

US Media Policy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Abstract

The rapid dissemination of news and the creation of media hype have made social media highly powerful in the battle for public opinion. However, today, social media acts as a double-edged sword in covering the Gaza war. While it provides unprecedented coverage opportunities, it also faces serious challenges. Despite limitations such as the rapid spread of information—which opens the door to misinformation and raises fact-checking concerns—social media in the United States has sought to support Israel. This has heightened suspicions of manipulation, division, and narrative distortion in the eyes of global public opinion. From this perspective, the present article, using a descriptive-analytical method, aims to answer the key question: What role do American media play in supporting Israel in the war against Palestine? The research findings indicate that the gaps in the coverage of the Gaza war by American media significantly influence public opinion and seek to shape the discourse surrounding it. As a result, they contribute to a one-dimensional narrative that, by inadequately presenting Palestinian perspectives, omitting essential historical and cultural contexts, and neglecting to humanize those most affected, reinforces misconceptions and biases. This has, in turn, led to a decline in the perception of democracy in the eyes of public opinion.

Keywords: Social media, United States, Public opinion, Israel, Palestine

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Introduction

The development of social media platforms has transformed communication methods between the government and the people, introducing new forms of citizen participation. In this way, it facilitates government activities and actions, making them more transparent, consultative, and participatory. Following this literature, social media serves as a valuable platform for overcoming communication barriers commonly encountered in public relations and governance. During crises, social media enables people to seek emergency signals and safety guidelines, receiving valuable information quickly. It acts as an essential platform for information transmission and as a channel for risk communication during crises. However, one of the major challenges social media faces is the spread of conflicting information and news, which may prevent people from achieving the expected value from such social technology. During times of intense political disputes, social networks function as a channel for engaging with political platforms. By using these networks, opposing parties can run propaganda campaigns, attack opponents, and communicate with people to influence their viewpoints. Ultimately, this has created a platform for virtual conflict that matches, and at times surpasses, real-world conflict. By taking advantage of easy access to social networks, a country can utilize the virtual world to harness all its interactive and decentralized energies for public mobilization and maximizing the number of its supporters. The ease with which people can now connect has led to the formation of electronic communities with different or shared interests.

Given the ongoing conflict and war between Israel and Palestine, it seems that covering this conflict using manipulative methods to reach national and international audiences is easier than ever. A large amount of online content, such as images and videos, lacks context or, worse, conveys misleading messages. Perhaps more than any other conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—previously referred to as the Arab-Israeli conflict—has been the richest source for studying media warfare against peace in the modern era. In fact, a significant volume of literature exists on media coverage of this conflict, with most of it focusing on Western media, particularly the United States. This is likely because, until recently, Western media dominated global news coverage of the conflict.

As a result, the United States, due to its shared geostrategic and geopolitical interests with Israel, has engaged in biased efforts. This issue raises intellectual challenges and necessitates an evaluation of American media coverage of the Gaza crisis, given Israel's war against Palestine. Therefore, the present study aims to examine how media and political actors attempt to shape public opinion through targeted language. This research enables us to deeply analyze the complexities of the multifaceted role of social media in reporting conflicts and covering wars. Understanding these complexities is crucial for assessing its diverse impacts on public perception and engagement during challenging times. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of mastering media literacy skills to maximize the benefits of social media platforms while minimizing any potential harm during times of war and conflict.

Theoretical Foundations

With each technological advancement, daily life is affected. This is especially true for advancements in media technology. While media is an all-encompassing aspect of everyday life, its increasing significance concerning government and political information is particularly striking. The internet has become an increasingly important tool for American citizens, enabling them not only to gain political knowledge but also to acquire the political and economic resources necessary for effective self-governance (Winner, 2003, p. 167). A broad understanding of social media includes the way new technological tools "provide a two-way street that allows us to communicate and share our thoughts with others." New communication tools have facilitated mass online interactions, enabling engagement between individuals and groups, as well as across borders, including content sharing and collaboration on large-scale activities. Various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, Google, Wikipedia, and others have significantly contributed to building communities and disseminating information (Monshipouri and Prompichai, 2018, p. 38). In this context, Bruce Bimber suggested that the internet might not be as politically powerful as some scholars would like to believe. He developed a theory called "accelerated pluralism" to describe the potential future relationship. This theory states that "the network is accelerating the formation and actions of issue-based groups, altering the political power structure in the United States, but it has not revolutionized or qualitatively transformed it into a new era of democracy." He believes that the expansion of communication and its impact on political participation depend on an individual's inherent willingness to

engage. This means that a person would likely participate even without the addition of the internet (Bimber, 1998, p. 134).

Social media allows individuals to engage with others on a personal or group level. With limitless interaction, social media has become a new public space. When social media is used as a public arena, it creates the illusion that every issue related to social matters will capture internet users' attention and provoke reactions (Nurul Huda et al., 2022, p. 902). With the presence of social media, citizen participation in government is increasingly moving online, and initiatives have been mostly passive (Bui, 2016, p. 89). Social media provides three essential functions for a developing society: offering information, reducing the cost of political participation, and increasing the ability of opposing forces to mobilize (Chang et al., 2013, p. 150).

