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**Partisanship and Bias in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:
A Comparative Study of Four International Media Outlets**

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Abstract

Partisans, sometimes exhibiting a “hostile media” phenomenon (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985), often complain that media coverage is biased against their side in a conflict or dispute. Academic researchers, on the other hand, have struggled to identify empirically such bias. These studies often have focused on domestic political issues—typically, presidential elections (e.g., D'Alessio & Allen, 2000)—and compared actual coverage to an “objective” balanced or even-handed treatment. In the area of international affairs, however, the ideal of “objective” or “even-handed” treatment is itself debatable, and “balance” is not automatically desirable; partisans always see their side as “right” and therefore justifying favorable coverage.

This study compares coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in four international media outlets—the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* (U.K.), the *Jerusalem Post* (Israel), and the English-language Web site of the pan-Arab cable TV network, Al Jazeera. A content analysis of a sample of 200 articles from each outlet over five years (2004-2008) demonstrated clear differences between the four outlets, while avoiding having to establish what would constitute a “correct” or “fair” treatment. The *Jerusalem Post*, clearly a partisan outlet, favored the Israeli side of the conflict, while AlJazeera.net presented a pro-Palestinian viewpoint. The *New York Times* treated each side approximately equally, while the *Guardian* sympathized with civilians on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, and harshly condemned violence against civilians, regardless of the identity of the perpetrator or the circumstances.

Partisanship and Bias in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:

A Comparative Study of Four International Media Outlets

The media have a powerful shaping effect on public opinion and public policy (Graber, 1980). This is especially true for foreign affairs, with which most citizens have little first-hand knowledge or experience (Cohen, 1963; Holsti, 2004; Lavine, Sullivan, Borgida, & Thomsen, 1996; Soroka, 2003). The media provide information (What is happening in the world?), analysis and context (Why is this happening? What does it mean?), and evaluation (Who is right? Who is to blame? What is the best solution or approach to this situation?). The media have also been shown to shape political outcomes (e.g., DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007; Gerber, Karlan, & Bergan, 2006). With this broad role and high impact, media have a responsibility to present, and audiences reasonably expect to receive, complete, unbiased, and “fair” coverage of news events.

Despite these responsibilities and expectations, the public generally perceives the media to be ideologically or politically biased, i.e., unfairly favoring one side over another in coverage of conflicts, disputes, or electoral politics (American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1998; Mutz, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2007, 2009; Zogby, 2007, 2008). This perception may challenge the credibility of the press and its power to influence public attitudes and policy. More troubling, perceived media bias may even undermine public trust in government itself (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger, & Bennett, 1999). In light of the media’s influence over public opinion and government policy, accusations of bias must be taken seriously and examined carefully.

As we shall see, even the term “bias” is not straightforward, and bias is often in the eyes of the beholder. Nevertheless, the veracity of these allegations of bias has been studied repeatedly, and they have generally not been found to stand up to scrutiny. D'Alessio and Allen (2000), for example, conducted a meta-analysis of 59 studies of partisan media bias regarding

presidential election campaigns since 1948 and found no significant evidence that coverage in newspapers or news magazines favors one party over the other. Niven (2002) examined coverage of U.S. presidents, governors, members of Congress and mayors under similar circumstances, controlling for external variables such as unemployment and crime rates, and similarly concluded that “[i]n a comparison of coverage of two presidents, 200 governors, the mayors of eight cities, and 266 members of Congress, all matched to a member of the opposite party who had the same outcome in office, there is simply no evidence for partisan bias” (p. 93).

The studies debunking the myth of media bias are persuasive, but they do not go far enough. Most have focused on coverage of domestic issues, typically elections. Elections are convenient to study as they are limited in time, occur in regular intervals, and supply plenty of material to review and compare. In contrast, there is comparatively little scholarly examination of coverage of foreign affairs. This is an important area to examine for bias, as the media are even more powerful and influential in shaping public opinion and policy regarding international matters than regarding domestic ones (Monroe, 1998; Soroka, 2003).

Further, many of these studies comparing coverage of two sides of a controversy or conflict are based on the assumption that unbiased or impartial attention means that the coverage is “fair.” This is a reasonable assumption in the context of elections and domestic politics, but does not necessarily apply to other types of reporting. For issues entailing moral judgment, with clear right and wrong sides, “fair” is not synonymous with “balanced,” as we will see. A more rigorous analysis would avoid the need to establish *a priori* what is the most “correct” or “fair” treatment of each side in a conflict.

One area of foreign news that features prominently in U.S. and worldwide media is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As in other complex international situations, it is not intuitively

obvious to many consumers of media which side in the conflict is “right” and which is “wrong.” Israeli and pro-Israel sources have one set of narratives or points of view; Palestinian and pro-Palestinian sources hold different views and different interpretations of the same facts and events. Individuals hold a range of different opinions, possibly changing over time, regarding the identities of the “aggressor” and “defender” in this conflict. Treatment of the two sides has been found to vary by media outlet (Chang & Zeldes, 2006) and over time (Noakes, 2002), generating accusations of biased coverage from both sides (e.g., Alexander, 1982; Gerstenfeld & Green, 2004; Karetzky, 1986; Kenazi, 2006; Kressel, 1987; Philo & Berry, 2004; Viser 2003).

This study examined coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in three newspapers—the *New York Times*, the *Guardian* (U.K.), and *Jerusalem Post* (Israel)—and the English-language Web site of a pan-Arab cable television channel, Al Jazeera. After all, newspaper exposure has been shown to be an important predictor of knowledge regarding foreign affairs in general and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically (Gandy & El Waylly, 1985). By comparing coverage across these four media outlets, the focus is on the outlets’ *relative* treatment of the sides to the conflict, avoiding the need to define an objective benchmark for “fair” or “true” coverage. A review of reports from different outlets regarding the same region and during the same timeframe holds constant the “objective” reality, i.e., the facts and events of the conflict occurring during this timeframe. Content analysis can conclusively demonstrate that coverage of the conflict in these four media outlets varies measurably in the direction and degree in which it favors Israel or the Palestinians. This examination of the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will help not only communication scholars who study bias, but also policy makers and consumers who rely on media reports to inform and shape their opinions of this important conflict and of foreign affairs in general.

Media Bias

Many people in the U.S. believe that the news they consume is biased (e.g., American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1998; Mutz, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2007, 2009; Zogby, 2008). Anecdotal evidence supports this view (e.g., Coulter, 2002; Goldberg, 2001), yet researchers struggle to identify such bias empirically (e.g., D'Alessio & Allen, 2000; Domke et al., 1997; Niven, 1999, 2002). What is more clear from research is that the *perception* of media bias is a result of various factors, including the audiences' own partisanship (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994; Gunther, 1992; Morris, 2007; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985), source cues based on the perceived partisanship or bias of the media outlet (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Baum & Gussin, 2008; Turner, 2007) or of the sources it cites in a story (Rouner, Slater, & Buddenbaum, 1999), interpersonal communication networks (Eveland & Shah, 2003), or the discussion of bias in the media (Watts, Domke, Shaw, & Fan, 1999).

Even the term “bias” is not straightforward. Bernhardt, Krasa, and Polborn (2008) define bias as the selective suppression of relevant information (p. 1093). This definition is very similar to Entman's (1993) definition of a distinct but related concept, framing: “To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described” (p. 52, emphasis in the original). An accusation of bias, then, is a *judgment* about the selection of a frame. Every frame selects some aspects of reality; therefore, it must selectively suppress other aspects. For any “particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” a frame favors (Entman, 1993), bias can be viewed simply as the belief that the story selected the “wrong” aspects, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment

recommendation. Hence, consistent with the hostile media phenomenon (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985), *any* selection of a frame, and any presentation of any subset of the facts and interpretations, may be perceived by a partisan to indicate bias.

