

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF CONFLICT AND RESISTANCE IN GAZA

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Abstract

This study investigates the discursive construction of conflict and resistance in Gaza across selected media outlets through a Critical Discourse Analysis of 30 English news articles from The New York Times, CNN, Reuters, Al Jazeera, The National and Al Arabiya using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. To facilitate a more comparative analysis of news from different regions, the dataset was split into two groups: Western media and Middle Eastern media. The results indicate that Western media outlets predominantly contextualise the Gaza conflict in geopolitical and military frameworks, while Middle Eastern media outlets more often focus on the humanitarian effects of the war. The research also reveals disparities in the portrayal of key figures, indicating that Western media are more likely to distinguish between Palestinian civilians and Hamas militants, whereas Middle Eastern media prioritise the suffering of Palestinian civilians. Also, when reporting deaths and destruction, Western news is more likely to use passive constructions, while Middle Eastern news is more likely to use active constructions that clearly identify those responsible for military actions. The findings of the study imply that media portrayals of the Gaza conflict varies systematically between the two media categories, and these discrepancies suggest more extensive institutional and ideological biases in the investigated categories. By comparatively analysing multiple outlets across the same analytical dimensions, the study extends existing research on media representation of the Gaza conflict and further highlights how discourse functions in reporting events and structuring meaning and responsibility in conflict narration.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Gaza Conflict, Media Representation, Conflict Framing, Resistance Framing, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, Ideology

Introduction

The Gaza conflict is one of the most politically contested and extensively mediated geopolitical conflicts of the past decade because it combines issues of conflict, humanitarian crisis, political legitimacy and resistance. Although this current wave of the conflict is often discussed through the lens of recent happenings, the origin of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be traced all the way back to the late Ottoman and British Mandate periods, the Balfour Declaration, World War 2, the 1947 United Nations partition plan, the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and subsequent wars and occupations. Gaza has become especially pivotal within this history due to its dense population, targeted military assaults, human rights violations, and iconic position in the political struggle of Palestine. These factors mark it, not only as a site for military confrontation but also as an arena of discursive struggle in international media.

Media coverage has always occupied a central position in shaping how the public sees and understands armed conflicts through the selective framing of events and narrative construction to influence public perceptions of responsibility, victimhood, and legitimacy. Such coverage utilise sourcing patterns, linguistic choices, and narrative structures to not only report conflict but also actively participate in the construction of the conflict in the minds of the public.

Abu Taha and Al-Khanji (2020), in their analysis of the coverage of the Gaza Marches of Return, identified inconsistent quotation patterns and disparities in the portrayal of Israeli and Palestinian social actors among various newspapers. Their findings indicate that news discourse may favour official and military perspectives while selectively portraying the suffering of Palestinian civilians. Amer (2022), in a Critical Discourse Analysis of BBC and New York Times coverage of the May 2021 Israeli assault on Gaza, discovered that the conflict was often portrayed as a war against Hamas rather than the Palestinian population at large, and that Israeli actions were frequently characterised as retaliation.

An article by Lakshmi Priya (2024) closely examined the coverage of the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023 and the response of the Israeli military by the Arabic press. The research noted that the coverage of the conflict reinforced the popular opinion of a “strong and aggressive” Israeli state and victimised Palestinians and underlined the wide support for Palestinians. The article further noted that the Arabic press can be categorised into state-aligned and independent media and that the coverage of the state-aligned press reflected the opinions of the respective governments of the states noting that key trends emerging as at the time included a strong “anti-Israel” sentiment and an increased support for Palestinian statehood.

The findings of the study indicate that the coverage of the Arab media is not monolithic and that significant disparities exist within regional reporting. However, this study only analysed the coverage of the Arabic press and did not perform a comparative analysis with Western press.

El Damanhoury et al.(2025) utilised Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the framework to analyse and compare the coverage of Al Jazeera English (AJE) and BBC news outlets and their discourse around key events in the early stages of the 2023 Israel-Gaza conflict. The findings of the study shows that while there is no difference in the use of active voice, there were key differences in the discursive treatment of Palestinians and also how the death tolls were reported. The study further reveals huge differences in how statements were quoted with AJE taking a more balanced approach while BBC refrained from using accusations like “genocide”, “terrorism”, “ethnic cleansing”, and “war crimes” against Israel. The study demonstrates the substantial difference in how two prominent international news outlets can frame the same conflict. While this study utilised CDA, it only compared the coverage of two news outlets and only in the early stages of the 2023 Israel-Gaza conflict.