Due to its features that facilitate interaction, proximity, and easy access for the public, media can foster political awareness (Zempi and Rahayu, 2019, p. 92). The role of media as a strategic tool for new social movements facilitates reasoning and thinking in mobilizing support (Galuh, 2016, p. 73).

Zeynep Tufekci argued that the most significant advancement of social networks (compared to traditional media channels) is their ability to allow individuals to discover and spread knowledge within their networks. Thanks to complex algorithms, users can capture and present information derived from past activities, preferences, and other shared content in their networks. However, people do not merely passively follow or share texts from authorities. Instead, social networking sites allow ordinary people to respond to ruling elites

using hashtags or direct engagement (Nurul Huda et al., 2022, p. 903).

Socially-driven politics is based on the capacity to influence people's minds. The primary communication channel between the political system and citizens is the mass media system, primarily television. Until recently, and still to a large extent today, media have formed an interconnected system in which print journalism typically produces primary information, television broadcasts it to mass audiences, and radio customizes the interaction. In a networked society, politics is primarily media-driven. The functioning of the political system is showcased through the media to garner support or at least minimize opposition from citizens, who have become consumers in the political marketplace. However, this does not mean that power rests in the hands of the media. Political actors exert considerable influence over the media. In fact, today's 24-hour news cycle has increased the importance of politicians for the media, as the media constantly needs content to feed its continuous cycle (Castells, 2008, pp. 240-241).

In fact, the main issue is not shaping the mind with explicit messages in the media, but rather the absence of specific content in the media. What does not exist in the media, does not exist in public consciousness, even if it may be scattered in individual minds. Therefore, a political message is necessarily a media message. And whenever a politically related message is conveyed through the media, it must be expressed in the specific language of the media. This often means the language of television. The need to format a message in its media form has significant consequences, as established by a long tradition in communication research. The idea that "the medium is the

message" is not entirely correct in an empirical sense, but it certainly has a fundamental impact on the form and effect of the message (Castells, 2008, p. 241). To the extent that any political intervention in the public sphere requires a presence in the media space, and since the media space is largely shaped by commerce and governments that set political parameters in terms of the formal political system—albeit in its pluralism—the emergence of rebellious politics cannot be separated from the emergence of a new type of media space, namely the space created around the process of self-mass communication (Castells, 2008, p. 243). From this perspective, power in networks is of great significance. Network power refers to the power of actors and organizations and includes the networks that form the core of the global network. These global networks exercise power through inclusion or exclusion (Castells, 2009, p. 42). According to Castells, actors maintain communicative power that connects different networks. Programmers are actors in distinct networks who, through linguistic discourses, frame the possibilities of networks and actors. "Power in the network society is communicative power" (Munch, 2012, p. 182).

Mass media operate through agenda-setting, priming, and framing. Power is based on the ability and potential of specific actors to articulate particular issues. Additionally, Castells emphasizes that power is not exclusively in the hands of political elites, and social actors struggle to construct a discourse of reality through framing and counter-framing. However, since political elites hold a superior position, their messages are more likely to become national and international news. They have privileged access to knowledge, and their political choices often have real-world

consequences (Munch, 2012, p. 183). Thus, in the network society, power is redefined but not eliminated. Under these circumstances, people attempt to understand the sources of their fear and hope (Castells, 2009, p. 50). In this context, the state remains a key factor in defining power relations. Communication networks emerge from the interaction between media and politics. The most direct form of media politics is propaganda and control, which involves:

- a) Fabrication and dissemination of messages that distort facts and induce misinformation to advance government interests; and
- b) Censorship of any message that undermines those interests, if necessary, through criminalizing communication, prosecuting messengers, and defining state control mechanisms (Castells, 2009, p. 264).

Media politics leads to the personalization of politics around leaders who can be effectively marketed in the political arena. This should not be trivialized as merely the color of a tie or the appearance of a face. Rather, it is the symbolic embodiment of a message of trust surrounding a person and then, in terms of imagery, that person's projected image (Castells, 2008, p. 241).

Based on the above discussion, the development of social media platforms has transformed the modes of communication between the government and the people, introducing new forms of citizen participation. In this way, it facilitates government activities and actions, making them more participatory, transparent, consultative, and collaborative. Following this literature, social media serves as a valuable platform for overcoming communication

barriers that are typically encountered in public relations and government interactions.

During crises, social media enables people to seek emergency signals and safety instructions, quickly receiving valuable information. It functions as an essential platform for disseminating information and as a channel for risk communication throughout crises (Al-Omouh et al., 2023, p. 1). From this perspective, it can be argued that media accessibility reflects the connection between media and its political and social environment, as well as the governing frameworks. While mass media, in terms of origin and professional function, are primarily national institutions, they respond to the political and social pressures and expectations of their audiences. Thus, they articulate the national interests identified by societal actors.