Weaver (1972) distinguished “journalistic bias” from “ideological bias,” defining the former as the “spin” or journalists’ attempt to get a “good story.” Mullainathan and Shleifer (2002) make a similar distinction between *ideological bias*, resulting from “a news outlet’s desire to affect reader opinions in a particular direction,” and *spin*, reflecting “the outlet’s attempt to simply create a memorable story” (p. 1). Economists have attempted to define and identify bias as a function of audience expectations (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006a; Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2002; Turner, 2007), profit maximization (Baron, 2006; Bernhardt, Krassa, & Polborn, 2008; Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006b), or competition (Baron, 2006; Sutter, 2001).

Entman (2007) calls bias “that curiously undertheorized staple of public discourse about the media” (p. 163). Attempting to rectify this inattention, Entman distinguishes between *distortion bias* (intentionally publishing false information or claims), *content bias* (favoring one side over another in a political conflict), and *decision-making bias* (factors that may influence journalists to bias their reports). He also proposes the concept of *news slant*, or *tilt*, which “characterizes individual news reports and editorials in which the *framing favors one side over the other in a current or potential dispute*” (p. 165, emphasis in the original). Slanted news stories aggregate to produce a more general content bias, which Entman defines as “*consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts*” (p. 166, emphasis in the original)¹. Entman identifies slant and bias as relative

¹ Entman’s definition adds “over the use of government power.” Not all conflicts are over government power, however. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the subject of this study, concerns competing claims to the same land and conflicting historical narratives, so a broader definition applies.

measures, comparing actual press coverage to a “balanced” or “even-handed” discussion of a disputed issue, while acknowledging that “[t]here is no objective, bright line dividing reasonably balanced from slanted framing” (p. 171).

In Entman’s formulation, the objective “facts” and “event context” are fixed; slant is produced by the relative power and skill of each opposing side in manipulating the media and winning them over. Others have observed, however, that a presentation of facts and context is itself subjective and depends on the journalists’ and editors’ decisions as to which facts to include, which to omit, and what background context is relevant to the current discussion. For example, Kressel (1987) warned journalists against what he calls the “mythical pretense” of objectivity. He points out that “[d]iffering perceptions about media coverage are linked *inextricably* to disagreement over facts and interpretations concerning the conflict itself” (p. 216, emphasis in the original) and that “the decision about *which version of context* to present remains dependent, by definition, upon political perspective and values” (pp. 220-221, emphasis in the original). Goffman (1974) noted similarly that “[a]ny event can be described in terms of a focus that includes a wide swath or a narrow one and – as a related but not identical matter – in terms of a focus that is close-up or distant. And no one has a theory as to what particular span and level will come to be the ones employed” (p. 8).

Entman’s (2007) model also presumes that a perfectly balanced or even-handed account of a conflict is accurate and fair. This is an oversimplification, for at least two reasons. First, imbalance is not the same as bias, and balance does not guarantee an impartial “truth”: “Imbalance refers to a lack of evenhandedness in content, while bias refers to the content’s departure from a presumed objective reality” (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994, p. 168). Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken illustrate this distinction using an unfavorable portrayal of Hitler in a

documentary, which would not be judged as biased “because such a portrayal is necessary to accurately serve the truth” (p. 168). Kressel (1987) makes the same argument regarding media portrayal of Stalin: “Should the mass media have reported 50% favorable items about the Soviet leader and 50% about his victims? Should half the *New York Times* editorials have supported Stalin and half opposed him? Or should they have remained neutral?” (p. 216). The same principle holds in reports of crimes; news coverage of a convicted embezzler “will necessarily contain a preponderance of negative opinion” about the person—even if he has proclaimed his innocence—without being accused of bias (Weaver, 1972, p. 65). In all such cases, “fair” is very different from “even-handed.” As *Time* magazine noted in another context, “a false even-handedness that flies in the face of reality is not the same as honesty” (Poniewozik, 2009).

Second, to a partisan or ideologue, even-handedness is itself a manifestation of bias, as it does not favor the “correct” or “just” side in a controversy or a dispute. Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) compare a “balanced” report to the subjective “truth,” as perceived by a partisan: “[B]ecause partisans believe that their side’s claims are more accurate than the other side’s, they consider evenhanded coverage to be inappropriate. Thus, even a correctly perceived balanced presentation would appear to be unfairly biased toward the opposition, by treating the ‘inferior’ claims of the opposition as equivalent to the ‘superior’ claims of the partisan’s own side” (p. 166).

Bias is, therefore, largely in the eye of the beholder, and is always relative; even the most “balanced” or “even-handed” coverage does not inoculate from accusations of bias. To avoid these pitfalls, the current study employs a *comparative* examination of media outlets. By analyzing coverage in different outlets *relative to each other*, we eliminate the requirement to determine what is “fair” or “true” coverage. The reporting of different newspapers, TV news

channels and online sources on the *same* events during the *same* time period controls for the reality, the facts of the conflict, by keeping them constant. Controlling for (identical) external events precludes the need to define an objective baseline “truth.” This study thus evaluates reports of *the same* facts and events in different outlets relative to each other, in the context of a subject of extensive media coverage and many allegations of bias: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Media Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Middle East has been on the foreign-policy agenda of every U.S. presidential administration since 1776 (Oren, 2007). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict features prominently in contemporary media as well: In the first half of 2008, foreign news accounted for over 10% of the content of U.S. newspapers, and both Israel and the Palestinian Territories were among the top ten countries featured (Sartor & Page, 2008). The way the conflict, its participants, and events, are presented or framed drives audiences’ perceptions of the region and their opinions of the two sides in the conflict (Pew Research Center, 2006, Question 27). The media also have played a role as unwitting—or even willing—participants in the conflict itself, such as by gathering intelligence and distributing propaganda (Kalb & Saivetz, 2007).

A number of non-governmental organizations and individuals review coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for what they perceive to be inaccurate, misleading, or biased reporting. Pro-Israel organizations include Honest Reporting (www.honestreporting.com), the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA, www.camera.org), the Global Research in International Affairs Center (GLORIA) of the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) in Herzliya, Israel (gloria.idc.ac.il), and blogs such as Little Green Footballs (www.littlegreenfootballs.com) and the Augean Stables (www.theaugeanstables.com). On the

pro-Arab side, prominent critics include former president Jimmy Carter (2006), Mearsheimer and Walt (2007), as well as groups such as Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (www.fair.org), If America Knew (www.ifamericaknew.org), and Palestine Media Watch (www.pmwatch.org).

Conflicting views, even regarding the same outlet or the same report, are consistent with the hostile media effect (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). This phenomenon was first identified in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict: Vallone and his colleagues showed pro-Israel and pro-Arab students the same TV news footage from a 1982 incident in Lebanon, and found that the two groups varied in their recall and judgments about what they had just seen. Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) confirmed this finding, again in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as they examined its underlying mechanisms—issue attitudes and prior beliefs about media bias.

In contrast to the extensive academic literature regarding media bias in domestic politics, and despite the widespread accusations of media bias from partisans on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there has been little scholarly research supporting—or debunking—these allegations. The current study addresses this lack. To control for the hostile media phenomenon, and to avoid the need to establish an objective baseline, it will use a comparative approach, examining four media outlets, each from a different part of the world: the *New York Times* (U.S.), the *Guardian* (U.K.), the *Jerusalem Post* (Israel), and Al Jazeera (the Arab world).