Ammari et al. (2025) explore two corpora groups that focus on opposing views of Arab and Western newspaper agencies on the Russian-Ukrainian war. The findings of the study reveal that the distribution and frequency patterns have significant differences which indicate that each corpus group had unique sensational dimensions and political images used to generate support for or rally opposition against respective political positions in the war and each group displays lexical consistency in the linguistic patterns used in specific political dimensions. This study is relevant as it illustrates how rival media systems formulate narratives of war through unique discursive and lexical frameworks. Nevertheless, due to its focus on a distinct conflict, it cannot directly address the particular historical, political, and ideological dynamics that influence representations of Gaza

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an analytical framework that helps examine what functions language plays in relation to power or in this case, conflict. Rather than simply treating the news articles as transparent reflections of reality, CDA conceptualises them as practices that are socially situated and that are embedded in ideological and institutional structures. This perspective situates media discourse as a site where meanings of conflict and resistance can be negotiated, contested or legitimised.

Existing studies have often focused on one event, a phase of the conflict, news outlets in a single region, or a limited comparison between two news outlets. However, few studies have actually attempted to systematically compare and analyse the recent coverage of the conflict across Western and Middle Eastern international media using a unified CDA framework that combines conflict framing, actor representation, agency attribution, sourcing patterns, humanitarian discourse, and resistance framing.

Given the military escalations, humanitarian crises, ceasefire negotiations and other dynamic political developments between February 2025 and January 2026, this time period offers a valuable opportunity to examine the evolution of discourse across institutional contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the discursive construction of conflict and resistance in Gaza by selected Western and Middle Eastern news outlets during the specified period. Using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA, this study examines the representations at textual, discursive practice and social practice levels.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions: How do Western and Middle Eastern media outlets discursively construct conflict in Gaza? How are principal actors, including Israel, Palestinian civilians, and Hamas, represented across the selected outlets? How do the selected outlets differ in agency attribution, humanitarian discourse, sourcing patterns, and resistance framing?

By critically analyzing thirty articles from six major international news channels, this article seeks to examine how language contributes to the negotiation, contestation and legitimization of conflict and resistance within recent media discourse and thereby contribute to existing literature on media representation, ideology and discursive construction of geopolitical conflicts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilises a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis, and is supported by descriptive frequency reporting. However, descriptive counts are not intended to function as inferential statistical evidence; they are only used to identify recurring patterns in the sample corpus. The theoretical framework used in this study is Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA as it enables the study to systematically analyse the articles at three interconnected levels: textual analysis which analyses the linguistic features of the text, discursive practices which involve the consumption and production processes of the text, and social practices which involve the broader ideological and power structures. Rather than treating news articles as representations of reality, the study presents them as socially situated texts that are embedded in broader geopolitical and institutional contexts.

Data Selection and Corpus Construction

The study's dataset consists of thirty news articles published between February 2025 and January 2026 by six international news outlets representing Western and Middle Eastern media institutions. The selected news outlets are New York Times, CNN, Reuters, Al-Jazeera, The National and Al-Arabiya. Five articles were selected from each outlet, making a total of thirty articles. The outlets were purposively selected as they are well-known international news organisations that regularly report on Gaza in English.

They also represent two broad types of media environments that are relevant to the study: Western outlets and Middle Eastern outlets. For the sake of analysis, The New York Times, CNN, and Reuters were put in the Western media group, and Al Jazeera, The National and Al Arabiya were put in the Middle Eastern media group. These categories serve as analytical groupings rather than assertions of institutional uniformity; the study acknowledges the significant editorial and ideological disparities present within each group. The detailed coding tables for all the articles are present in the supplementary file.

Sampling Criteria

This article used purposive sampling to ensure that the selected articles were relevant and comparable across all selected outlets. News reports were first identified by searching through the archives of each outlet and headline-based selection using recurring keywords related to Gaza, Israel, Hamas, ceasefire, aid, air strikes, casualties, diplomacy and displacement. Only straight news reports, live news updates, data trackers, and explanatory reports directly focused on Gaza conflict events were considered. Opinion pieces, editorials, podcasts, video-only items, and duplicate versions of the same report were excluded. Articles were also excluded if they focused only marginally on Gaza or lacked sufficient textual material for discourse analysis. This method ensured that the data set was analytically comparable across institutional contexts and was intended to create a comparative corpus that captured variation in conflict reporting rather than a simple chronological sequence of articles. Because the corpus is relatively small, the study does not claim to represent all Western or Middle Eastern media coverage of Gaza. Instead, it offers a focused comparative analysis of discourse patterns within the selected sample.