Research Methodology

The present research employs a descriptive-explanatory approach, and data collection is based on library and documentary studies. Explanatory research allows the study to examine why something happens despite the limited available information. From this perspective, this research adopts a qualitative approach and utilizes library research methods. Library research itself is a bibliographic investigation within a scientific system and utilizes data collection techniques from various bibliographic materials related to the research objectives. Conducting library research requires the researcher to follow several steps, including:

- 1) Defining the research topic
- 2) Collecting information or data related to the research topic

- 3) Conducting focused research
- 4) Searching for and classifying obtained documents
- 5) Taking research notes
- 6) Reviewing documents
- 7) Reclassifying documents, and finally
- 8) Drafting or writing the research report (Basit, 2023, p. 88).

Thus, in this study, a qualitative approach is adopted, utilizing primary sources such as official documents and online-retrieved publications, as well as secondary sources including research publications (journals, articles, books, reports, etc.). From this perspective, the present study relies on data obtained from primary and secondary sources and will use statements and interviews for information gathering. Secondary data include academic journals, books, online articles, and news obtained from the internet.

Common Interests and U.S. Comprehensive Support for Israel in the Gaza War

The Middle East has long been of pivotal importance to the United States, as successive U.S. administrations have pursued a broad set of interrelated objectives, including securing vital energy resources, preventing Soviet and Iranian influence, ensuring the survival and security of Israel and Arab allies, countering terrorism, promoting democracy, and reducing refugee flows. The United States has long been Israel's ally and primary security partner because the U.S. supports the existence of a Jewish state (Robinson, 2023). U.S. support

for Israel has manifested in three forms: political support, financial aid, and military assistance. The United States and Israel maintain one of the strongest political and military alliances in the world. U.S. political support for Israel extends beyond the Palestinian issue to encompass regional geopolitics. Two key factors underpin this alliance:

1) The U.S. and Israel share values, interests, and objectives in the Middle East. According to mainstream U.S. political thought, Israel is the only democracy in the region. In a region plagued by failing states and ideologies hostile to U.S. hegemony, Israel stands as a key ideological ally.

2) The U.S. and Israel share a strategic vision, which relies on mutual understanding of regional threats and challenges. During the Cold War, Israel was a crucial U.S. partner in containing the Soviet threat (Erdoğan and Habash, 2020, p. 131). Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran has emerged as their common adversary. Both nations are concerned about Iran's growing power and its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas. As a result of these shared interests, the United States has committed to maintaining Israel's military superiority over any hostile regional coalition. By law, the U.S. government must ensure that arms sales to other Middle Eastern countries do not "adversely affect Israel's qualitative military edge" (Robinson, 2023). Since World War II, the U.S. has provided Israel with more foreign aid than any other country. Under a 2016 Memorandum of Understanding, the U.S. pledged to provide nearly \$4 billion annually to Israel, including \$500 million for missile defense programs. More than half of the foreign military aid requested by President Biden

for Fiscal Year 2022 was allocated to Israel (Robinson, 2023).

Historically, Israel has played a crucial role in upholding a U.S.-centric order in the Middle East. However, shifts in U.S. foreign policy regarding Palestine reveal that this policy varies across administrations, significantly impacting regional tensions and the peace process (Hamdi, 2018, p. 251). The widespread U.S. military movements following the Al-Aqsa Storm operation indicate that Washington considers Israel not just a key pillar but the defining pillar of its Middle East policy. However, the surprise and execution style of Al-Aqsa Storm severely damaged Israel's defensive deterrence. This increased the significance of another key component in Israel's security strategy: strengthening its special security relationship with the U.S. The U.S. protective umbrella over Israel is evaluated as an effort to restore Israel's deterrence and offensive strategy (Aslani, 2023). Following Hamas's October 7 attacks, President Biden immediately announced additional military aid, including ammunition and interceptors to replenish the Iron Dome (Zanotti and Sharp, 2024, p. 8). Thus, the U.S. continues to provide political and material support for Israel's efforts to eliminate Hamas's rule in Gaza and secure the return of hostages.

U.S. Media Strategy Regarding Israel

Media are related to and control the policy-making process in two main ways: (1) by sorting important topics in a way that makes them presentable to the public and policymakers (agenda-setting) and (2) by questioning policies in a manner that adheres to their meaning. In this context, Facebook and Twitter, which

often share political data and information, are effective (Sutan et al., 2021, p. 139). In this regard, media access indicates the media's connection to its political and social environment and the frameworks governing it. While mass media, in terms of origin and professional function, are primarily national institutions, they respond to the political and social pressures and expectations of their supporters. Therefore, they express the national interests identified by societal actors. However, the crucial link between the media and the government becomes more apparent during crises. The significance of studying the coverage of conflicts and crises in social media is not only due to their influence on public opinion trends. Additionally, their direct connection to governments' foreign policy highlights the importance of media framing of conflict-related topics. In this regard, Douglas (1995) notes that the media framework of foreign policy issues is issued within political and cultural ideology to enhance public perceptions of international affairs. This phenomenon is known as "news domestication," which means translating news for local audiences and framing it in ways that align with the political conditions and dominant culture of society. Hence, it can be said that media go beyond being just an informational and analytical source on specific topics; they play a fundamental role. While prioritizing a particular issue means attracting an audience, it also plays an effective role in shaping what occupies their thoughts. Focusing on specific characteristics, repeatedly emphasizing them, and ignoring others influence the perceived importance of those features in people's minds (Awais et al., 2022, pp. 8820-8821).