This study uses Entman's (2007) definition of content bias: framing that “favors one side over another” in a conflict or dispute (p. 165). It examines and compares the direction and degree to which coverage in each of the four outlets favors the Israeli or Palestinian side in the conflict. By reviewing coverage from the same events during the same time period, the actual events are held constant. The content selection similarly controls for journalistic bias (Weaver,

1972), the desire to “simply create a memorable story” (Mullainathan & Shleifer, 2002, p. 1), as the generic characteristics of a good story can be assumed to be similar across media outlets.

Media Outlets

New York Times

The *New York Times* is one of the top three U.S. newspapers, as measured by circulation figures, distributing an average of over a million copies a day (BurrellesLuce, 2008). The *Times* has been called the “newspaper of record” on international and domestic affairs (e.g., Friel & Falk, 2004, p. 2; Zelizer, Park, & Gudelunas, 2002), though its own editors eschew that label (Okrent, 2004). It has more international coverage, as a proportion of total news, than any other U.S. media outlet (Soroka, 2003, p. 34) and has been shown to have an agenda-setting influence on other news outlets (Golan, 2006). Of particular importance, coverage in the *New York Times* has a direct and measurable effect on American foreign policy: Regan (2000), for example, found that the extent of its reporting on a foreign conflict strongly affects the probability of change in U.S. policy toward that conflict.

Despite its prominence and overall credibility, the *New York Times* has not been free of accusations of bias. Groseclose and Milyo (2005) found the *Times*' news coverage to be the most liberal of the five high-circulation daily newspapers they studied, based on the number of times each media outlet cited various think tanks in its news stories, a finding similar to those of Puglisi (2006) and Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006a, 2006b). Their conclusions support the public perception of the *New York Times* as the most liberal of the print publications examined (Rasmussen Reports, 2007). But, as noted, “bias” can be established in a number of ways, and

other research has not identified such a liberal bias. Lacy and Fico (1991), for instance, found the *New York Times* to be among the daily newspapers exhibiting the “fairest” or least biased coverage, based on the relative amount of space devoted to each side in a controversy, though this study examined coverage of local, not national or international, issues.

Partisans on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have criticized the *Times* as being biased either against Israel (Emerson, 2009; Gordon, 2005; Gross, 2003; Harris, 2009; Hollander, 2008; HonestReporting, 2008c, 2009c; Ini, 2009; Karetzky, 1986; Landes 2008; Levin, 2008; Rubin, 2008; Tal, 1989; Waters, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) or in Israel’s favor (FAIR, 2009; Ghareeb, 1983; Kanazi, 2006; McDavid, 1983; Philo & Berry, 2004; Slater, 2007; Weir, n.d., 2005; Zelizer, Park, & Gudelunas, 2002). Viser (2003) found the *New York Times* to be more pro-Israel than a prominent Israeli daily newspaper, *Haaretz*, as measured by story focus, sources quoted, and the naming of fatalities on each side. Consistent with accusations leveled at other outlets and at the media at large, then, evidence of *New York Times*’ alleged bias regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is mixed. The allegations are generally made by partisans and supported by anecdotal evidence that have not been tested in scholarly research; the reports cited above are mostly from the popular press or partisan sources.

Guardian

The *Guardian* (formerly *Manchester Guardian*) was founded in 1821 and has been published daily since 1855 (Guardian, 2002). It is one of Britain’s most popular newspapers, with an average daily circulation of over 350,000 copies (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2008). Its audience is predominantly left-of-center in British politics: in a 2005 poll, 82% of *Guardian* readers said they would vote for either the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrats, the highest

share of such intended voters among readers of ten daily newspapers surveyed (Ipsos MORI, 2005).

The *Guardian* has been accused repeatedly of anti-Israel bias by pro-Israel partisans (Baram, 2004; Broch, 2009; Dershowitz 2006; Gutmann, 2005; Hollander & Myer-Smith, 2008; HonestReporting, 2006, 2009a, 2009b; Stotsky, 2006a, 2006b) as well as by a former employee (Burchill, 2003; 2006). In 2005, pro-Israel media watching organization HonestReporting “awarded” the *Guardian* its “Dishonest Reporter ‘Award’” for coverage, unrelated to Israel, of the July 2005 terror attacks in London (HonestReporting, 2005); that coverage may have led to the resignation of the paper’s executive editor (Dread Pundit Bluto, 2005).

The *Guardian*’s reader’s editor (ombudsman) wrote that “The Israel-Palestine conflict is probably the most controversial subject covered by the Guardian. News reports are scrutinised by both sides and comment pieces attract febrile postings online” (Butterworth, 2008). In one notable example, the *Guardian*’s coverage of a suicide bombing in the southern Israeli city of Dimona in early 2008 was decried by pro-Israel media watchers as a “ Hamas propaganda piece,” serving as “a mouthpiece to a terrorist organization justifying its latest atrocity” (HonestReporting, 2008a). After receiving more than 500 complaints, many of which were prompted by an alert from HonestReporting to its subscribers, the *Guardian* responded that the video in question—obtained from Reuters—“was all that was available at the time” of the incident, and that the decision to post it was an “editing error” (Butterworth, 2008). The newspaper subsequently acknowledged that “[t]he video should have included a more balanced selection of interviewees” (Guardian, 2008) and removed it from its Web site (HonestReporting 2008b).

Jerusalem Post

The *Jerusalem Post*, founded in 1932 as the *Palestine Post*, is Israel's largest circulation English-language daily newspaper, and is also distributed worldwide (Leppek, 2009). It is unambiguously and unabashedly pro-Israel, providing "almost exclusively the viewpoint of Israeli Jews" (Broderick & Miller, 2007, p. 167). Within the Israeli political spectrum, the *Post* is considered politically center-to-right-leaning (Broderick & Miller, 2007; Leppek, 2009; Popper, 2005). Leppek (2009) called the *Jerusalem Post* "frontline newspaper in a frontline city in a frontline country."

Looking out for Israel's interests, it routinely covers or investigates allegations of anti-Israel bias in academia (e.g., Romirowsky, 2009; Shrybman, 2009), the United Nations (Keinon, 2009a) and other non-governmental organizations (Keinon, 2009b), and other media (Dershowitz, 2006; Ini, 2009; Gordon, 2005; Levin, 2008; Paul, 2009). It has occasionally conducted its own analysis of media bias (Pfeffer, 2006), and its senior writers and editors speak publicly about anti-Israel bias and distortion and advise Americans to be better informed media consumers (Stockson, 1998; Twiggs, 2009). For purposes of this study, it clearly represents the mainstream Israeli viewpoint.

Al Jazeera

Al Jazeera is a television network headquartered in Doha, Qatar. Launched in 1996, it broadcasts news in Arabic 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It is carried worldwide via cable and satellite television, reaching an estimated 35 million viewers by 2001 (Ajami, 2001; Campagna, 2001; Richey, 2001) and 140 million households in 40 countries in 2009 (Mason, 2009). Al Jazeera is the most-followed network for news broadcasts in six Arab countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Lebanon and Jordan), where over half of the population

relies on it as their primary news network and 60% of survey respondents watch its broadcasts at least five times a week (Telhami, 2008, pp. 99, 107). It is viewed by Palestinian Arabs even more than their own Palestinian television (Wolfsfeld, Frosh, & Awabdy, 2005), and regarded by them as more “neutral” than international media like CNN (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, 2009).

In addition to its ubiquity, Al Jazeera also represents a break with traditional Arab media. *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman (2001) has said that “Al-Jazeera is not only the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world since the advent of television, it is the biggest political phenomenon” because of its openness, such as criticizing Arab governments and interviewing Israeli officials. Its portrayal of “real news and real opinions” (Friedman, 2001) is unprecedented in the Arab world. It is perceived positively by viewers (Saad, 2002b), while angering Arab leaders (Ajami, 2001; Campagna, 2004; Friedman, 2001) as well as U.S. officials (Campagna, 2001).