Analytical Procedure

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, the analysis was done as follows:

1. Textual Analysis: At the textual level, the study analysed:
 - Lexical choices
 - Modality and evaluative language
 - Nominalisation processes
 - Active versus passive constructions
 - Transitivity patterns and agency assignment.
2. Discursive practice: At the level of discursive practice, the study examined:
 - Sourcing patterns
 - Quotation strategies
 - Nominalisation processes
 - Active versus passive constructions

- Transitivity patterns and agency assignment.
3. Social practice: At the level of social practice, the study analysed the findings in relation to broader ideological and geopolitical contexts.

Coding Categories and Operational Definitions

The coding scheme was developed in advance and applied to the full corpus manually. Each article was coded across six analytical categories: conflict framing, representation of actors, agency attribution, humanitarian discourse, source selection, and resistance framing.

- Conflict framing: The articles were coded depending on whether they were mostly about military operations, humanitarian crises, or diplomatic negotiations. Military operations framing was assigned when the article was mostly about strikes, offensives, battlefield developments, retaliation, military targets, or operational goals. When the article focused mostly on civilian deaths, displacement, lack of aid, famine, destruction of infrastructure, or the collapse of public health, the humanitarian crisis framing was assigned. When the article was mostly about ceasefire talks, peace plans, mediation, prisoner exchanges, or international diplomatic initiatives, it was assigned the diplomatic negotiation framing. When there was more than one frame, the main frame was chosen based on the one that was most consistently emphasised throughout the article.
- Representation of actors: This refers to how the principal actors in each article were categorised. This included references to Israel as a state, military, or political actor; Palestinians as civilians, residents or displaced persons; and Hamas or other armed groups as militants, resistance actors or political actors. This was done to identify whether the discourse differentiated between civilian and military actors or favored one group over the other.
- Agency attribution: This refers to how actions and reactions were constructed grammatically. When a reference is made to the actor e.g. “Israel launched strikes”, “Hamas attacked”, it was coded as active agency attribution. When a reference is made to the action but not to the doer, e.g., “dozens were killed”, it was coded as passive agency attribution. This was particularly useful in passages describing casualties and destruction.
- Humanitarian discourse: This refers to the recurrence of humanitarian issues such as civilian suffering and material conditions like descriptions of civilian casualties and injuries, displacement, food insecurity and scarcity, destruction of homes and health facilities and public health emergencies. It is worth noting that news reports could contain instances

of humanitarian discourse even when they were not coded with it as the primary frame.

- Source selection: This refers to attribution of statements cited in the article. The sources were grouped into official state actors, military spokesperson, international organisations, humanitarian workers, experts and eyewitnesses/civilians. This was done in order to assess whether any of these groups were given prominence over the others and how this preference shaped the narrative.
- Resistance framing: This was added as a distinct analytical category to observe how actions, actors, or narratives that opposed the Israeli military force and occupation of Gaza were represented in the sampled corpus. When the news articles referred to Hamas, militants, fighters or other armed groups, it was coded as armed resistance. When references to statehood claims, anti-occupation discourse, demands for withdrawal, or discourses of national struggle were made, it was coded as political resistance. Civil or symbolic resistance included references to steadfastness, survival, return, public protest, or narratives that framed Palestinian endurance as a form of resistance. The analysis also noted whether resistance was legitimized, securitized, neutralized, or delegitimized through terms such as “militant,” “terrorist,” “fighter,” “armed wing,” “resistance,” or similar labels.

Coding Procedure

All articles in the sample corpus were coded using a structured coding sheet which recorded article ID, outlet, publication date, dominant frame, principal actors, source types, evidence of humanitarian discourse, evidence of resistance framing, and selected examples of active and passive constructions. As the coding was conducted by a single researcher, the study maintained consistency through the use of predefined operational definitions and repeated recoding of the dataset. After the initial coding, the articles were revisited and rechecked against the coding categories to ensure the consistency of category assignments across the corpus. Ambiguous cases were handled by revisiting the dominant emphasis of the article as a whole and comparing it with previously coded examples in the same category. For news articles with multiple themes, the coding sheet allowed primary coding and secondary notes. An example is an article that was primarily coded as a diplomatic negotiation but contains elements of humanitarian discourse and resistance framing. Doing this ensured that the complexity of the texts was preserved while also identifying recurring comparative patterns.