In light of this, for years, the geopolitical war between Israel and Palestine has dominated

media coverage (Ali et al., 2024, p. 1212). The failures and ruling mentality of digital platforms have led us to refer to this as a new Orientalism in the digital sphere or digital Orientalism. Orientalism is a stereotypical and discriminatory lens through which Western countries view the Middle East and North Africa. Western nations have used this perspective to justify dominance and colonization through various means, including war, media, governance, and policies (Alimardani & Elswah, 2021). In this context, the shared ties between the United States and Israel have extended to the realm of U.S. media's strategic activism in distorting the narratives of the Gaza war. The fragmented reflection of Gaza's harsh realities by American media is influenced by multiple factors, all of which stem from corporate ownership structures that avoid risk, negative impacts from mobilized interest groups, the lack of diversity in newsrooms, and audience preferences. However, the most critical source of media bias in foreign affairs coverage is U.S. foreign policy itself (Youmans, 2024).

The Reversal of U.S. Media Narratives on the Israel-Palestine War

The Gaza war, which began in October 2023, has been a global focal point due to its significant human casualties, widespread destruction, and high death toll. By the end of May 2024, about 1.7 million people—representing 75% of Gaza's population—had been displaced. Nearly half of them have been stranded in the southern strip, which remains under continuous Israeli military attacks. More than 80,000 people have been injured, and among those with complete records, more

than half are women or children under 18. It is estimated that around 17,000 children have been orphaned or separated from their parents/families (London et al., 2024, p. 2). The economic losses have been equally devastating, amounting to billions of dollars, further crippling Gaza's economy. Meanwhile, in a fragmented archipelago of isolated Palestinian cities, including Jerusalem and the Green Line, occupation policies continue to threaten livelihoods, weakening the economic outlook (Khalidi & Iwida, 2024, p. 80). The scale and severity of this humanitarian catastrophe demand a closer examination of how it has been covered by international media, particularly in mainstream Western media, compared to analysts, researchers, and other social media platforms.

In an era where media warfare parallels armed conflict, possessing immense power to construct or challenge narratives and shape public sentiment, U.S. media seek to distort the narrative of the Israel-Palestine war. This underscores the obstacles media face in portraying a nuanced image of the conflict, offering insights into the complexities of war reporting (Fahmy et al., 2024, p. 153). In this regard, it is argued that social media platforms may be influential in shaping protest movements and rejecting dominant narratives (Nurul Huda et al., 2022, p. 903). From this perspective, the Gaza conflict is no different from other 21st-century wars, where domination over the digital media landscape is now an integral part of aggressors' overall strategy—to win hearts and minds, engage with like-minded supporters, and counter opponents' claims.

However, what distinguishes the Middle Eastern war is the disproportionate distortion of online messaging. Generalizing it is difficult,

as each person's social media experience is unique due to algorithmic customization based on individual interests (Scott, 2024). However, American social media—due to the overlapping interests of its politicians with Israel—has directed its supportive stance against Palestine.

As claimed, major social media platforms headquartered in the United States restrict access to information regarding the Israel-Gaza war and enforce pro-Israel censorship (Medet, 2024). In this context, writers, activists, journalists, filmmakers, and ordinary users worldwide have argued that posts containing hashtags such as "Free Palestine" and "Resistance with Palestine," as well as messages supporting Palestinian civilians killed by Israeli forces, are being hidden by platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, and TikTok (Shankar et al, 2023).

In this regard, interviews and data reviews have revealed that hate speech and incitement to violence against Palestinians have occurred on Meta platforms (BSR, 2022, p. 4). In the Gaza war, the personal views of Meta's owner, Mark Zuckerberg, and those who advertise for this company can be seen in the policies they have implemented. For example, immediately after October 7, Facebook formed a team and removed nearly 800,000 pieces of content within a week (Medet, 2024). Meta's new social media platform, based in the U.S., did not respond to Al Jazeera's request for comment. In response, the company stated that it had removed newly created accounts affiliated with Hamas, deleted "tens of thousands of posts" for sharing graphic media and spreading hate speech, and updated its policies on what it considers to have "news value" (Dixit, 2023).

In this context, a user named "Indian Muslim" shared a video titled "More Power to You #Hamas" and claimed that the clip showed an armed Hamas fighter firing a large shoulder-mounted missile and shooting down an Israeli helicopter. Several misinformation researchers, both on social media and in interviews with Al Jazeera, pointed out that the video was from a video game called Arma 3 (Dixit, 2023).

