M. A., & Zhukov, Y. M. (2019). Media ownership and news coverage of international conflict. *Political Communication*, 36(1), 36-63.
- [9] Baden, C., & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K. (2018). The search for common ground in conflict news research: Comparing the coverage of six current conflicts in domestic and international media over time. *Media, War & Conflict*, 11(1), 22-45.
- [10] Jungblut, M., & Zakareviciute, I. (2019). Do Pictures Tell a Different Story? A multimodal frame analysis of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict. *Journalism Practice*, 13(2), 206–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1412804>
- [11] Al-Sarraj, W. F., & Lubbad, H. M. (2018). Bias Detection of Palestinian/Israeli Conflict in Western Media: A Sentiment Analysis Experimental Study. In *Proceedings - 2018 International Conference on Promising Electronic Technologies, ICPET 2018* (pp. 98–103). Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICPET.2018.00024>
- [12] Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical discourse analysis. *Annual review of Anthropology*, 29(1), 447-466.
- [13] Alkalliny, S. (2017). Framing of media coverage of the Palestinian -Israeli conflict in CNN and FoxNews. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 2(4), 161–165. <https://doi.org/10.24001/ijels.2.4.20>
- [14] Wodak, R. (2014). Critical discourse analysis. In *The Routledge companion to English studies* (pp. 302-316). Routledge.
- [15] Rahman, K. A., & Emadi, A. (2018). Representations of islam and muslims in new zealand media. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 24(2), 166–188. <https://doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v24i2.419>

- [16] Fathir, M. F. M., Lokman, A. M., Kadir, S. A., & Sualman, I. (2022). Social Media Visual Framing towards Political Participation: An Analysis on BERSIH 2.0. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 38(2), 127–143. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2022-3802-08>
- [17] Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of communication*, 49(1), 103-122.
- [18] Güran, M. S., & Özarlan, H. (2022). Framing theory in the age of social media. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (48), 446-457.
- [19] Maretha, A. L., & Kongthai, A. (2017, July). The use of verbal rhetorical devices to construct readers' ideology in online news headlines. In *ASEAN/Asian Academic Society International Conference Proceeding Series*.
- [20] Blumer, H. (1948). Public opinion and public opinion polling. *American sociological review*, 13(5), 542-549.
- [21] Assarroudi, A., Heshmati Nabavi, F., Armat, M. R., Ebadi, A., & Vaismoradi, M. (2018). Directed qualitative content analysis: the description and elaboration of its underpinning methods and data analysis process. *Journal of research in nursing*, 23(1), 42-55.