Political Pressure And Journalistic Independence In Reporting On The Conflict In Gaza, Palestine

Mujahed faraj[1], Ibrahim ukka[2], Jeratallah Arram Dhani[3], Ali Arif Setyawan[4], Jahid Syaifullah[5]

Tunis University
Mojahedjehad2018@hotmail.com
Anajah National University
Ibrahim.okh@najah.edu
Corresponding Author: Mujahed faraj. E-mail: Mojahedjehad2018@hotmail.com

Abstract: The Gaza War since October 2023 has become a dangerous context for modern journalists, with increasing killings, censorship, and widespread restrictions on access to information. This study aims to analyze the forms of political pressure on journalists in their coverage of the Gaza conflict and its impact on journalistic independence. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was collected from the coverage *of* four international media outlets BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, and *The* Guardian from 2023 to 2024, and reinforced by reports from international institutions such as CPJ and RSF. Qualitative content analysis used Robert N. Entman's (1993) *framing* model to identify patterns of reality construction and indications of political intervention. The results show that political pressure on journalists is multi-layered: it stems from state and military policies (access restrictions and field censorship), ideological interests within media editorial structures, and biased digital content moderation on Palestinian issues. This pressure affects journalists' freedom in determining the narrative, framing, and distribution of news, thereby limiting journalistic independence and making it negotiable. However, journalists demonstrate *resilience* strategies through cross-media collaboration, collective verification, and the use of *open source intelligence* (OSINT) technology. These findings confirm that press independence in the era of modern conflict is not only determined by individual courage, but also by the infrastructure of global information freedom and the transparency of digital platforms. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the study of political communication and conflict journalism, as well as to policy recommendations for the protection of journalists and transparency in digital content moderation in the future.

Keywords: Political Pressure, Journalistic Independence, Gaza Conflict, Media Framing, Conflict Journalism, Journalist Resilience.

A. Introduction

The war in Gaza since October 2023 has placed journalistic work in the most deadly and politically intervened situation in contemporary history. Press freedom monitoring reports show an escalation of violence against reporters, access restrictions, and widespread censorship practices across various information channels. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) notes that the Israel-Gaza war has been the deadliest period for journalists since records began in 1992; as of August 18, 2025, the CPJ confirmed that at least 192 journalists and media workers had been killed in connection with this war in Gaza, the West Bank, Israel, and Lebanon. This figure illustrates the magnitude of the risk and direct impact on the public information ecosystem(*Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War*, 2025) .

Findings from other institutions reinforce this picture. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called Gaza the most dangerous place for journalists, with nearly 200 journalists killed and newsrooms destroyed, accompanied by a total blockade that has continued

into 2025. RSF also assessed that independent reporting was restricted because Israeli authorities closed access to foreign journalists for more than 20 months, leaving the international public dependent on local journalists working in conditions of minimal protection, hunger, and forced displacement.(, 2025) .

At the same time, political pressure on journalistic independence comes not only from the battlefield and state policy, but also from the architecture of digital platforms. A Human Rights Watch report documents Meta's (Instagram/Facebook) content moderation patterns that systematically restricted pro-Palestinian content throughout 2023–2024, ranging from post deletions, account suspensions, to reach restrictions, which impacted the circulation of information about human rights violations in Gaza (Censorship & Content, n.d.) . Digital advocacy organizations added that some takedowns occurred in response to government requests, raising serious concerns about accountability and the right to freedom of expression in the online sphere (PAIGE COLLINGS AND JILLIAN C. YORK, 2024).

The dimension of political pressure is also evident in the domestic and regional media ecosystem (Lestarini, 2023) . Recent analysis shows that mainstream Israeli media often absorbs the government's narrative framework and minimizes coverage of the hunger crisis in Gaza, so that domestic public opinion is largely unaffected by international institutions' findings on the humanitarian disaster. This situation shows how narrative control—through state policy, access to coverage, and media ecology—can undermine journalistic independence and influence public perception of the conflict (Tondo, 2025) .