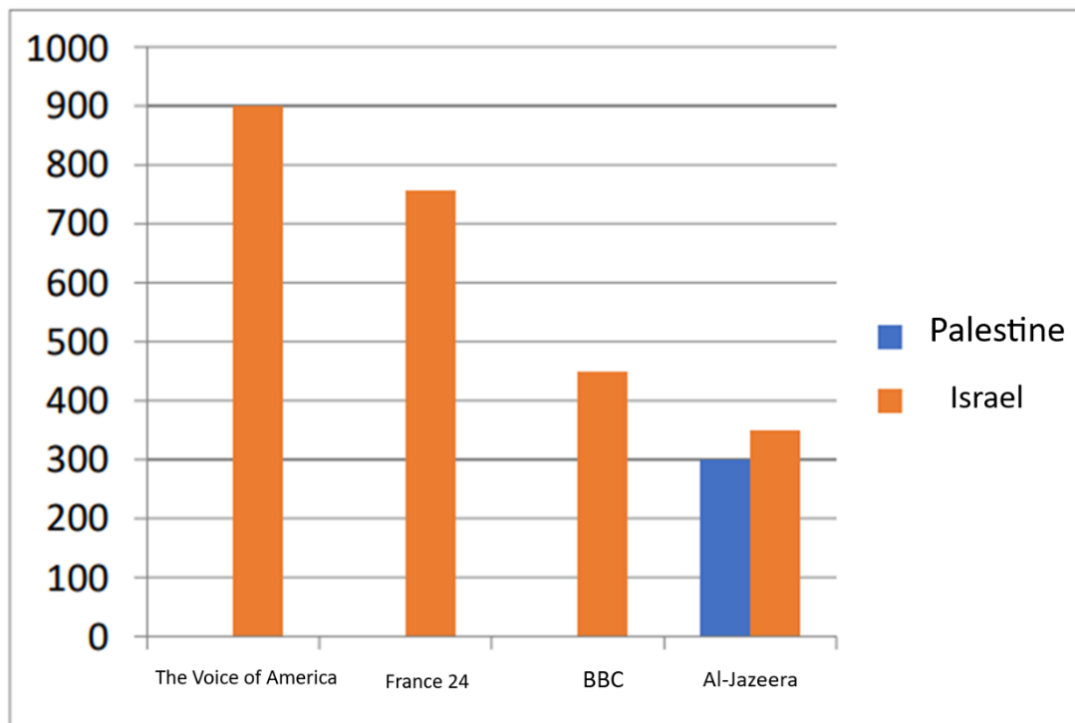
Additionally, BBC, France 24, and Voice of America have tended to present their news in a way that favors Israel while discrediting Palestine (Ali et al, 2024, p. 1212). Furthermore, reviewed data, individual case studies, related materials, and interviews with internal and external stakeholders have all identified excessive enforcement (erroneous content removals and wrongful account penalties) and insufficient enforcement (failure to remove violating content and failure to penalize violative accounts), reflecting Meta's content policies, particularly its policies on dangerous individuals and organizations and on violence and incitement (BSR, 2022, p. 4).

One key example during this crisis was when the hashtag #AlAqsa was added to the hashtag blocklist by a Meta outsourcing employee while removing it from the updated list of the U.S. Treasury Department's terms. As a result, the hashtag #AlAqsa was hidden from search results, despite its widespread use in posts about Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of Islam's holiest sites (BSR, 2022, p. 6). Some users have also accused Instagram, owned by Meta, of arbitrarily removing posts that merely mention Palestine for allegedly violating "community guidelines." Others reported that their Instagram stories were hidden after sharing information about protests in support of

Palestine in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. Some also complained that the word "terrorist" appeared next to their Instagram bio (Shankar et al, 2023). Moreover, the rise of social media has added another layer of complexity to this balance. While these platforms have created new opportunities for real-time reporting and offer significant benefits in news dissemination, they have also raised concerns about accuracy and ethical norms. These platforms often spread misinformation, placing the responsibility on journalists to verify information (Fahmy et al, 2024, p. 175). Western mainstream media have been criticized for failing to provide accurate, fair, and comprehensive coverage of the Gaza crisis. This has been attributed to multiple factors, including biased and one-sided coverage that predominantly prioritizes the Israeli narrative over the Palestinian one—especially when relying on official Israeli reports without making the necessary efforts to verify information (Youmans, 2024). In this regard, Ian Miles Cheong, a far-right commentator often associated with Elon Musk, posted a video claiming to show Palestinian fighters killing Israeli civilians, writing: "Imagine if this happened in our neighborhood, to your family." In reality, misinformation and fake news deliberately spread about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have also appeared widely on other U.S.-controlled social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and others (Dixit, 2023).