Use of descriptive frequencies

As the dataset used in this study is relatively small, raw frequencies were prioritised over statistical claims. Percentages are only used to provide

descriptive comparison across the corpus and should therefore be read as pattern indicators rather than measures of media tendencies in general.

Ethical considerations

This study only utilises news texts that are publicly available and does not involve any real individuals, interviews, or any private correspondence; thus, no formal ethical approval was required for this study. Regardless, the study treats all texts as part of the public domain and interrogates them as data only from a scholarly perspective.

Methodological limitations

The study's methodology has some limitations. First, the study only includes a small purposively selected sample of articles. Therefore, the identified discourse patterns are meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive for the whole Western and Middle Eastern media spectrum reporting on Gaza. Secondly, while the study includes Western and Middle Eastern media in two separate categories, it acknowledges the differences between outlets in the same category. The limitations of the study have been taken into consideration in the analysis of the findings.

Theoretical Framework

The framework utilised in this study is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which focuses on the relationship between language, power and ideology across multiple disciplines. Rather than treating discourse as a neutral medium for conveying information, CDA views it as a type of social practice used to construct, reproduce and challenge social realities (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Different scholars like Ruth Wodak, Teun A. van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough have contributed to the development of CDA and although there are slight differences in their emphasis, they share a common focus on investigating how discourse shapes and maintains social structures.

For instance, while van Dijk (1998, 2008) argues that shared mental models organize ideologies that directly contribute to the maintenance of social structures, Wodak (2001, 2015) emphasises that discourse should be situated in its historical and political contexts. Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2001) focuses on the dialectical relationship between discourse and society and argues that discourse both reflects and shapes social structures, institutional practices, and ideological formations.

Given this study's primary concern with how different news channels construct conflict and resistance, Fairclough's three-dimensional model provides the most suitable framework for this analysis. Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2001), argues that discourse operates on the three interconnected levels of text, discursive practice and social practice simultaneously.

This model allows us to systematically analyse linguistic choices in relation to institutional processes and broader ideological structures, making it a very suitable choice for media discourse analysis.

At the textual level, Fairclough's model focuses on vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, modality and transitivity patterns (Fairclough, 1995). These elements are vital to understanding how responsibility, legitimacy, victimhood, resistance and agency are constructed. Through active and passive constructions and careful lexical selections, news articles can foreground actors and actions or relegate them to the background while also shaping public perceptions of blame and legitimacy. This dimension is therefore important as it helps analyse how the selected news outlets frame conflict, attribute key actors and assign agency in relation to violence and suffering.

At the level of discursive practice, the model focuses on how texts are produced and circulated within institutional settings and elements like sourcing patterns, quotation strategies, intertextual references and attribution verbs are analysed. This dimension is particularly useful in analysing factors such as the differences in the selection of sources, bias towards local or official sources, and attribution patterns across sample outlets.

At the social practice level, Fairclough's model of CDA seeks to connect discourse to broader geopolitical and ideological concepts. This dimension helps to examine how recurring media representations of Gaza relate to wider issues like power, legitimacy, conflict and resistance. In the context being analysed in this study, which is conflict reporting, repeated linguistic patterns might render representations of violence and resistance normalised, which in turn contributes to the legitimization of political actions.

As Fairclough's model bridges detailed linguistic analysis with institutional and ideological interpretations, it is highly suitable for this study. Through this theoretical lens, this study analyses how contemporary Western and Middle Eastern international media discourse constructs and represents violence and resistance in Gaza and how these constructs and representations reflect broader relations of power and ideological positioning.

This study analysed 30 English news texts (published between January 1st, 2025 and January 31st, 2026), with five articles drawn from six different outlets: The New York Times (NYT), CNN, Reuters, Al Jazeera English (AJE), Al Arabiya English (AAE), and The National. Using Fairclough's 3D model, each article was analysed on the textual level, the discursive practice level and the social practice level. As the dataset is small and purposively sampled, the count given below is used only as pattern indicators and are interpreted through qualitative reading of the lexical and grammatical choices recorded in the coding sheet.

Determination of “dominant frame”

Many of the selected articles contain military, humanitarian, and diplomatic elements. To ensure that frames are not treated as mutually exclusive, each text was only assigned a dominant frame when the frame was consistently sustained across the article through repeated lexical emphasis and organisational pattern.

Dominant conflict framing

Table 1 summarises the dominant frame distribution using the study's three core conflict framing categories, keeping one article categorised as other instead of forcing it into one of the categories.