The network has a clear political agenda: “Day in and day out, Al Jazeera deliberately fans the flames of Muslim outrage” (Ajami, 2001, p. 1). James Morris of the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter in Britain was quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* saying that Al Jazeera’s coverage “isn’t playing with fire, [it] is using a flamethrower in terms of the potential impact on the governments in the Islamic world” (Richey, 2001). As one consequence, for example, Al Jazeera viewers tend to believe that the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were not carried out by Arabs and that these attacks were justified (Saad, 2002a). A former journalist with the English channel accused the network of as having a “narrowing world view and increasingly anti-American editorial slant” (Telegraph, 2008). Al Jazeera’s competitors call it “propagandistic,” while its own news host

expressed pride in mobilizing Arab and world public opinion—particularly against Israel (quoted in MEMRI, 2009).

Al Jazeera's Corporate Profile claims to provide "impartial and objective reporting" (Al Jazeera, n.d.(a)), and its Code of Ethics states that the network strives to "[p]resent diverse points of view and opinions without bias or partiality" (Al Jazeera, n.d.(b)). However, the network is generally seen to be a strong partisan regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ajami (2001) alleged that "[t]he station's coverage of the crisis barely feigned neutrality," exalting Palestinian victims as martyrs while Israeli victims were simply "Israelis killed by Palestinians" (p. 1). Eisin (2009) similarly states that Al Jazeera—as typical of the Arab media—focuses on the Palestinian tragedy and portrays the Israel Defense Forces as an occupation army. Mazel (2009) goes further, charging that the network's partisanship trumps even basic journalistic values: "Al Jazeera leads an all-out war against Israel in which there is no room for true reporting. [...] No efforts are spared to present the Palestinians as the ultimate victims" (p. 8). The gritty, gruesome coverage added fuel to the fire of Palestinian uprising, or perhaps even sparked the violence (Wolff, 2003). Even within the Palestinian community, Al Jazeera has been accused of partisanship, favoring the Fatah faction over Hamas in internecine conflict (Al Jazeera, 2009; Bronner, 2009; Mazel, 2009). Others, however improbably, have claimed that Al Jazeera was too sympathetic towards Israel (Jasperson & El-Kikhia, 2003, p. 130), and even accused it "of being an agent for the CIA and the Mossad, the Israeli intelligence" (el-Nawawy, 2003, p. 11) because of its willingness to interview top Israeli officials.

Al Jazeera launched its English-language Web site, www.AJazeera.net, in March 2003 (Lettice, 2003). The site received much attention in the worldwide media (Khurma, 2003), offering a non-Arabic-speaking audience a glimpse of Arab society and politics, and was re-

launched in 2006 together with the English television channel (Abdul-Mageed & Herring, 2008). During March 2003, the first month of the Iraq War, traffic from U.S. readers to Al-Jazeera's Web site increased 15-fold increase, to a million unique visitors, a third of whom went to the English version of the Al-Jazeera site (Kawamoto, 2003).

Abdul-Mageed & Herring (2008) compared article headlines on Al Jazeera's English and Arabic Web sites, and found some differences in regional focus. They also concluded, based on critical discourse analysis of headlines from the two versions, that "Al Jazeera's coverage is relatively balanced, and that the English version, especially, seems to go to great lengths to avoid any appearance of ideological bias, including at the expense of being informative." It is possible, then, that Al Jazeera's English Web site is less partisan on the Israel-Palestinian conflict than its Arab counterpart; nevertheless, for purposes of this study, it is assumed to represent a pro-Palestinian viewpoint.

Hypotheses

This study defines each outlet's pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian viewpoint based on its selection of stories, sources quoted or cited, and the portrayal of Israelis and Palestinians in these stories as perpetrators or targets of violence. I hypothesized that:

H₁: Media outlets vary in the direction and degree of in which their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict favors Israel or the Palestinians.

Two of the media outlets, the Israeli *Jerusalem Post* and the Arab Al Jazeera, were expected to reflect partisan viewpoints in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian positions, respectively. As partisans, their treatment of the conflict is likely to "reflect both a sense of patriotism and feelings of belligerence towards a country's enemies"

(Wolfsfeld, Frosh, & Awabdy, 2005, p. 2), clearly aligning each outlet with its respective side. The two other outlets, the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*, do not clearly correspond to parties to the conflict. We expected to find that the *Times*, as a generally moderate-to-liberal publication in a country that is strongly pro-Israel (Pew Research Center, 2006, Question 26; Saad 2007), will favor the Israeli viewpoint slightly more than the Palestinian one, though not as strongly as the partisan *Jerusalem Post*. In contrast, the *Guardian*, with its strong liberal leaning and European audience, was expected to favor the Palestinian perspective over the Israeli one, albeit not as strongly as the partisan Al Jazeera. Therefore,

H₂: Coverage in the *Jerusalem Post* will be the most favorable to Israel, followed by the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, and Al Jazeera, in that order.

Method

Article Selection

The study examined articles from the four media outlets—*New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Jerusalem Post* and AlJazeera.net—spanning five years, 2004 through 2008. The five-year period is long enough to provide a large number of press reports, while also being recent enough to be relevant to current evaluations of media coverage. It includes periods of relative calm (a dramatic decline in suicide bombings after 2004, cease fire in Gaza in June 2008) and three wars (between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon in summer 2006, an intra-Palestinian coup in June 2007, and between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in December 2008), as well as the Israeli unilateral disengagement from Gaza (August 2005). The five-year period included two elections in the Palestinian Authority (for president in January 2005 and parliament in January 2006) and one in

Israel (parliamentary elections of March 2006). Overall, the years 2004 through 2008 cover a broad range of Israeli-Palestinian relations and ebbs and flows in the violence between them.

Articles were screened for including the text “Gaza” anywhere in the headline or body, using LexisNexis, ProQuest, and Al Jazeera's English Web site (english.aljazeera.net). The search criteria identified a total of 22,078 articles from the four outlets, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. All Articles Mentioning "Gaza"

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AlJazeera.net	Total
2004	710	417	3,053	831	5,011
2005	676	369	3,656	690	5,391
2006	713	485	2,358	430	3,986
2007	532	354	2,339	422	3,647
2008	397	355	2,597	694	4,043
All	3,028	1,980	14,003	3,067	22,078

In the next stage, three coders reviewed all of the 22,078 headlines to determine which articles appeared to discuss some incident or aspect of war or violence. The coders were undergraduate students who received course credit for their work on the project. They were instructed to identify the headlines that suggest that the article deals with some aspect of violence or war, such as acts, instruments, casualties, causes, or direct consequences of war or violence. Examples include any mention of injuries, weapons, fighting, acts of terrorism, or military action, as well as any statements or threats regarding violence.

To test for inter-coder reliability, all three coders independently coded the same randomly generated sample of 10% of the headlines ($n = 2,233$). After two rounds of training and refining the definition, two-coder agreement reached 96%. Overall agreement for the headlines reviewed by two or more coders was 93%. Table 2 lists the number of articles identified as discussing violence or war, and their percent of the total articles from each outlet.

