



[Bias Media Coverage of the War in Gaza Affects Public Opinion](#)

By Jacob Van Veldhuizen

Media coverage of the war in Gaza has leaned in favor of Israeli accounts since the current crisis began. Western media and officials appear to have largely adopted the Israeli narrative where politicians conflate Palestinian resistance with terrorism and Palestinian protest with antisemitism. Journalists and talk show hosts have framed the issue as exclusively one where the Israelis are responding to a terror attack. They have effectively removed any nuance or historical perspective from the conflict, creating a simple contrast of good versus evil.

Arguably, a history of media bias has helped shape the degree to which pundits and politicians have embraced the Israeli version of current events. A few academics have documented the predisposition. In a 2018 study entitled "Bias Detection of Palestinian/Israeli Conflict in Western Media" researchers found that a higher number of media outlets carried pro-Israeli stories compared to channels that carried pro-Palestinian content: "Pro-Israeli bias has the majority by 5 [media] outlets and 2 for Pro-Palestinian through western [sic] media coverage for [the] 2014 Palestinian-Israel conflict." Similarly, in a 2021 analysis of 33,000 *New York Times* articles during the First and Second Intifadas (uprisings that took place in the occupied territories), a Massachusetts Institute of Technology researcher noted "clear patterns of bias against Palestinians in the Times' coverage through two main linguistic features: (1) a disproportionate use of the passive voice to refer to negative or violent action perpetrated towards Palestinians and (2) use of more negative and violent rhetoric in reference to Palestinians compared to Israelis." In fact, as far back as 1993 Janice Shamon of Boston Media Action conducted a review of 93 *New York Times* articles on Israel's deportation of Palestinian Islamists and concluded that "reporting and analysis...reflected time and again the point of view of the Israeli government."

The roots of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are far more nuanced than many are willing to consider or accept; and the ongoing media misrepresentation of certain aspects of the war serve to reinforce biases rather than impartially present facts. A CNN article detailing the experience of an elderly Israeli woman who was kidnapped and subsequently released by Hamas is one example. While the article's title reads "I Went Through Hell," its content reflects a different reality, particularly as international media broadly reported the woman's acknowledgement that she was treated well. While the journey through the tunnels was undoubtedly frightening and traumatizing, she explains that upon reaching their destination she was greeted by "people who told us we believe in the Quran" and promised "not to harm" the hostages. She then recounts how she and the other hostages ate the same food as the fighters and were given adequate medical attention by doctors.

CNN editors selected an inflammatory quote to headline their piece as an illustration of the good versus bad dynamic pushed by Israeli commentators. Complicity or fear of recrimination has even led numerous news outlets to apologize for any insinuation that the Israelis are committing war crimes, let alone unjustified violent acts. Following the bombing of the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, the *New York Times* reported that the Israelis were responsible for the blast, relying possibly on a now-deleted post by Hananya Naftali, a digital aide to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, stating "Israeli Air Force struck a Hamas terrorist base inside a hospital in Gaza." However, soon thereafter the publication issued an editor's note stating that they relied too heavily on initial reports from

Hamas and should have been more careful with the presentation of content and transparency of sources. Rollback from such a major news source has been interpreted by some as the result of pressure from pro-Israeli groups.

Palestinian rights advocates criticize the media for their historical hypocrisy toward the conflict. Major Western media outlets do not report the atrocities committed regularly in the occupied territories. Prior to the current crisis this year alone, major shifts in Israeli policies to undermine Palestinian rights took place. Examples include the property expropriation and shooting of civilians in Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah district earlier this year. Increased incursions by settlers and far right militants onto Palestinian property causing significant damage, attacks and closures of the Dome of the Rock Mosque, expansion of settlements, and so on. In fact, in the first half of this year, almost 200 Palestinians had already been killed by Israelis. Tor Wennesland, UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, told the UN Security Council that “the unabated expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, Israel’s demolition of Palestinian homes, operations by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank areas under Palestinian administrative and police control, and attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian villages” caused growing despair about the future among Palestinians. These events are hardly covered in Western media; and almost no coverage occurs in mainstream American channels with any depth.

Violence and censorship further exacerbate the effective delivery of news. Reporters who try to relay the Palestinian perspective have voiced their fears about covering the war. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that at least 24 journalists have been killed as of October 26th. Israel has also issued emergency regulations to control content and broadcasts about the war. Aljazeera, an award-winning Arab broadcaster, faces ongoing threats that they will be shuttered. These and other deterrents against any critical analysis of the Israeli narrative have impacted what is broadcast to international audiences.

Media portrayals of the conflict can also be skewed by the approach to polling whether their own or taken from other sources. Mainstream outlets may not have representative demographics in their methodology, often showing one set of results for all those surveyed while then highlighting a focused set of data from college-educated whites. Some channels recognize that respondents from different racial and/or religious backgrounds are under-represented; however, this doesn’t deter the publication of the results.

The Hill and other media outlets, for example, published results from a Quinnipiac University study on October 17th in which registered voters responded to questions about their opinions on America’s response to various crises. The primary topics were the Ukraine and Israeli wars. According to this poll, a considerable number of white and Hispanic voters believe that supporting the Israelis is in the U.S. national interest. Nevertheless, with 168.42 million registered American voters in 2022, it reasonable to question the validity of polls that limit the entire voting spectrum to 1,000 respondents across all demographic segments.