Table 1: Distribution of dominant conflict frames across Western and Middle Eastern media outlets

Dominant Conflict Frame	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern Media (n=15)
Military operations	6	6
Humanitarian crisis	4	4
Diplomatic negotiations	4	5
Other	1	0

At first glance, there is no sharp divergence between the two groups. However, when viewed at the textual level, a more analytically meaningful difference appears. Even when the outlets share the same dominant frame, they differ in the linguistic realisation of the frame which is often through evaluative language, agency assignment and sourcing. An instance of this is how military operations in NYT is often described using lexis such as “ground assault” and “rout Hamas” (NYT, Article 2), whereas AJE pushes the conflict into a stronger moral register using phrases like “war of extermination” (AJE, Article 17). In Fairclough's terms, both texts occupy the “military operations” frame but they belong to two divergent orders of discourse: one is closer to security logic and strategic objectives, while the other is closer to humanitarian accountability.

Interpretation: The conflict doesn't just capture military events, diplomacy or humanitarian crises. It is also portrayed as either a security contest to be managed, or a humanitarian emergency that requires aid and witnesses or a diplomatic situation to be handled by skilled negotiators.

These constructions reflect broader geopolitical traditions of legitimising conflict as security necessities or humanitarian crimes, and also authority and control as diplomatic mediation.

Representation of key actors: role allocation and moral positioning

Israel: “Security actor” versus “active violator/aggressor”

Across the corpus, Israel is often represented as a high-agency actor, but the evaluation attached to it varies greatly. In several Western reports, Israel is frequently situated within a security-response situation related to Hamas, militants and hostages. For instance, NYT constructs an escalation as an effort to “pursue hostages and defeat Hamas” (NYT, Article 2), and CNN frames the conflict as a “devastating retaliation” (CNN, Article 9). These grammatical choices are not neutral, terms like this helps to construct coercive action as security management. In Middle Eastern reports however, Israel is more frequently portrayed as an agent responsible for harm and ceasefire breakdown using explicit lexis such as “violated”, “genocidal war”, and “block vital humanitarian aid” (AJE, Article 16). Similarly, AAE uses phrases like “Israeli airstrikes kill” to present Israel as an aggressor (AAE, Article 23).

Table 2: Israel's role foregrounded in coverage (presence counts)

Israel represented/foregrounded as...	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern outlets (n=15)	Total (N=30)
Military actor (strikes /offensives / occupation control)	13	12	25
Diplomatic actor (talks/ceasefire terms/mediation positions)	7	8	15
Aidgatekeeper (blockade/crossings/supply restrictions/aid obstruction)	6	3	9

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive; an article can foreground more than one role.

Note. “Aid gatekeeper” includes explicit references to restricting/controlling aid, crossings, supplies, or imposing conditions that shape humanitarian access.

Palestinians: civilianisation and collectivisation

Across the selected outlets, Palestinians are most commonly portrayed as civilians through several categories of vulnerability: displaced people, casualties, or bereaved returnees. NYT, Article 1 describes the displacement of Palestinians through intense lexicons like “overwhelming exodus”, “fleeing”, and “shellshocked” and these phrases centres the Palestinian experience of the conflict on victimhood and displacement. Similarly, CNN, Article 6 constructs Palestinians as returnees returning to “nothing but ruins” and “heartbreak”, thereby embedding the humanitarian harm done in affective witnessing. AJE, Article 10 renders Palestinians as quantified loss or harm (killed/injured/missing) which intensifies the scale but narrows subjectivity to casualty status.

Table 3: Palestinian voices and Palestinian/Gaza institutions in sourcing (presence counts)

Palestinian sources included (as cited/attributed voices)	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern outlets (n=15)	Total (N=30)
Palestinian civilians/residents/workers/protesters	7	1	8
Gaza local institutions (e.g., Gaza health ministry, civil defence, hospitals, municipal bodies)	7	8	15
Palestinian political institutions (e.g., Palestinian Authority)	1	0	1

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive

Note. This table captures who is quoted/attributed, not only who is discussed

Hamas: militant actor, security threat, political organisation, negotiating party

Hamas has several recurring portrayals. In hard-news escalation reporting (NYT Article 2, NYT Article 5, Reuters Article 13), Hamas appears primarily as either the target of operations, or as the actor linked to hostage situations. In ceasefire pieces (NYT Article 3, Reuters Article 12, The National Article 26 and 27), Hamas is constructed as a political agency that “agrees”, “rejects”, “softens stance” or “maintains demands”. One article (CNN, Article 7) portrays Hamas through the lens of a governance actor that has been weakened and fragmented. Another article (CNN, Article 9), through justificatory lexis like “golden moment” and “never surrender” portrays Hamas in the rare position of an ideological resistance narrator.