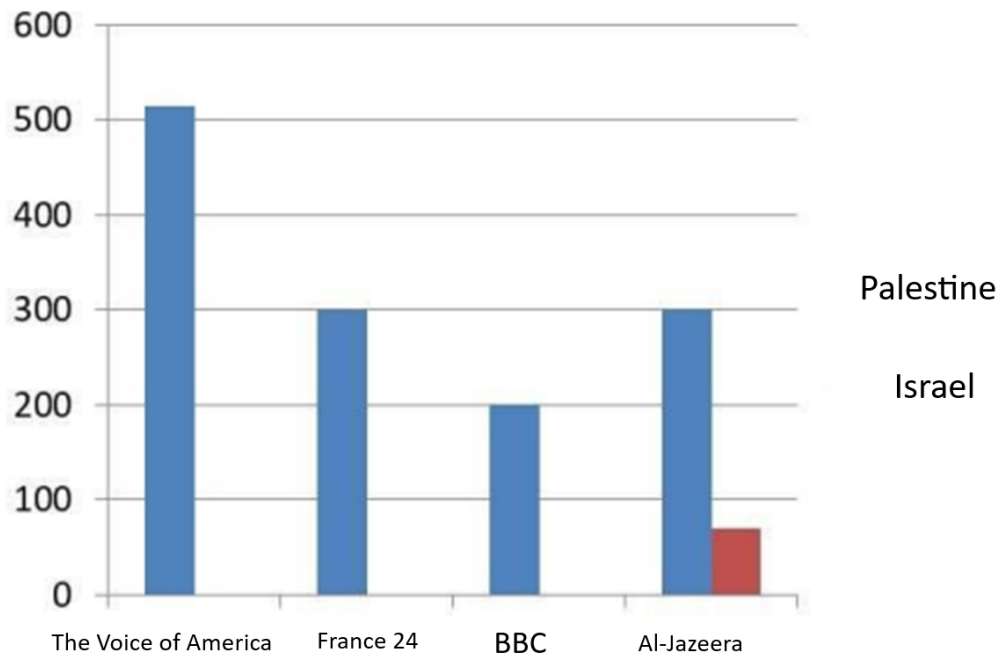
According to research, Al Jazeera adopts a more neutral approach and provides balanced coverage of both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, while BBC, France 24, and Voice of America tend to frame their stories in a more Israel-centric manner, often portraying Palestine in a more negative light (Ali et al, 2024, p. 1212).

The significance of this issue is such that initial research on U.S. news media coverage of Gaza has revealed an undeniable pattern of pro-Israel bias. A review of major newspapers by Adam Johnson and Usman Ali exposed a dramatic picture within the country's most reputable press institutions. In *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Los Angeles Times*, "Israel" was generally mentioned far more frequently in news reports than "Palestine," "even though Palestinian casualties were significantly higher than Israeli casualties." Strong and condemning adjectives such as "massacre" and "horrific" were almost exclusively used to describe the killing of Israeli civilians. When it came to headlines about children killed or injured, there was very little mention of young Palestinian victims. Only two out of more than 1,100 news articles published from October 7 to November 25—a period during which the Israeli military killed 6,000 children—acknowledged this reality (Johnson and Ali, 2024)

Number of stories in favor of Israel

(Resource: Ali et al, 2024: 1219)

Number of stories to the detriment of Palestine



(Resource: Ali et al, 2024: 1220)

This inconsistent use of language plays a significant role in influencing public opinion, as seen in media outlets like BBC, Voice of America, and France 24, which often use derogatory terms to describe Palestinians, such as "terrorists" and "Islamic extremists." This framework aligns with a narrative that delegitimizes Palestinian resistance while defending Israeli policies, describing Israeli activities as "security operations" and "counterterrorism efforts." Media literacy is crucial, as these well-known global media outlets shape the geopolitical narratives that influence public opinion and political choices regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Ali et al., 2024, pp. 1218 and 1221). The reasons behind these gaps and shortcomings in Western media coverage can be attributed to multiple factors, including the limited access of international

journalists to the Gaza war due to political restrictions imposed by Israel and security concerns for journalists, which further constrain comprehensive reporting. As a result, many international media outlets frequently rely on official government statements and embedded journalism, which restricts the diversity of perspectives and the depth and nuance of news coverage. Additionally, the complexities of the Gaza crisis, intertwined with many regional and international geopolitical interests, have been misrepresented over the years, often being reduced to the term "Israel-Hamas conflict" in much of the mainstream Western media.

Questioning the Democratic Nature of American Ideological Media

The use of social media coverage may have negative and even harmful effects. The characteristic of providing independent, uncontrolled, and biased information can contribute to the spread of fake news, misinformation, fueling information warfare, and increasing division and hostility. The way social media is used in Palestine often reflects and encapsulates the ongoing political and military conflicts in the region. Another factor that fuels this long-standing conflict is the deepening cyber warfare, which has taken on new dimensions (Abu Mualla, 2017, p. 1). Today, it seems that covering this conflict through manipulative methods to reach national and international audiences is easier than ever. A large amount of online content, such as images and videos, lacks context or, worse, conveys misleading messages. Since bad news is perceived as good news due to its ability to attract public attention, the bolder the hashtag, the faster it spreads (Klajnowska, 2022, p. 6).

Furthermore, the removal of some posts related to the Palestinian Intifada from social media undermines the right to freedom of speech, which the internet is known for. Since Palestinian activists rely on social networking sites to document events in their neighborhoods and directly influence global discourse, the censorship of posts poses a serious problem for them. This type of systematic discrimination is more evident on Facebook and Instagram, as Palestinian content was consistently flagged as "sensitive" or even removed without any justification (Klajnowska, 2022, p. 6). For example, although Facebook responds to government requests internationally (to varying degrees) based on local laws and

regulations, its policies regarding Israel and Palestine are alarmingly prominent, revealing the platform's political bias. In this context, Castro demonstrated that most news reports about the Gaza war published in print media, including major newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Los Angeles Times, were in favor of the Israeli side, showing continuous bias against Palestinians while paying little attention to their daily suffering (Castro, 2024).