Table 2. Articles about Some Aspect of War or Violence, Based on Headline

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AlJazeera.net	Total
2004	98	38	268	287	691
2005	55	73	215	136	479
2006	102	77	231	201	611
2007	83	40	158	149	430
2008	81	73	283	180	617
All	419	301	1,155	953	2,828
% of articles in outlet	14%	15%	8%	31%	13%

Sample Selection

A sample of 200 articles from each outlet was randomly selected from each for further examination. The study used stratified sampling, in which the sample size from each outlet was equal rather than proportional to the number from that outlet in the full set. This was because of the high variability of these numbers, with the *Jerusalem Post* accounting for over 40% of the total number of articles, almost four times as many as the *Guardian*. Proportional allocation of the sample would have resulted in too small a sample from the *Guardian* to yield meaningful result, or in the need to analyze a very large number of articles to compensate for the small stratum size (Hoinville & Jowell 1978, pp. 63-64; Rao 2000, section 5.8).

Content Analysis

The same three coders who evaluated the headlines then reviewed the full text of the articles included in the sample. To mitigate the effects of source cues (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Baum & Gussin, 2008; Turner, 2007), coders received the articles as plain text, without any source identification or formatting. The articles' bylines were removed; because the four outlets included or presented them differently, datelines, most subheads, and photo captions (unless the

photo caption was the entire article) were also deleted. Photographs and other visuals were not available in articles obtained from text databases, LexisNexis and ProQuest, and were systematically deleted from articles obtained from AlJazeera.net. The articles were presented to the coders in random order of date and outlet.

It is important to note that this is not the way readers of newspapers and Web sites would have seen the articles. Information removed in this study—publication and timing, formatting, and other accompanying textual and visual cues—adds meaning and context to readers evaluating the message presented in the story. In this study, we focused exclusively on the texts themselves, and attempted to eliminate all other cues and context that could affect the readers' judgment. In real-world media presentation the additional information probably reinforces the messages and impressions conveyed by the text, enhancing the differences between media outlets with regard to their sympathies or bias. Therefore, the analysis presented here is likely to err on the side of being too conservative, i.e., underestimating the differences between outlets as they are used by actual media consumers.

The coders were asked to read carefully and evaluate each article and respond to 12 multiple-choice questions about each article, using an online survey instrument. The first question (after identifying the article by its coded number) asked to verify that it does, indeed, include a mention of some aspect of war or violence. For those that did, the coders identified the first source cited or quoted, the alleged perpetrator of the violence, and its actual or intended target—all manifest content. Sources, perpetrators and targets were characterized by nationality (Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese or other). Sources were classified by type (representative of one of the sides in the conflict, such as a leader, government figure or official spokesperson; victim; eyewitness; medical source; other media; or outsiders) and targets were further identified as

civilians or combatants. Coders were also asked whether the article included any justification or mitigating factors for the violence (none, brief or extensive) and how much information the article provided about the injury or damage resulting from the violence (basic or more than basic). Other questions called for the coders' subjective evaluations, their overall impression of the perpetrator and of the target (positive, negative or balanced), based on the information presented in the article.

Inter-Coder Agreement

All three coders received and analyzed the same 100 articles. Reaching agreement between the coders on the content of the articles proved more challenging than agreeing on whether their headlines referred to some aspect of war or violence. After the first batch of 20 identical articles, the questionnaire was significantly revised: one question dropped, and the impressions of the perpetrators and targets modified from a five-point to a three-point scale. The coders were trained on the updated questionnaire, and reviewed together a subset of the articles for which there was no agreement. The first batch of overlapping articles was dropped from the analysis. Subsequent batches of identical articles exhibited improved inter-coder agreement.

After the first set of articles, "raw" agreement – the percentage of identical answers between two coders – ranged from 49% for the impression of the perpetrator to 87% on the question of whether the article discussed some aspect of war or violence. Two further adjustments were then applied to the data to better reflect actual concurrence between coders.

If a coder responded "No" to the question whether the article discussed some aspect of war or violence, the survey ended for that article, and subsequent questions were not asked. Therefore, if one coder responded "No" to that question and another said "Yes" for the same article and continued with the survey questions, the inter-coder agreement would be artificially

depressed because one set of answers was missing. Conversely, if both coders responded “No,” neither continued with the survey and *both* sets of answers were missing, artificially *inflating* their apparent “agreement,” as missing answers appeared “identical”. Therefore, articles for which one or more coders responded “No” on this question were excluded from the analysis of inter-coder agreement. (These articles *were* included in the actual content analysis.)

A second adjustment was to exclude evaluations of the target and/or perpetrator where the coders did not agree on that party’s identity. Some articles discussed more than one incident, or a “clash” in which there were injuries on more than one sides. In these cases, the coders were instructed to select the *primary* perpetrator and target, but that identification was not always straightforward. If one coder, for instance, thought the primary perpetrator was Israeli and the target Palestinian, and another coder identified their roles as reversed, they would, by definition, not agree on how positively or negatively the perpetrator and target were portrayed. Therefore, answers to the question regarding the impression of the perpetrator were dropped from the analysis of inter-coder agreement for those articles where agreement on the perpetrator’s identity was not unanimous. Similarly, answers to the question regarding the impression of the target were dropped for articles in which there was not unanimous agreement on the target’s identity. (Other responses regarding the same articles were included in the inter-coder analysis, and all responses were included in the final content analysis.)

With these two adjustments to the data, inter-coder agreement (excluding the question on whether the article mentioned violence or war, which by definition had 100% agreement as a result of the first adjustment) reached 69%. Agreement ranged from 54% for the questions regarding the impression of the perpetrator and the extent of justification or mitigating factors provided to a high of 86% for the question of the perpetrator’s nationality.

Most of the disagreement regarding the target's identity revolved around its identification as combatant or civilian. This is not surprising; even experts in the field have trouble distinguishing between civilian and combatant casualties (Halevi, 2009; Weinglass, 2009). While schoolchildren can generally be considered civilians and uniformed military personnel are obviously combatants, many victims in this conflict do not fall clearly into one of the two categories. Israeli victims may be off-duty soldiers out of uniform, for example, and many Palestinian fighters do not wear uniforms and blend in among the civilian population. The definitions are even murkier when considering that the intended target may be different from the actual one, and civilian bystanders may be injured or killed in a military operation targeting combatants. When considering only the target's nationality (Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese or other), not its identity as civilian or combatant, agreement between the coders jumped from 68% to 89%, accounting for most of the differences.

Other questions for which inter-coder agreement was relatively low were those asking for latent content or the coders' subjective judgments: impression of the perpetrator (in articles for which there was agreement on the perpetrator's identity) and the extent of justification or mitigating factors for the violence (both 54%), the extent of information regarding the injury or damage (68%), and the impression of the target (in articles in which there was agreement on the target's identity, 69%). The coders reached better agreement on the questions regarding the perpetrator's nationality (86%) and the type (77%) and nationality (71%) of the first source cited or quoted, which were more easily and "objectively" identified (manifest content).

For articles reviewed by all three coders, the most frequent or "average" responses were used in the final content analysis.

Results

Violence-Related Stories

Coders were asked at two stages to identify whether the stories they reviewed were violence-related. In the first stage, the headline analysis, they were asked to determine whether the headline suggested that the article dealt with some aspect of violence or war. Later, when reading the articles selected in the sample, they were again asked to verify that the text of the story supported the implication in the headline.

The results showed dramatic differences between the four outlets (Table 3). Three of every ten stories on AlJazeera.net mentioning Gaza featured headlines that implied violence, while only one in twelve of the *Jerusalem Post* headlines included the same implication ($\chi^2=1177$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). Upon closer examination of the text of the articles, a further 19% of the *Jerusalem Post* stories were excluded from the subsequent analysis because they were determined to not refer, in fact, to any act or consequence of violence; only 3% the AlJazeera.net articles were excluded for the same reason. Combining these two screens of the headline and the text of the articles shows that Al Jazeera stories mentioning Gaza referred to violence or war over four times more frequently than *Jerusalem Post* articles ($\chi^2=484$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$).