Table 4: Hamas representation categories (presence counts)

Hamas represented as...	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern outlets (n=15)	Total (N=30)
Armed/militant actor or military target (security-threat framing)	12	3	15
Negotiating actor (ceasefire / exchange / mediation context)	3	7	10
Governance/organisational actor (rule, fragmentation, “survival mode,” internal control)	3	1	4

Note: Categories are not mutually exclusive; they indicate recurring discourse roles.

Note. “Armed/militant actor” includes framing Hamas primarily through combat, threat, hostages, or as an operational target.

Agency Attribution and Linguistic Structures

A pattern that was repeated across outlets is a split in transitivity. Military actions are usually portrayed using active agency (“Israel launched strikes...”, “ground forces move in...”, “ Hamas attacked...”), attributing responsibility clearly to an actor. Civilian harm however is more often expressed using passive or result-focused constructions (“...were killed, “buried under rubble”, “ruins”) that highlights outcomes while putting the doer in the background of the clause. Explicit documentation of this pattern appears in NYT, Article 1 which portrays Israel's actions as active and CNN, Article 8, which used passive forms like “were killed” to treat death figures bureaucratically. Contrastingly, AJE articles attribute agentive responsibility to Israel more consistently using clauses like “Israel kills dozens” (AJE, Article 17) or “violated” (AJE, Article 16). Table 5 summarises the agency attribution used in each category of outlets. Categories listed in this table are mutually exclusive.

Table 5: Agency attribution style in descriptions of Palestinian harm (article-level qualitative coding)

Passivisation/result-focus in harm descriptions	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern outlets (n=15)	Total (N=30)
Frequent (harm repeatedly framed as outcomes/states rather than attributed acts)	2	2	4
Mixed (active attribution present, but outcome-focused phrasing occurs often)	8	9	17
Limited (harm usually tied to explicit actors in clauses)	5	4	9

Humanitarian Discourse

This discourse is present across all media outlets but in two recurring forms which are experiential humanitarian discourse, which constructs harm through embodied experience and ongoing aftermath (CNN Article 6, The National Article 30) and institutional/statistical humanitarian discourse which relies on institutional sources and numeric legitimacy to portray harm (Reuters Article 15, CNN Article 8). AJE however combines live updates and trackers which amplify immediacy and scale (AJE, Article 19) and explainers which use quantified claims to connect humanitarian harm to state action (AJE, Article 16).

Table 6: Humanitarian discourse intensity (as coded in the appendix)

Categories are *mutually exclusive* (one intensity label per article, based on the

Humanitarian discourse intensity	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern outlets (n=15)	Total (N=30)
Very strong	5	3	8
Strong	4	5	9
Moderate to strong	2	2	4
Moderate	2	1	3
Limited to moderate	1	1	2
Limited	1	2	3
Minimal	0	1	1

Sourcing patterns and quotation strategies

Instead of treating sourcing as just a neutral journalistic feature, CDA treats it as a mechanism of discursive authority. In the corpus, Western outlets frequently rely on official state/military voices and high-status institutions like Israel Defense Forces, Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, and UN as sources (CNN Article 6, NYT Article 1) which support a discourse where policy rationales and diplomatic management are frequently present. Middle Eastern outlets, particularly AJE, more often rely on local authority and locally grounded sources like Gaza health ministry and civil defence (AJE, Articles 15 and 19), alongside international organisations; AAE more frequently highlights Israeli security narration (AAE, Article 22) while The National leans more into elite mediation and analyst commentary (The National, Articles 26 and 29).