This bias can be observed in the corporate interests of the platform, as with many of its profit-driven actions. This platform is a primary source of information, news, and, in many cases, essential for mobilization, communication, and political participation. When these spaces are dictated by political bias, the impact on freedom of expression, discourse, and equal access rights is harmful. Regardless of whether the motivation is political or driven by corporate economic interests, this political bias shapes public discourse around issues, marginalizes voices and communities, and significantly influences the media landscape (Hamdallah, 2018, p. 2). As such, "the scattered flood of lies and hatred about the Israel-Gaza crisis in recent days, along with algorithms that aggressively promote extreme and offensive content, is precisely why social media has become a poor place for accessing reliable information" (Dixit, 2023). A study has shown that Facebook partly relies on the U.S. State Department's list of designated terrorist organizations, which includes groups like Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), as well as many other organizations that oppose U.S. policies (Hamdallah, 2018, p. 17). According to Al-Safadi (2018), in agreement with Israel, Facebook has been combating Palestinian pages

that publish Palestinian narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, according to Israel's Ministry of Justice, Facebook has agreed to 85% of Israel's requests to remove and ban Palestinian content (Awais et al., 2024, p. 72).

As people around the world increasingly turn to Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other platforms for news and expressing opinions, the social media sphere has become a new public space for discussion—and often heated debates—on political and social issues. In the minds of many analysts, social media is considered one of the main reasons for the decline of democracy in countries around the world (Wike et al., 2023, p. 4). For example, the escalation of violence in parts of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories in 2021 led people to turn to social media to document events, raise awareness, and condemn the latest cycle of human rights violations. In this context, efforts were made to forcibly evict Palestinians from their homes, violently suppress protesters, attack places of worship, carry out collective violence, launch indiscriminate rocket attacks, and conduct airstrikes that resulted in civilian casualties (Talatene, 2021). However, in recent years, Palestinians have experienced a sharp increase in attacks on freedom of speech. These violations occur locally, regionally, and globally through the policies of major social media corporations and governments. Despite these companies' policies claiming neutrality, social media platforms have become a new battleground for political confrontation over the Israel-Palestine issue (Hamdallah, 2018, p. 5). In this framework, Palestinian rights advocates argue that these forms of online discrimination are a continuation of the systematic segregation, discrimination, and abuse carried

out by Israeli authorities, subjecting Palestinians to subjugation in the digital realm (Alimardani and Elswah, 2021). In response, the Arab Center for the Advancement of social media, which defends the digital rights of Palestinian and Arab civil society, issued a statement urging tech companies to respect Palestinian digital rights during the ongoing war. The statement read: "We are [concerned] about the significant and disproportionate censorship of Palestinian voices through content removal and the suppression of hashtags, among other violations." These restrictions pose a serious threat to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of assembly, and political participation (Shankar et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, according to available data, 78% of all adults in the United States believe that social media companies have too much power in today's politics. When looking only at Republicans, this number rises to 84%. Regardless of political stance, the majority agree that social media has had a mostly negative impact on the country—although Republicans have softened their stance on the negative influence of social media since 2020, while more Democrats now believe that social media is harming the country. A growing number of individuals affiliated with both parties believe that social media companies are likely censoring political content. Eighty-three percent of all Americans believe it is somewhat or very likely that social media companies suppress such content.

While Republicans have long been convinced that their political views are being targeted by Big Tech, a growing number of Democrats now believe the same, with 74% of left-wing individuals now agreeing with this statement

(Carter, 2024). A new survey by the Pew Research Center, covering 19 advanced economies, shows that ordinary citizens—especially in Singapore, Malaysia, Poland, Sweden, and Hungary—view social media as a constructive component, with 65% or more believing it has had a truly positive impact on democracy. In contrast, only 34% of American adults think social media has been good for democracy, while 64% believe it has had a negative impact. In fact, the United States is an outlier in several measures, with a greater share of Americans viewing social media as divisive (Wike et al., 2023, pp. 5-7). Thus, given the manipulation, divisiveness, and lack of civility in the online world, particularly in the U.S. media landscape, one cannot truly speak of democracy.

In this context, traditional media outlets such as the BBC and The New York Times have failed in this process. The language and stance they adopt are entirely pro-Israel. While actions against Gaza are labeled as "operations," those against Israel are termed as attacks. While the Palestinian people are the true victims, mainstream media portray Israel as the victim. Meanwhile, according to the United Nations, Israeli attacks have displaced 85% of Gaza's population due to severe shortages of food, clean water, and medicine, while 60% of Gaza's infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed (Medet, 2024). These media outlets have been criticized for not sufficiently representing Palestinian perspectives and for not adequately including Palestinian voices. Badran believes that the voices of those living in Gaza are often overshadowed by official narratives, limiting public exposure to the diverse personal experiences and everyday lives of Palestinian communities. This lack of local voices distorts the agency, individuality, and

resistance of the Palestinian people, consequently portraying them as passive victims—or worse, as ordinary human beings with grievances, suffering, hopes, and legitimate aspirations (Badran et al., 2023, p. 18). The images selected by Western and American media often conceal the true extent of destruction and casualties in the Gaza war.