The *New York Times* and *Guardian* focus on violence was similar to each other and fell between these two extremes. Fourteen percent of the *Times*' Gaza-related headlines implied violence, and 13% of the total were found after the second screening to actually be related to violence or war. For the *Guardian*, these figures were 13% and 12%, respectively.

Table 3. Proportion of Articles About War or Violence, Based on Headline and Body Analysis

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AlJazeera.net	All
% of headlines (of all Gaza-related articles) implying violence	14%	15%	8%	31%	13%
Of these, % of stories about violence	91%	77%	81%	97%	81%
% of stories about violence (of all Gaza-related articles)	13%	12%	7%	30%	25%

Sources Cited

As Table 4 shows, both the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* cited or quoted Israeli and Palestinian sources about as frequently. The *Jerusalem Post*, in contrast, cited Israeli sources first almost twice as often as Palestinian sources ($\chi^2=124$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$), while the proportions were reversed on AlJazeera.net ($\chi^2=21$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$).

Table 4. Nationality of First Source Cited

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AlJazeera.net	All
No sources mentioned	6%	6%	7%	2%	5%
Israeli	41%	35%	52%	23%	37%
Palestinian	36%	40%	28%	52%	39%
Lebanese	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Nationality not identified	12%	10%	10%	23%	14%
Other	3%	7%	2%	1%	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The type of source also varied between the outlets (Table 5). Over 70% of *Jerusalem Post* and *New York Times* articles cited first an official spokesperson or representative, while this type of source accounted for only about half of the first sources cited by the *Guardian* and

AlJazeera.net ($\chi^2=426$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). In contrast, AlJazeera.net cited medical sources first much more frequently (24% compared to between 1% and 9% for the other three outlets, $\chi^2=368$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$).

When citing or quoting Palestinian sources, all the outlets, but especially the *Jerusalem Post*, most frequently used official spokespeople, such as government figures or military leaders ($\chi^2=155$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). The *New York Times* and (especially) AlJazeera.net cited Palestinian medical sources more often than the *Guardian* or *Jerusalem Post* ($\chi^2=11$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$). The *Guardian* cited or quoted Palestinian victims much more frequently than the other three outlets ($\chi^2=42$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). . The distribution of Israeli sources was similar across the four media outlets, with the vast majority again being official spokespeople (Table 5).

Table 5. Type of First Source Cited

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AllJazeera.net	All
Palestinian Source					
Representative	62%	42%	76%	45%	53%
Victim	0%	26%	2%	1%	7%
Eyewitness	17%	18%	11%	16%	16%
Medical source	18%	6%	0%	29%	16%
Israeli Source					
Representative	88%	76%	86%	93%	86%
Victim	1%	4%	4%	0%	2%
Eyewitness	4%	7%	5%	0%	4%
Medical source	1%	4%	1%	5%	2%
All Sources					
Representative	72%	53%	79%	48%	62%
Victim	2%	14%	3%	1%	5%
Eyewitness	11%	12%	7%	15%	11%
Medical source	9%	7%	1%	24%	11%

Perpetrators and Targets

Most of the violence-related stories on AllJazeera.net featured Israeli perpetrators (Table 6) and Palestinian targets (Table 7). The other three outlets had included approximately the same proportion of Israeli and Palestinian perpetrators, with the balance leaning slightly toward Palestinian perpetrators in the *Jerusalem Post* and toward Israeli perpetrators in the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* (Table 6).

Table 6. Perpetrator Nationality

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AllJazeera.net	All
None/not identified	4%	4%	10%	4%	5%
Israeli	53%	55%	38%	74%	56%
Palestinian	40%	38%	47%	22%	36%
Lebanese	3%	1%	3%	0%	2%
Other	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Targets of violence were coded for both nationality (Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese or other) and type (civilian or combatant). Results showed that the *Guardian* covered more violence directed against civilians: three quarters of its stories identified the targets as civilians, compared to about half in the other three outlets (Table 7; $\chi^2=24$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$).

Table 7. Target Nationality and Type (Civilian or Combatant)

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AllJazeera.net	All
No target mentioned	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Nationality not identified	0%	3%	2%	1%	1%
Israeli civilian	21%	25%	34%	8%	21%
Israeli combatant	8%	3%	13%	4%	7%
Palestinian civilian	27%	40%	15%	38%	30%
Palestinian combatant	37%	20%	34%	46%	35%
Lebanese civilian	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Lebanese combatant	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Other	4%	8%	1%	2%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
All Israeli	29%	29%	47%	12%	33%
All Palestinian	65%	60%	49%	84%	76%
All Civilians	52%	74%	51%	48%	55%
All Combatants	48%	26%	49%	52%	45%

Combining the nationalities of both the perpetrator and the target of violent acts identified an even stronger pattern (Table 8). The *Jerusalem Post* featured approximately the

same number of stories about Israeli-on-Palestinian violence as Palestinian-on-Israeli incidents. Three quarters of the stories on AlJazeera.net involved Israeli perpetrators and Palestinian targets, and only one-sixth as many featured Palestinian perpetrators and Israeli targets ($\chi^2=84$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). The *New York Times* and *Guardian* fell once again between these two patterns, with twice as many stories featuring Israeli perpetrators and Palestinian targets than the reverse ($\chi^2=28$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). Remarkably, AlJazeera.net had the lowest proportion (9%) of stories involving Palestinian-on-Palestinian violence, such as the 2006 civil war in which Hamas ousted by force the Fatah-led government in Gaza.

Table 8. Nationality of Perpetrators and Targets

Perpetrator/Target	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AlJazeera.net	All
Israeli/Palestinian	55%	57%	42%	77%	59%
Palestinian/Israeli	28%	27%	41%	13%	26%
Palestinian/Palestinian	15%	13%	15%	9%	13%
Israeli/Israeli	1%	3%	2%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Portrayal of Perpetrators and Targets

Not every perpetrator is described by the media as a villain; sometimes the actor who commits violence is depicted as a tragic or sympathetic or even heroic character. Some acts of violence may be viewed or presented by some as unavoidable and necessary, or even desirable, as in the case of self-defense or resistance to evil. Conversely, not every target is portrayed as a victim; some stories suggest that the target deserved their fate (or worse) or “had it coming.”

As intuitively expected, the articles overall portray targets more sympathetically than perpetrators (Table 9; $\chi^2=259$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). When coded on a three-point scale (“positive,”

“balanced” and “negative”), perpetrators were viewed negatively over half of the time and positively only in one-sixth of the articles ($\chi^2=195$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). Targets, on the other hand, were described in positive terms in half of the articles—twice as frequently as they were portrayed negatively ($\chi^2=74$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$).

Once again, there were dramatic differences in the four outlets’ treatment of Palestinian and of Israeli perpetrators and targets. Table 9 presents each outlet’s portrayal—positive, balanced or negative—of perpetrators and targets, by nationality. Also included are constructed variables showing the overall portrayal of Israeli and Palestinian perpetrators (positive minus negative), and the degree to which Israelis are presented more positively than Palestinians as both perpetrators and targets.