Table 7: Source types cited (presence counts)

Source type cited	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern outlets (n=15)	Total (N=30)
State/government officials (any country)	14	10	24
Military / armed-group spokespersons or official statements	10	4	14
International organisations / NGOs / monitoring projects	9	3	12
Local authorities (e.g., Gaza health ministry, civil defence, hospitals, municipal bodies)	7	8	15
Civilians / eyewitnesses (residents, workers, families, protesters)	9	1	10
Experts / analysts (legal, academic, conflict analysts)	4	3	7

Resistance framing

All forms of this discourse were present through the corpus. Armed resistance is constructed using labels and contexts like “militants”, (NYT Article 2 and Reuters Article 14) “armed gangs” (CNN, Article 7). Political resistance was most clearly portrayed in negotiation contexts, where Hamas is treated as a bargaining actor (NYT, Article 3; The National, Articles 26 and 27) and in anti-displacement claims where Hamas frames relocation as “genocide and displacement”, thereby politicising population movement (Reuters, Article 12). Civil resistance is shown in articles where endurance and return are focused on rather than armed action. For example, CNN, Article 6 frames the return to the north as persistence and doggedness amid devastation and destruction while The National, Article 30 frames the recovery and burial work done as an ongoing struggle for dignity under material deprivation.

Table 8: Dominant resistance framing type by media grouping (N=30)

Dominant resistance framing type	Western outlets (n=15)	Middle Eastern outlets (n=15)	Total (N=30)
Armed resistance (incl. securitised/delegitimised armed action)	6	4	10
Political resistance (negotiation demands, anti-displacement claims, statehood/anti-occupation discourse)	2	4	6
Civil/symbolic resistance (return, endurance, recovery, witnessing/journalism as resistance)	1	2	3
Minimal/absent (resistance not meaningfully developed as a discourse category)	6	5	11

Discussion

This study analysed the discursive construction of conflict and resistance in Gaza across a purposively selected corpus of 30 English news texts taken from six Western and Middle Eastern media outlets using Fairclough's three-dimensional model. When observed through this framework, the differences observed were not only limited to “focus”, but also linguistic resources used to construct reality (text), the routines through which the reports are constructed (discursive practice), and the ideological effects produced by these routines and linguistic resources. While on the surface level, there appears to be only a contrast between military and humanitarian emphasis, a closer look reveals a recurring struggle between three interwoven discourses: conflict as a necessity, conflict as a civilian catastrophe, and conflict as a diplomatic situation to be handled by brokers and states. This distinction is important because frames are not only used to describe events and happenings, they also shape what kinds of agency, legitimacy, and accountability becomes thinkable for audiences.

On the textual analysis level, the corpus repeatedly reveals how lexis and evaluative choices place the conflict within very particular moral and political purviews. For instance, reports coded as military escalation often used operational and strategic lexis like “ground assault”, “rout Hamas”, which tends to normalise conflict as rational in a security narrative. By contrast, several Al Jazeera texts enforce an accountability register through evaluative terms like “violated”

and through high-moral claims like “war of extermination” which construe conflict not as a strategy but as breach and exterminatory harm. These findings align with earlier CDA-oriented scholarship that identifies how linguistic framing can legitimise or delegitimise conflict by painting it with security rationales or legal-moral registers. Amer's (2022) analysis of the BBC and NYT coverage of Israeli's onslaught on Gaza in May 2021 is especially relevant here. The pattern of constructing Israeli military action as a war against Hamas and as retaliation identified by Amer fits into the way security-centred lexical chains in the present corpus paint the conflict as a response and as a necessity rather than as a structural dominion. This shows that militarised lexis and justificatory framing work together to push a narrative where Israel's actions appears as purposeful.

Actor representation in this corpus further portrays Fairclough's argument that discourse is constitutive. Actors are not simply mentioned, they are constructed into different categories with unequal legitimacy. For instance, Israel consistently appears as a high-agency actor, but the evaluative meaning of the agency differs by outlet and genre. In some reports, Israeli action is framed in vocabulary that portrays coercive violence as risk management. In other reports, Israel is represented as an active violator through recurring agentive predicates like “violated”, “kills”, “blocks aid”). This contrasting view helps to refine the bias argument found in earlier studies; instead of treating the bias as just “more Israeli voices”, the findings of the present study implies that legitimization can also happen through recurring rule allocation and evaluation. This aligns with Taha and Al-Khanji's (2020) findings that Western coverage afford Israeli military and political actors bias not only through space and quotations patterns, but also through choice of reporting verbs and attribution strategies that shape the narration of Palestinian suffering.

Palestinian representation across the corpus is dominated by humanitarian subject positions like casualties, survivors, and returnees, built through affective and catastrophic lexis like “exodus”, “heartbreak”, “ruins”, and “famine.” This, however, does not indicate a lack of empathy as Palestinian suffering is vividly foregrounded in many texts. This discursive issue portrays Palestinians more often as the affected rather than as political agents. In Fairclough's terms, this is not only a transitivity pattern, it is also a representational one. El Damanhoury et al.'s study on the differential treatment of Palestinian death and the politics of death toll reporting directly reflects this pattern. The current corpus shows that Palestinian lives are often rendered either through mass quantification or through humanitarian testimony, while political agency is not often elaborated on outside the figure of Hamas.