At the international level, the UN mandate on freedom of expression has warned of the erosion of media freedom triggered by the Gaza war—ranging from the killing of journalists, criminalization of expression, to restrictions on access to information—all of which threaten the public's right to accurate and balanced information(A/79/319: Global Threats to Freedom of Expression Arising from the Conflict in Gaza , 2024)

Joint statement by press and civil society networks demanding an end to attacks on journalists, open access for foreign media, and fulfillment of the state's obligation to protect media workers in accordance with international humanitarian law(Gaza: RSF Calls for Emergency UN Security Council Meeting after Targeted Israeli Strike Kills Six Media Professionals, 2025) .
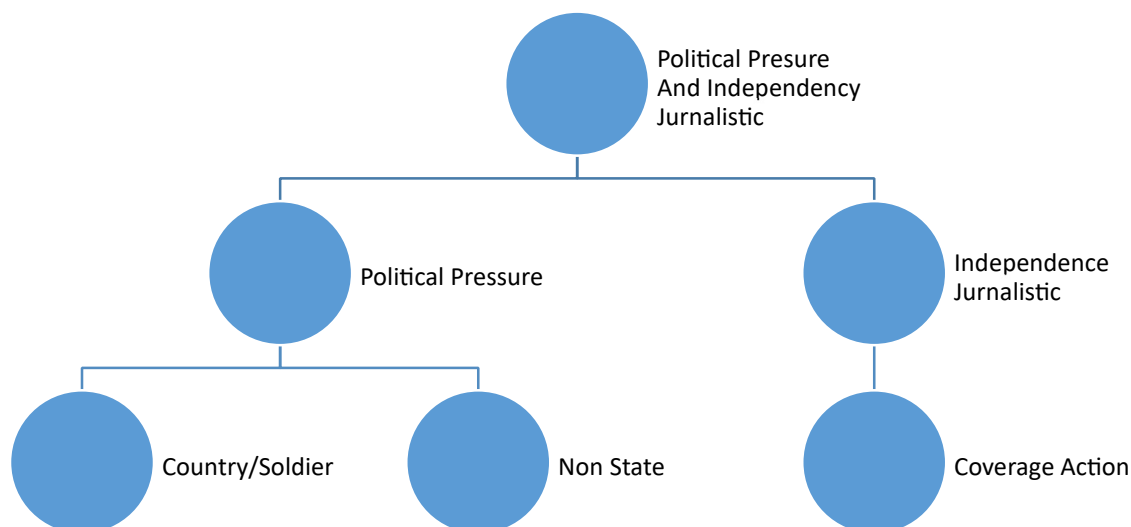
Academically, this situation provides a rich empirical context for examining the relationship between political pressure and journalistic independence. "Political pressure" in this study is understood as intervention or influence originating from state actors (government, military, security forces), non-state armed actors, and/or corporate platform actors that impact the process of information acquisition, editorial decision-making, and news dissemination (Banjarani et al., 2019) . Meanwhile, journalistic independence refers to the ability of newsrooms and journalists to carry out their watchdog, verification, and fact-presentation functions without coercion, threats, or censorship, whether direct in the form of physical violence, detention, access restrictions, or indirect in the form of economic pressure, disinformation campaigns, and biased content moderation (Sukadis & Batara, 2010) .

The knowledge gap arises because most previous research has mapped attacks on journalists as occupational safety risks, rather than analyzing how the configuration of political pressure across state, armed group, and digital platform arenas together shapes structural bias in the production of news about conflict. In addition, restrictions on access for foreign journalists force reliance on local journalists in Gaza, who face extreme risks and deteriorating living conditions. These dynamics have the potential to change ethics, verification practices, and the ecology of sources (Bruttin, 2025) .   Based on this background, this study aims to map the forms of political pressure experienced by journalists and newsrooms in reporting on the Gaza conflict. In addition, it also analyzes how these pressures affect journalistic independence in pre-coverage stages such as access, assignment, coverage in data collection, data verification, and post-coverage related to editing, distribution, and content moderation, as well as identifying resilience strategies developed by journalists/newsrooms to maintain ethical standards and accuracy. In practical terms, the findings are expected to provide policy recommendations for countries, media organizations, and platform companies to strengthen the protection of journalists, transparency of content moderation, and access to credible public information (Zinnbauer, 2024) .

By combining policy reviews, news content analysis, and in-depth interviews with local and international journalists, this research aims to contribute theoretically to the study of political communication and conflict journalism, particularly regarding

how state power infrastructure, platform economics, and editorial practices are closely interrelated in shaping the characteristics of information in modern warfare (Limpitlaw, 2013) .

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Political pressure from state, non-state, and digital platform actors will influence journalistic independence, resulting in biased/limited reporting and impacting the emergence of resistance/resilience strategies from journalists in conflict areas.

B. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical type. This approach was chosen because the issues of political pressure and journalistic independence cannot be measured quantitatively but must be understood through the interpretation of meaning, social context, and the construction of reality in media texts. According to Denzin & Lincoln in 2018, qualitative research focuses on a deep understanding of social phenomena through the exploration of meaning and context (Bahiyah & Gumiandari, 2024) . Thus, this approach allows researchers to explore how journalistic independence is shaped, limited, or influenced by political pressure in the reporting of the Gaza conflict. Data was obtained from news articles by CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, and The Guardian during the period of attacks on Gaza in 2023–2024. The analysis focused on news framing, the selection of sources, and the use of terms in describing the conflicting parties.

The focus of this study is to analyze the forms of political pressure experienced by international media in their coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Gaza. It also examines the influence of this pressure on the independence of journalists and editors in determining the narrative of their reporting. This study also focuses on the coverage strategies employed by the media, from pre-coverage to post-coverage, to maintain objectivity and journalistic ethics amid global political pressure.

The object of this study is international media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Gaza during the period October 2023 – June 2024, which was a period of intense Israeli military attacks on the Gaza Strip. The unit of analysis in this study is news articles published by four international media outlets, namely BBC News (UK), CNN International (US), Al Jazeera (Qatar), and The Guardian (UK). This study uses two types of data sources, namely primary data, which consists of news articles, special reports, and editorial opinions from international media outlets discussing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Gaza, and secondary data, which consists of academic literature, reports from institutions such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and previous research findings related to press independence and political pressure in the media.

Data collection techniques were carried out through digital documentation, namely downloading and archiving news from official media websites, literature studies by collecting theories, concepts, and previous research results relevant to political pressure and journalist independence, as well as text observation notes by recording framing elements, term selection, and the position of sources in each news article (Yusri, 2020) .

The analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis with Robert N. Entman's (1993) framing analysis model, which covers four dimensions

1. Define problems – how problems are constructed by the media

2. Diagnose causes – who is considered the cause of the problem

3. Make moral judgments – what moral values or ethics are framed by the media

4. Suggest remedies – what solutions are offered or suggested by the media.

Each news text was analyzed based on these four dimensions to find framing patterns and indications of political pressure that influenced the content of the news.

To maintain data validity, the study uses source and theory triangulation, namely by comparing the results of analysis between different media outlets, namely CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, and The Guardian. In addition, it also uses the mass communication theory (Hadi, 2021) and the theory of journalistic independence (Tobergte & Curtis, 2001) to strengthen the interpretation. The data validation process also involved peer debriefing with lecturers or fellow researchers to avoid subjective bias in text interpretation.

The research was conducted online through the analysis of digital documents from international news portals during the period February–July 2025. Data collection and analysis were carried out simultaneously until representative findings were obtained.

Figure 2. Research Flow Chart

Problem identification

Literature and theory study

Media selection and news gathering

Qualitative content analysis (framing analysis)

Interpretation of political pressure and journalistic independence

Conclusions and ethical recommendations

C. Analysis and Discussion

1. Political Pressure in Coverage of the Gaza Conflict

Analysis of news texts and international organization reports shows that political pressure on journalists covering the Gaza conflict appears in three main layers: state and military policy, structural pressure within editorial offices and mainstream media, and digital control through social media platforms.

First, state and military pressure is evident in restrictions on access to coverage and direct censorship of journalists in the field. The Israeli government has closed access to foreign journalists to the Gaza Strip for more than 20 months since 2023 (RSF, 2025), effectively isolating the region from independent coverage. This practice has resulted in the international public relying entirely on local journalists working under extreme risk, without adequate protection and logistical support. Data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) shows that as of August 2025, at least 192 journalists have been killed in Gaza and its surroundings — making this war the deadliest period for the press since 1992.

Second, political pressure also arises from the ownership structure and editorial policies of international media. An analysis of CNN and the BBC shows a tendency to follow the diplomatic framework of their respective countries, for example by using the term "Israel's right to defend itself" as justification for attacks, while terms such as "genocide" or "occupation" are avoided. This indicates a form of ideological pressure and foreign political interests that limit editorial independence.

Third, a new form of pressure has emerged from digital platforms and content moderation policies. A Human Rights Watch study and a report by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (York & Collings, 2024) found that pro-Palestinian content was being deleted and its distribution restricted on social media platforms such as Instagram, and Facebook. This phenomenon is referred to as "digital apartheid," in which algorithms and moderation decisions act as a form of indirect censorship that hinders the dissemination of alternative information.