Table 9. Treatment of Perpetrators and Targets, by Nationality

Impression	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AlJazeera.net	All
Impression of perpetrator					
Positive	14%	6%	20%	11%	13%
Balanced	24%	12%	14%	31%	21%
Negative	53%	77%	55%	51%	58%
No information provided	5%	1%	1%	4%	3%
No perpetrator	4%	4%	10%	4%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Net Positive	-39%	-70%	-35%	-39%	-45%
Israeli Positive% - Negative%	-19%	-67%	26%	-36%	-29%
Pal. Positive% - Negative%	-68%	-84%	-85%	-56%	-75%
Israeli Positive% - Pal. Pos%	49%	17%	111%	20%	46%
Impression of target					
Positive	46%	69%	46%	44%	50%
Balanced	10%	6%	11%	17%	11%
Negative	26%	16%	27%	21%	22%
No information provided	18%	9%	16%	19%	16%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Net Positive	20%	53%	19%	23%	28%
Israeli Positive% - Negative%	71%	73%	73%	71%	72%
Pal. Positive% - Negative%	-1%	39%	-33%	15%	7%
Israeli Positive% - Pal. Pos%	71%	34%	106%	56%	1%

Target Pos% - Perp. Pos%	31%	62%	25%	33%	37%
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The *New York Times*, *Guardian* and AlJazeera.net portrayed all perpetrators negatively, Palestinian perpetrators more negatively than Israeli ones ($\chi^2=23$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). (This difference was most pronounced in the *Times*; $\chi^2=15$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$.) The *Jerusalem Post* treated Palestinian perpetrators very negatively, but was generally sympathetic to Israelis who committed violence ($\chi^2=57$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$). The *Guardian* presented all perpetrators in much more negative light than did the other outlets ($\chi^2=28$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$).

All four outlets treated Israeli targets generally positively. The *Guardian* and AlJazeera.net described Palestinian targets in positive terms—the *Guardian* even more strongly than AlJazeera.net ($\chi^2=13$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$). The *Jerusalem Post* presented Palestinian targets most negatively ($\chi^2=18$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$), and their portrayal in the *New York Times* was approximately evenly split between positive and negative. The *Guardian* presented all targets much more positively than the other three outlets ($\chi^2=27$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$).

Justification or Mitigating Circumstances

The coders were asked whether each article included any justification or explanation that mitigated the act of violence, such as self-defense, retaliation, or prevention. Coders determined whether the justification information was “brief”—typically “a single sentence saying that the act of violence was a response to some other event, or some other short description”—or “extensive,” meaning that the mitigating or extenuating circumstances or the reasons and justifications for the act of violence were described in more detail than a single line or sentence.

All outlets offered justification or mitigating factors more frequently for Israeli perpetrators than Palestinian ones—on average, over twice as often (Table 10; $\chi^2=94$, $df=1$,

$p < 0.0001$). This discrepancy was most pronounced in the *Jerusalem Post*, which included five times more stories with “extensive” justification for Israeli perpetrators as for Palestinian ones ($\chi^2=48$, $df=1$, $p < 0.0001$). The *Guardian* offered the least justification – even less than AlJazeera.net – for Israeli perpetrators ($\chi^2=32$, $df=1$, $p < 0.0001$).

Table 10. Justification or Mitigating Circumstances for Violence

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AlJazeera.net	All
Israeli perpetrator					
No	18%	44%	15%	32%	28%
Brief	54%	36%	47%	48%	47%
Extensive	28%	20%	39%	20%	25%
Palestinian perpetrator					
No	63%	66%	73%	65%	67%
Brief	24%	24%	19%	26%	23%
Extensive	13%	10%	8%	9%	10%
"Extensive" Israeli - Pal.					
	15%	10%	31%	11%	15%

Information about the Injury or Damage

One of the ways the media support or promote a cause and engender sympathy for its victims is by describing, sometimes in vivid detail, the damage done or the injury inflicted on the target. In this study, the coders were asked to determine whether each article included information about the injury or damage. If it did, they specified whether the description was “basic”—just a few words about the result of the act of violence, such as “two killed” or “house destroyed”—or “more than basic.” The question specifically referred to the amount of detail provided in the *description* of the damage, not the severity of the damage itself.

The responses show that the *Guardian* included details of the injury or damage in its coverage of violence, for both Israeli and Palestinian targets, much more frequently than the other three outlets (Table 11; $\chi^2=30$, $df=1$, $p < 0.0001$). The *Jerusalem Post* covered a larger

proportion of incidents in which there was no injury or damage than the other three outlets

($\chi^2=27$, $df=1$, $p<0.0001$)

Table 11. Extent of Description of Damage or Injury

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AllJazeera.net	All
Israeli target					
No injury or damage	10%	7%	24%	13%	15%
Basic	69%	59%	57%	83%	64%
More than basic	22%	34%	19%	4%	21%
Palestinian target					
No injury or damage	0%	3%	9%	4%	4%
Basic	86%	61%	80%	82%	79%
More than basic	14%	35%	11%	14%	18%
Both					
No injury or damage	4%	5%	16%	5%	7%
Basic	81%	62%	69%	82%	74%
More than basic	15%	33%	15%	12%	18%
"More than basic" Israeli - Pal.	8%	-1%	7%	-10%	3%

Overall Partisanship

There are many ways in which we can combine and interpret these results to establish each media outlet's partisanship, the extent to which it sympathizes with and positively portrays one or the other side in the conflict. We can expect a more pro-Israeli outlet to include a smaller portion of stories in which Israelis were perpetrators and larger portion of stories featuring Israelis as targets of Palestinian violence. It would portray Israelis more positively, both as perpetrators and as targets, and Palestinians more negatively in both roles. It would cite more Israeli sources, especially victims and official spokespeople who represent Israel's point of view. It would include more extensive descriptions about the injuries and damage caused to Israelis and more frequent justifications and mitigating details when Israelis were the perpetrators. Conversely, we'd expect the reverse from a more pro-Palestinian outlet: More sympathetic portrayal of Palestinians as both perpetrators and as targets, more Palestinian sources, more

extensive descriptions about Palestinian injuries and damage, and more justifications of Palestinian perpetrators.

One straightforward way to establish the partisanship or “slant” (Entman, 2007) is to compare the relative numbers of stories describing Israelis positively and Palestinians negatively with and those describing Palestinians in positive terms and Israelis negatively. Table 12 presents these results. An article is defined as “pro-Israel” if it portrays an Israeli perpetrator positively and a Palestinian target negatively, or a Palestinian perpetrator negatively and an Israeli target positively. An article is “pro-Palestinian” if the reverse is true: an Israeli perpetrator described in negative terms and a Palestinian target positively, or a Palestinian perpetrator described positively and Israeli target negatively.

Table 12. Overall Partisanship

	New York Times	Guardian	Jerusalem Post	AllJazeera.net	All
Pro-Israel articles	49	34	60	26	169
Pro-Palestinian articles	24	45	5	49	123
Total	73	79	65	75	292
Pro-Israel (% of total)	67%	43%	92%	35%	58%
Pro-Israel (normalized from AJ=0 to JP=100)	56	15	100	0	

The summary supports the pattern identified in previous sections of the analysis. AllJazeera.net presents Israelis positively about one-third of the time, while *Jerusalem Post* articles are almost uniformly positive toward Israelis, both as perpetrators and as targets. The *New York Times* and *Guardian* fall in between, with the *Times* more sympathetic to Israelis and the *Guardian* closer to Al Jazeera in favoring Palestinians. When normalized to a scale on which the *Jerusalem Post* is defined as 100 (most pro-Israel) and AllJazeera.net as zero (most pro-

Palestinian), the *New York Times* coverage is approximately at the midpoint between them, while the *Guardian* demonstrates strong pro-Palestinian slant.