At the level of discursive practice, the sourcing patterns observed in the corpus help explain why textual differences recur. The prevalence of official sources reflects that elite sources set the boundaries of legitimate interpretation and this current corpus illustrates how this does not only affect who speaks, but what kind of story is being told.

Official sources more readily support security rationales and diplomatic process narratives while local authorities, eyewitnesses, and humanitarian workers more readily support experiential accounts of civilian life. This pattern suggests that credibility can easily become a function of power: the suffering in Gaza is not only reported but is also repeatedly subjected to processes of validation and recognition unevenly distributed across actors.

The observation across the corpus shows that the framing of resistance across the outlets was not uniform. In Western outlets, resistance most frequently appeared through the militancy or armed resistance lens, especially in relation to Hamas as a militant group, armed actor, or cause of escalation. In Middle Eastern outlets, resistance takes on varied forms. It appears not only appear as armed resistance through militancy, but also as political resistance through claims of statehood, displacement refusal, and anti-occupation discourse and as civil resistance through endurance, recovery work and persistence under siege conditions. This differentiation is important because it shows that resistance in media discourse can be narrowed to militancy only or it can be broadened to include political and civil forms as well. This study extends existing scholarship by showing that resistance framing in Gaza coverage is not limited to simply being present or absent and that its categorisation and legitimisation differs according to the discursive priorities of the outlets

At the level of social practice, the patterns observed in this corpus are best represented as part of a wider debate as to what becomes “common sense” or “moral right” about Gaza. The recurring struggle between the discourses of securitised war, humanitarian emergency and diplomatic management helps determine what counts as violence, what sources are treated as credible and what Palestinian agency can be recognised without being automatically classified as a threat. In this dimension, the articles in the corpus do not just reflect geopolitical situations, they reproduce the terms on which the situation in Gaza makes sense to international audiences. In this sense, the study shows how discourse contributes to broader ideological struggles over visibility, legitimacy, blame and resistance.

When taken together, the results of this study examine the study's primary focus on the discursive construction of conflict, actors, resistance, and responsibility and show that the disparities between Western and Middle Eastern media coverage of Gaza appear not only in topic emphasis but also in actor construction, linguistic form, and source selection. In this regard, the study extends the existing body of scholarship by integrating all these dimensions into a unified comparative Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Previous research has investigated particular outlets or events; however, the current analysis offers a concentrated comparison across various outlets and multiple discourse features simultaneously. This demonstrates the representation of the same conflict through varying narrative priorities, grammatical approaches, and source hierarchies.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the study draws from a dataset of only 30 articles from six media outlets. While this allows a comparative analysis of Western and Middle Eastern media outlets, a larger dataset will provide a more comprehensive understanding of discourse patterns and representations. Second, the analysis focused on articles that were published within a specific timeframe of the Gaza conflict, excluding news articles published outside this timeframe and the possibility of the evolution of media narratives due to the shifts in international political dynamics. Third, this study only examined articles published in English language, excluding media coverage in Arabic, Hebrew and other languages and their narrative strategies, terminologies and discursive structures. Fourth, the coding was conducted by a single researcher, and although consistency was strengthened through predefined categories and repeated review of the corpus, some degree of interpretive subjectivity remains inevitable in qualitative discourse analysis. Consequently, the results should be interpreted as indicative of discourse patterns within the chosen corpus rather than as comprehensive representations of all Western and Middle Eastern media coverage of Gaza.

Future studies could build on this study by expanding the dataset to include more articles, more media outlets and a wider timeframe to provide a broader dataset and allow more in-depth analysis. Also, future studies can combine critical discourse analysis with computational text analysis methods to allow researchers identify broader patterns in actor representation, framing and lexical choices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that Western and Middle Eastern media outlets cover the Gaza conflict in different ways regarding framing, actor construction, agency attribution, and sourcing practices. These disparities signify overarching institutional and ideological frameworks that influence the presentation and comprehension of conflict by audiences. Utilising a comparative Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the study elucidates the dual role of discourse in both reporting events and structuring meaning, visibility, and responsibility within conflict narratives. In doing so, it adds to the ongoing research on how the media covers the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and shows how important it is to critically look at how language and sourcing affect how people understand complicated geopolitical events.

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