Based on the data and theories presented, political pressure on international media in their coverage of the Gaza conflict stems from various actors, namely:

a) State Actors: The Israeli and Palestinian governments, as well as the governments of other countries that indirectly influence coverage through access policies, censorship, and diplomatic pressure.

b) Non-State Actors: Armed groups and militants who commit acts of violence against journalists and restrict access to information.

c) Digital Platforms and Social Media Platforms: Sometimes used as a means to spread disinformation, influence narratives, and manipulate public perception.

This pressure often takes the form of access restrictions (restrictive coverage), physical attacks or threats against journalists, and attempts to control the narrative presented by the media.This political pressure has a significant influence on the independence of journalists at various stages of reporting, namely the pre-reporting stage, where there are limitations on access to conflict locations, control over assignments, and the determination of sources that can influence the balance and bias of information.During the reporting process, data collection, source verification, and news framing are often influenced by pressures that limit journalists' freedom to convey facts objectively. Then, in the post-reporting process, content editing and distribution are also subject to pressure, such as censorship by editorial boards under certain political influences or strict moderation that obscures the balance of the news. As a result, journalists' independence is no longer fully in their control due to various direct and indirect interventions and threats.

2. Journalistic Independence Amid Political Tensions

Journalistic independence in the context of the Gaza conflict faces systemic challenges. Based on the results of a framing analysis of news reports by the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, and The Guardian, fundamental differences were found in the way the media constructed the reality of the conflict, including:

a) BBC and CNN tend to frame events in the context of a symmetrical 'two-sided conflict', highlighting narratives of security and diplomacy.

b) Al Jazeera constructs the conflict as a 'humanitarian crisis', focusing on civilian casualties, hospitals, and food blockades.

c) The Guardian presents a more balanced approach, but remains influenced by British editorial policies that are cautious about accusations of anti-Semitism.

The results of this analysis show that journalistic independence is not absolute, but rather depends on a combination of media ownership structures, the ideology of the country of origin, and the surrounding digital information ecosystem. In conflict situations, editorial decisions are often the result of negotiations between professional values and inherent political pressures.

3. Representation and Framing of the Gaza Conflict

Robert N. Entman's framing analysis framework is a method for analyzing how the media selects and highlights certain aspects of a reality, thereby creating a particular perspective or point of view. This framework generally includes four main elements: problem diagnosis, cause diagnosis, moral evaluation, and solution recommendations (Entman, 1993) . The author uses Entman's (1993) analytical framework and finds four main framing patterns in the coverage of the Gaza conflict:
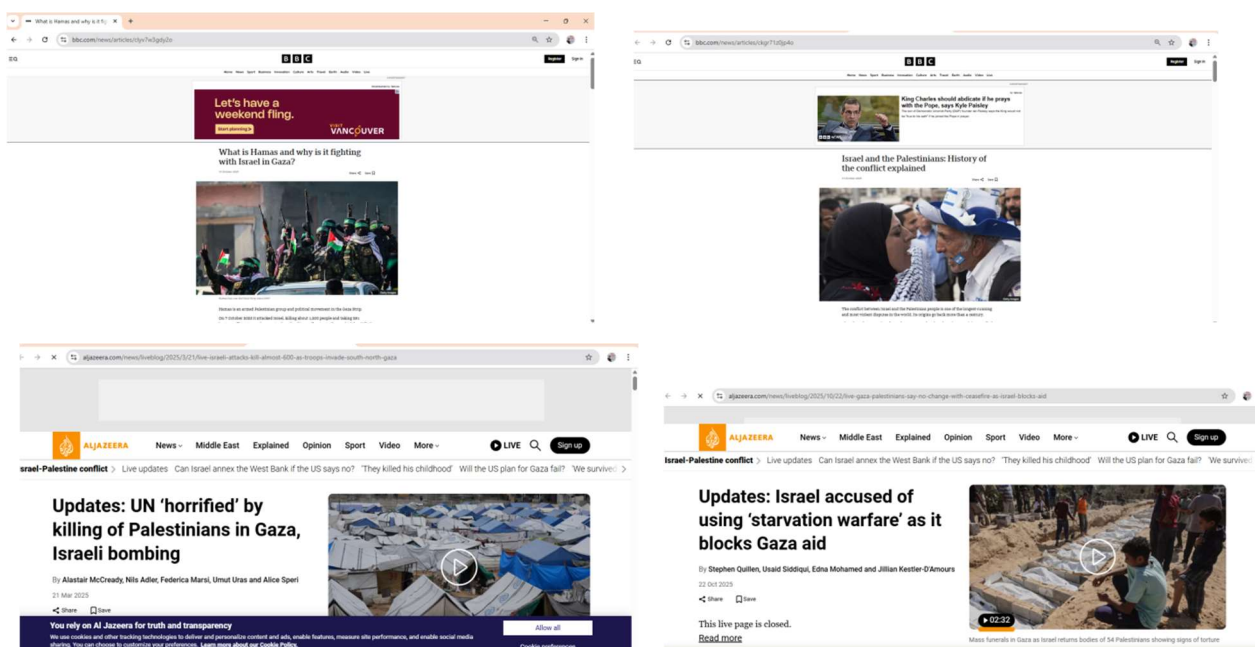
Figure 3. Media Framing Table