In summary, content analysis of 200 articles in each of the four media outlets supported Hypothesis H₁, that the outlets vary in the direction and degree of in which their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict favors Israel or the Palestinians. The differences were sizable and statistically highly significant. Demonstrating these differences did not require determining the “fair” or “correct” coverage, and without having to establish a baseline or to assume that a “balanced” or “even-handed” treatment of the two sides in the conflict is most desirable. As hypothesized in H₂, coverage in the *Jerusalem Post* was most favorable to Israel, and that of AlJazeera.net the most favorable to the Palestinians. The *New York Times* and *Guardian* coverage fell along the continuum, with the *Guardian* displaying the most sympathy toward targets of violence, regardless of the side they represented.

Conclusion

Media bias has been a long-time complaint of partisans, but has proved elusive under rigorous academic scrutiny, for two reasons. First, as Vallone, Ross, & Lepper (1985) established as the “hostile media phenomenon,” bias—like beauty—is often in the eyes of the beholder. Partisans tend to see bias against their position, and partisans on opposite sides of an issue will *each* perceive bias against their position even when exposed to identical media content. Partisans’ perception of bias does not even require media coverage; it has been demonstrated with direct observations of events by partisans (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954). Source cues also influence the perception of bias (Arpan & Raney, 2003; Baum & Gussin, 2008; Turner, 2007), further obfuscating any inherent partiality in the media content itself. In short, the tools used to assess bias—experimental subjects reading or viewing media content—may be too blunt to measure the phenomenon we are attempting to evaluate.

The second problem with traditional studies of media bias is the need to establish what “fair” coverage is. In some cases, such as sports coverage, this is simple—there is no inherent reason why a “fair” media report should favor one team over another—but these cases account for a tiny minority of media coverage. In other cases, researchers determine a priori a baseline for “objective” or “balanced” treatment, such as equal space or equally favorable reviews of two candidates for office (e.g., D’Alessio & Allen, 2000; Niven, 2002). Once we move away from sports and two-party domestic politics, however, the task of determining what is “fair” in order to measure actual coverage against this ideal yardstick becomes more difficult. And nowhere is this more important than in the area of international affairs, where media consumers’ first-hand information is minimal and there are major policy implications of picking the “right” side in a dispute or conflict.

The present study attempted to mitigate the challenges of measurement, and completely sidestepped the need to define “fair” coverage. The first was accomplished by using as experimental subjects media consumers who had no obvious predisposition to the issue examined, and by removing source cues and extraneous data from the media reports they reviewed. The measurement system was strengthened and refined in multiple iterations until inter-coder reliability reached 89% (with the exception of one thorny issue, identifying victims of violence as civilians or combatants or civilians—a challenge that baffles even experts in the field). The second, more novel approach was to avoid defining “fair” media treatment by comparing coverage of the same events by different outlets *to each other*, rather than to an arbitrary external measure. With these two design elements, the study identified clear, sizable, and highly significant differences in partisanship—the elusive “bias”—between media outlets.

The study examined coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by four international media outlets—the American *New York Times*, the British *Guardian*, the Israeli *Jerusalem Post*, and AlJazeera.net, the English-language Web site of Qatar-based, pan-Arab cable TV outlet Al Jazeera. The results are unambiguous and striking. The *Jerusalem Post*, a clear pro-Israel partisan, portrayed Israelis positively—whether as perpetrators or targets of violence—in 92% of the articles examined. In contrast, only 35% of AlJazeera.net articles were favorable to Israelis. The *New York Times*, with 67% of its articles portraying Israelis in positive light, fell approximately between these two extremes while the *Guardian*, with 43% favorable to Israelis, was closer to AlJazeera.net.

The same spectrum of partisanship is also apparent when considering other aspects of the articles. For example, the *Jerusalem Post* cited an Israeli source first almost twice as often as it led with a Palestinian source. The proportions were reversed on AlJazeera.net, while the *New*

York Times and *Guardian* cited Palestinian and Israeli sources first with approximately the same frequency. Almost half of *Jerusalem Post* articles reviewed dealt with Israeli targets of violence, while AlJazeera.net featured Palestinian targets in over 80% of its articles; once again, the *New York Times* and *Guardian* fell in between. The *Jerusalem Post* offered extensive justification or mitigating circumstances twice as often for violence perpetrated by Israelis as did AlJazeera.net, with the *New York Times* once again in the middle and the *Guardian* closer to AlJazeera.net.

With these results, it is now possible to assert that the *Jerusalem Post* is indeed a staunch pro-Israel advocate, while AlJazeera.net shows predisposition toward Palestinians. The *New York Times*, long accused of bias by both sides to the conflict, is demonstrably even-handed, and the *Guardian* sides more frequently with the Palestinians than with Israeli views (but is generally favorable toward victims of violence on both sides). Following Entman's (2007) definition of slant and bias as relative measures, we are able to reach these conclusions without having to define "fair" or correct coverage.

This study examined only one international conflict—albeit one that receives disproportionate media coverage—over a specific five-year period. Further research may examine the relative partisanship of media in other conflicts or debates. The same principle could be applied to U.S. domestic political issues, such as health care reform, broadening the sphere of analysis beyond the traditional two-party election coverage to areas where there is no inherent "right" answer or "fair" treatment. It could be similarly applied to other topics of contemporary international affairs, such as the constitutional crisis in Honduras or Iran's nuclear program. Another possible avenue for investigation might be a longitudinal study, comparing coverage the *same* media outlet or outlets across different time periods—is it possible, for instance, to determine when and how the tone of media discourse vis-à-vis the war in Iraq

changed from cautious support to outright hostility? Could we identify that “tipping point” in different points in time in different media outlets? These are some potential interesting applications of this comparative analysis approach to future studies of media partisanship or bias.

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Appendix: Content Analysis Coding Sheet (Presented Electronically)

1. **Article No.** _____

2. **Does the article describe any incident of war or violence?**

Logic destinations

- Yes
- No [END HERE, skip the rest of this coding sheet] ➔ End of Quiz

3. **Who is the first source cited or quoted?** [Required; can be "None"] _____

4. **What is the nationality of the first source cited or quoted?** [Check one]

Logic destinations

- No sources mentioned ➔ Question 6: Who is the primary perpetra...
- Nationality not identified
- Palestinian
- Israeli
- Lebanese
- Other, please specify: _____

5. **What type of source is the first one cited or quoted?** [Check one]

- Not identified
- Victim
- Eyewitness
- Representative of one of the sides (spokesperson or leader)
- Medical source
- Outside source (expert, NGO, etc.)
- Other media
- Other, please specify: _____

6. **Who is the primary perpetrator of the violence, as reflected in the headline or the initial paragraph?** [Required; can be "None"] _____

7. **What is the nationality of the primary perpetrator of the violence?** [Check one]

Logic destinations

- None/not identified ➔ Question 9: Does the article provide an...
- Palestinian
- Israeli
- Lebanese
- Other, please specify: _____

8. What is your overall impression of the perpetrator, based on the article? [Check one]

- No perpetrator identified
- No information provided
- Negative
- Balanced
- Positive

9. Does the article provide any justification or mitigating factors for the violence? [Check one]

- No
- Brief
- Extensive

10. Who is the primary target of the violence, as reflected in the headline or the initial paragraph? [Required; can be "None"] _____

11. What is the nationality of the primary target of the violence? [Check one]

Logic destinations

- No target mentioned
 - Nationality not identified
 - Palestinian civilian
 - Palestinian combatant
 - Israeli civilian
 - Israeli combatant
 - Lebanese civilian
 - Lebanese combatant
 - Other, please specify: _____
- ➔ Question 13: How much information is pro...

12. What is your overall impression of the target, based on the article? [Check one]

- No information provided
- Negative
- Balanced
- Positive

13. How much information is provided about the injury or damage resulting from the violence? [Check one]

- No injury or damage
- Basic
- More than basic