Bias in headlines frequently downplays Palestinian suffering or even justifies acts of violence against them without providing the necessary nuance and context. This selective representation often shapes the audience's perception of the war, aligning it more closely with Israel's official narrative rather than the complex and often devastating realities in Gaza. The lack of complexity in the dominant media narratives is so pronounced that it calls into question established biases. Headlines and images significantly shape public understanding of current events (Melhemallaham, 2024, pp. 369-370).

Overall, despite freedom of expression being an internationally recognized right, as affirmed in various UN resolutions, and despite new recognition and guarantees in the digital realm, the dire situation—where there should be equal access, equal opportunities, safe participation, and the right to privacy—is overshadowed when it comes to the internet. In the digital sphere, numerous ambiguous boundaries exist, and despite the efforts of activists and various political groups, in some countries, these harms are severe.

In this regard, Israel's war against Palestine has become a battleground for American social media, where public opinion has been steered against Palestinians under the influence of U.S. politicians, who share common

interests with the Zionist regime. Therefore, it is argued that the internet—and especially social media—is being used as a tool of manipulation by governments worldwide to undermine democracy. Notably, the American media's coverage of the Gaza war has exposed numerous gaps, particularly when it comes to addressing human suffering, amplifying Palestinian voices, providing necessary historical context, and prioritizing the humanization of victims. These shortcomings have led to a widespread misunderstanding of the war, lacking a deep and nuanced comprehension of its complexity and severity. This lack of in-depth storytelling fails to convey the profound human cost of the conflict, leaving audiences with a misinformed, incomplete, or distorted perception of this crisis and its magnitude.

Conclusion

Society is characterized by rapid changes and significant social and geopolitical transformations. The world is witnessing continuous wars and conflicts alongside the evolution of media and technology, shifting humanity from the age of speed to the age of visualization. In this context, images depicting scenes of victims and casualties from these conflicts have become an inseparable part of shaping the global collective conscience and, more than that, a tool for propaganda and mobilization of powers in wars. The speed at which these images spread through social media and mass media is increasing, opening a window for researchers to understand their complex effects on psychological states and individual behaviors.

As far as U.S. media policy is concerned, the gaps in the news coverage of the Gaza war by

American media significantly influence public opinion on this pressing issue and shape discussions around it. These media contribute to a one-dimensional narrative that, by inadequately presenting Palestinian perspectives, omitting essential historical and cultural contexts, and neglecting to humanize those most affected, reinforces misconceptions and biases. It is argued that social media in the United States has become an extension of U.S. foreign policy, where regulations are selectively applied to favor elites and governments over grassroots activists and marginalized groups. While it may be claimed that these platforms are truly global, open-source, decentralized, and free, they are also owned by billionaires and shareholders, thus forming part of the private domain that is subject to the interests of stakeholders and governments. The problem lies in the fact that these spaces are praised as global public arenas.

By complying with the demands of the Israeli government, Facebook ultimately paves the way for the dominance of Israeli Zionist narratives in global discussions, as social media platforms have now become the primary arbiters of the messages conveyed to the world. Through complicity in Israel's censorship scheme, these social media platforms send a clear message that undermines freedom of expression—an issue that highlights the lack of democracy within American media. News outlets have consistently prioritized the lives of Israelis over Palestinians and have adopted Israeli framing and narratives. This pattern of coverage often results in a narrative shaped by those in power, further marginalizing already silenced voices and exacerbating their exclusion.

For a democratic media system to function effectively, it must commit to balance, objectivity, and proportionality—principles strong enough to withstand political pressures. Despite the biases in U.S. media coverage of Gaza, American public opinion has generally demonstrated a more consciously balanced perspective, reflecting the importance of alternative news sources such as independent journalism and social media. The failure of many mainstream Western media outlets to provide comprehensive coverage that highlights a range of perspectives and offers a complete context for better understanding the ongoing war in Gaza turns these media outlets into part of the problem rather than the solution. Therefore, a more empathetic, in-depth, and nuanced coverage of the Gaza war, supported by alternative media, can help promote informed discourse and deeper understanding—

potentially leading to more effective responses to ongoing conflicts and struggles, ultimately contributing to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Consequently, it can be confidently stated that social media acts as a double-edged sword in the coverage of the Gaza war, offering unparalleled opportunities for reporting while simultaneously facing serious challenges. However, despite limitations such as the rapid spread of information—which opens the door to misinformation and raises issues of verification—social media is essential for raising awareness, increasing mobilization and solidarity, and influencing mainstream media coverage, underscoring its crucial role in modern journalism. Social media platforms can provide real-time updates, offer spaces for diverse viewpoints, and create opportunities for eyewitness reports to fill the gaps left by mainstream media coverage.

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