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31. Do you support or oppose sending additional U.S. military aid to Israel?

| | BANNER 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|---------|------------|-------|----------|------|----------|-----|---------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|--------------|-----|--|
| | DEMOGRAPHICS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | GENDER | | AREA | | | | PARTY ID | | | | AGE | | | | RACE | | | UNION MEMBER | | |
| TOTAL | MALE | FE-MALE | NORTH EAST | SOUTH | MID-WEST | WEST | DEM | REP | IND/OTH | 18-34 | 35-49 | 50-64 | 65+ | WHITE | BLACK | HISP | YES | NO | | |
| Total | 1000 | 482 | 507 | 208 | 336 | 241 | 215 | 326 | 309 | 321 | 241 | 248 | 278 | 225 | 679 | 120 | 115 | 169 | 823 | |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | |
| Support | 576 | 287 | 284 | 122 | 208 | 130 | 116 | 184 | 200 | 169 | 117 | 130 | 181 | 145 | 419 | 50 | 67 | 90 | 484 | |
| | 58% | 60% | 56% | 59% | 62% | 54% | 54% | 56% | 65% | 53% | 49% | 52% | 65% | 64% | 62% | 42% | 58% | 53% | 59% | |
| Oppose | 345 | 173 | 167 | 71 | 109 | 82 | 83 | 115 | 86 | 132 | 109 | 101 | 76 | 57 | 209 | 60 | 43 | 62 | 281 | |
| | 34% | 36% | 33% | 34% | 32% | 34% | 39% | 35% | 28% | 41% | 45% | 41% | 27% | 25% | 31% | 50% | 37% | 37% | 34% | |
| Undecided | 73 | 20 | 53 | 14 | 17 | 26 | 16 | 25 | 22 | 19 | 14 | 15 | 20 | 22 | 50 | 8 | 4 | 17 | 56 | |
| | 7% | 4% | 10% | 7% | 5% | 11% | 7% | 8% | 7% | 6% | 6% | 6% | 7% | 10% | 7% | 7% | 3% | 10% | 7% | |
| Refused | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | - | 2 | 2 | |
| | 1% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 1% | 1% | | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 2% | 1% | | 0% | 0% | |

Media outlets may not always use scientific methods in crafting their queries. A *USA Today* survey, for example, asked a question whether readers were in favor of supporting the Israelis as they responded to “the Hamas terrorist attack.” In scientific terms, the phrasing of the question is clearly leading, which can impact the outcomes. Notwithstanding the slant, according to the results 58% of Republicans were predictably in favor of stronger military support while 35% of Democrats agreed.

23. Do you approve or disapprove of the United States sending weapons and military equipment to Israel in response to the Hamas terrorist attack?

| | REGISTERED VOTERS | | | | | | WHITE | |
|------------|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------------|-----|
| | Tot | Rep | Dem | Ind | Men | Wom | 4 YR COLL DEG | |
| | | | | | | | Yes | No |
| Approve | 64% | 79% | 59% | 61% | 63% | 65% | 70% | 70% |
| Disapprove | 28 | 19 | 29 | 32 | 31 | 25 | 22 | 24 |
| DK/NA | 8 | 3 | 12 | 8 | 6 | 10 | 8 | 6 |

| | AGE IN YRS | | | | WHITE | | | | |
|------------|------------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 18-34 | 35-49 | 50-64 | 65+ | Men | Wom | Wht | Blk | Hsp |
| Approve | 39% | 59% | 77% | 78% | 69% | 71% | 70% | 51% | 52% |
| Disapprove | 51 | 35 | 17 | 15 | 26 | 20 | 23 | 41 | 37 |
| DK/NA | 10 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 12 |

Recent polls, however, do highlight a generational divide regarding foreign policy that can be attributed to the difference in media consumption between generations where older generations tend to consume information through carefully crafted content while younger audiences take in the news through crowdsourcing on a wide range of social media platforms. It is on these sites that unfiltered, live content is accessible since it comes from individuals or groups that are on the ground. Despite concerted efforts by the platforms to validate or censor content as well as organized efforts by special interests to control the narrative, all indicators are that traditional editorial approaches are becoming less effective in framing the news.

The contrast between traditional outlets and content creator news, and the attempts of social media platforms to police the content has been particularly challenging during the current Gaza crisis. In a Brookings Institution commentary Valerie Wirtschafter observes that “[t]he fragile ecosystem built up around the online information space — and the ways in which it has fueled the media — may be irreparably broken.” It is the next generation of pundits that will repair that fragmented environment; and media channels wishing to reclaim legitimacy as impartial purveyors of the facts will face a stark reckoning as a result.

In a 2022 report entitled “The changing news habits and attitudes of younger audiences,” Dr. Kirsten Eddy demonstrated that 34% of 18–24-year-olds rely on news sites or apps as their main source, compared to 50% in 2015, while 39% rely on social media, compared to 25% in 2015. While ratings and the quest for advertising dollars have all but eliminated the incisive, investigative journalism of the past, there remains a need for legitimate journalism. That void, however, will soon be filled exclusively by social media influencers and content creators reporting on their surroundings, while traditional channels that have tried to control public perceptions will either go bankrupt, become entertainment outlets, or finally catch up the new generation’s demand for honest reporting.