Framing Dimensions (Entman)	Western Media	Middle Eastern Media
Define Problems	Conflict as Hamas rocket attacks and Israel's military response	Conflict as invasion and human rights violations
Diagnose Causes	Hamas is considered the main cause of violence	Israeli occupation and blockade of Gaza as the root cause
Make Moral Judgment	Israel is portrayed as having the right to defend itself	Israel is seen as committing war crimes
Suggest Remedies	Emphasis on ceasefire and international aid	Emphasis on ending the blockade and enforcing human rights law

The table shows that differences in framing are greatly influenced by the political orientation and ideology of the media, not just the facts on the ground. This pattern supports the findings of Shoemaker & Reese in 2013 that the construction of media reality is the result of interactions between editorial routines and external forces such as the state, the economy, and global political interests (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013) .

4. Journalists' Resilience Strategies

Amidst extreme political pressure and security risks, journalists and editorial rooms have developed a number of strategies to maintain professionalism and integrity, namely by:

a) Cross-media collaboration: Several Gaza journalists collaborate with international networks (Reuters, AP, Al Jazeera) to verify field data and avoid narrative manipulation.

b) Utilizing digital technology by using commercial satellites, open source data, and independent visual analysis (OSINT) to help break through the information blockade.

c) Collective reporting ethics, whereby editorial teams use the principle of collective verification, whereby new information is only published if it has been verified by more than two independent sources.

d) Advocacy journalism has given rise to a form of solidarity journalism, in which independent media position themselves as witnesses to human rights violations, without compromising fact verification.

5. Academic and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce McQuail's (2010) view that the media in the context of conflict is never completely free from power structures, but can still act as a watchdog by developing professional resistance mechanisms. Practically, these findings indicate the need for:

a) International journalist protection policies by UN agencies to ensure access and safety for reporting in war zones.

b) Transparency of algorithms and reform of content moderation on digital platforms so that freedom of expression is not politically restricted.

c) Support for independent media institutions capable of cross-border collaboration without succumbing to political pressure from any country.

From the analysis, it can be concluded that political pressure on journalism in Gaza is multilayered and transnational, encompassing state power, editorial ideology, and global digital control . Journalistic independence no longer depends solely on the courage of individual journalists, but also on the infrastructure of information freedom that must be jointly maintained by the global community. In the context of the Gaza war, journalistic independence is not only a professional issue, but also an issue of human rights and information democracy.

D. Conclusion

Political pressure in the coverage of the Gaza conflict has clearly affected journalistic independence in various aspects, including access, sources, framing, and distribution of news. To maintain the quality of objective and professional reporting, a resilience strategy that prioritizes ethics, collaboration, and protection of journalists is needed. This study shows the need for a policy framework and editorial practices that are capable of responding to the dynamics of power and technology, while strengthening the role of the media as guardians of truth in complex conflict situations. Such pressure can limit journalists' freedom of movement, direct the framing of news, and influence the balance and objectivity of reporting. Nevertheless, the media and journalists have demonstrated strategies of resistance and resilience to maintain ethical standards and objectivity, such as source management, fact-checking, and innovation in journalistic practices. These findings emphasize the importance of protecting the independence of journalists and transparency regarding external influences so that the public can obtain fair and balanced information in complex and politically charged conflict situations.

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