

Coverage of Gaza War in the New York Times and Other Major Newspapers Heavily Favored Israel, Analysis Shows

A quantitative analysis shows major newspapers skewed their coverage toward Israeli narratives in the first six weeks of the assault on Gaza.

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The New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times's coverage of Israel's war on Gaza showed a consistent bias against Palestinians, according to an Intercept analysis of major media coverage.

The print media outlets, which play an influential role in shaping U.S. views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, paid little attention to the unprecedented impact of Israel's siege and bombing campaign on both children and journalists in the Gaza Strip.

Major U.S. newspapers disproportionately emphasized Israeli deaths in the conflict; used emotive language to describe the killings of Israelis, but not Palestinians; and offered lopsided coverage of antisemitic acts in the U.S., while largely ignoring anti-Muslim racism in the wake of October 7. Pro-Palestinian activists have accused major publications of pro-Israel bias, with the New York Times [seeing protests Opens in a new tab](#) at its headquarters in Manhattan for its coverage of Gaza -- an accusation supported by our analysis.

The open-source analysis focuses on the first six weeks of the conflict, from the October 7 Hamas-led attacks that [killed 1,139 Israelis Opens in a new tab](#) and foreign workers to November 24, the beginning of the weeklong "humanitarian truce" agreed to by both parties to facilitate hostage exchanges. During this period, 14,800 Palestinians, including more than 6,000 children, were killed by Israel's bombardment of Gaza. Today, the Palestinian death toll is over 22,000.

The Intercept collected more than 1,000 articles from the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times about Israel's war on Gaza and tallied up the usages of certain key terms and the context in which they were used. The tallies reveal a gross imbalance in the way Israelis and pro-Israel figures are covered versus Palestinians and pro-Palestinian voices — with usages that favor Israeli narratives over Palestinian ones.

This anti-Palestinian bias in print media tracks with a similar survey of U.S. cable news that the authors conducted last month [for The ColumnOpens in a new tab](#) that found an even wider disparity.

The stakes for this routine devaluing of Palestinian lives couldn't be higher: As the death toll in Gaza [mountsOpens in a new tab](#), entire cities are leveled and rendered uninhabitable for years, and whole family lines are wiped out, the U.S. government has enormous influence as Israel's primary patron and weapons supplier. The media's presentation of the conflict means there are fewer political downsides to lockstep support for Israel.

Coverage from the first six weeks of the war paints a bleak picture of the Palestinian side, according to the analysis, one that stands to make humanizing Palestinians — and therefore arousing U.S. sympathies — more difficult.

To obtain this data, we searched for all articles that contained relevant words (such as "Palestinian," "Gaza," "Israeli," etc.) on all three news websites. We then parsed through every sentence in each article and tallied the count of certain terms. For this analysis, we omitted all editorial pieces and letters to the editor. The basic data set is [available hereOpens in a new tab](#), and a full data set can be obtained by emailing [ottoali99@gmail.comOpens in a new tab](mailto:ottoali99@gmail.com).

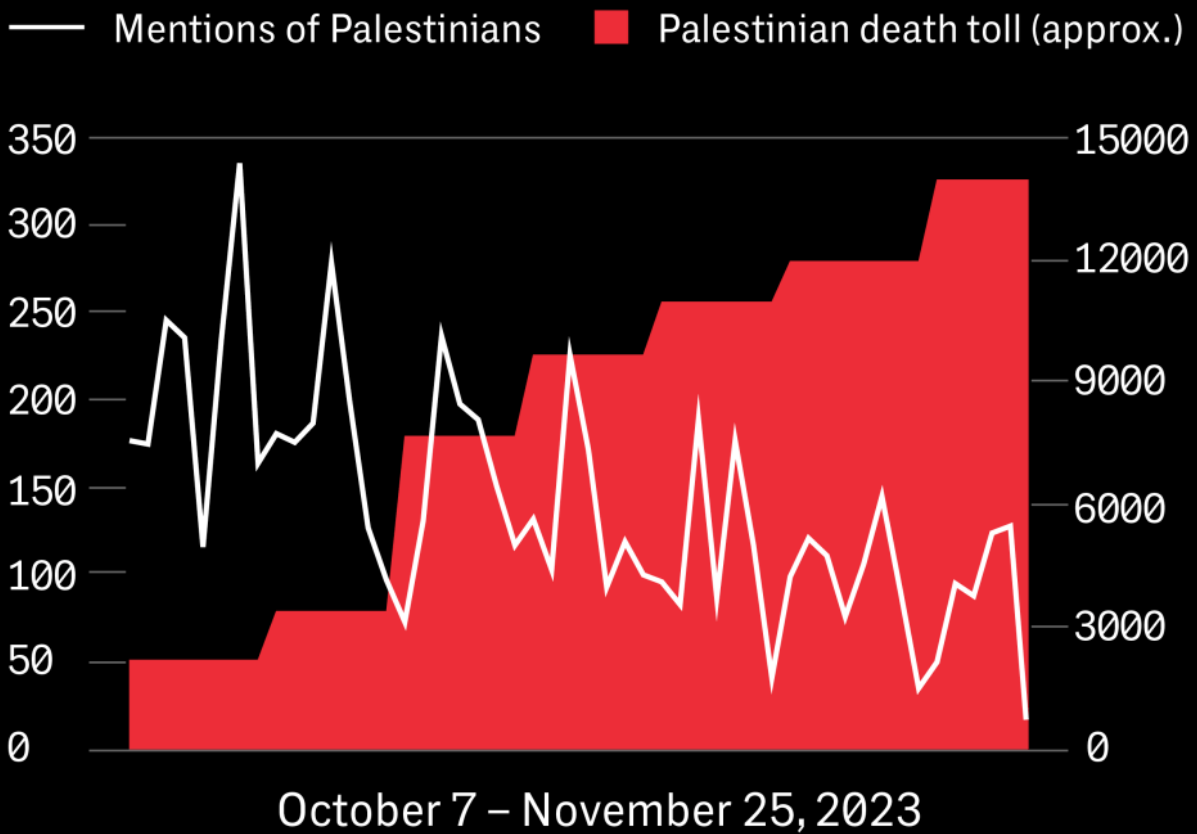
Our survey of coverage has four key findings.

Disproportionate Coverage of Deaths

In the New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times, the words "Israeli" or "Israel" appear more than "Palestinian" or variations thereof, even as Palestinian deaths far outpaced Israeli deaths. For every two Palestinian deaths, Palestinians are mentioned once. For every Israeli death, Israelis are mentioned eight times — or a rate 16 times more per death than of Palestinians.

Disproportionate Coverage

Mentions of Palestinians declined as the death toll mounted.



Data: Othman Ali

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Graphic: The Intercept

“Slaughter” of Israelis, Not Palestinians

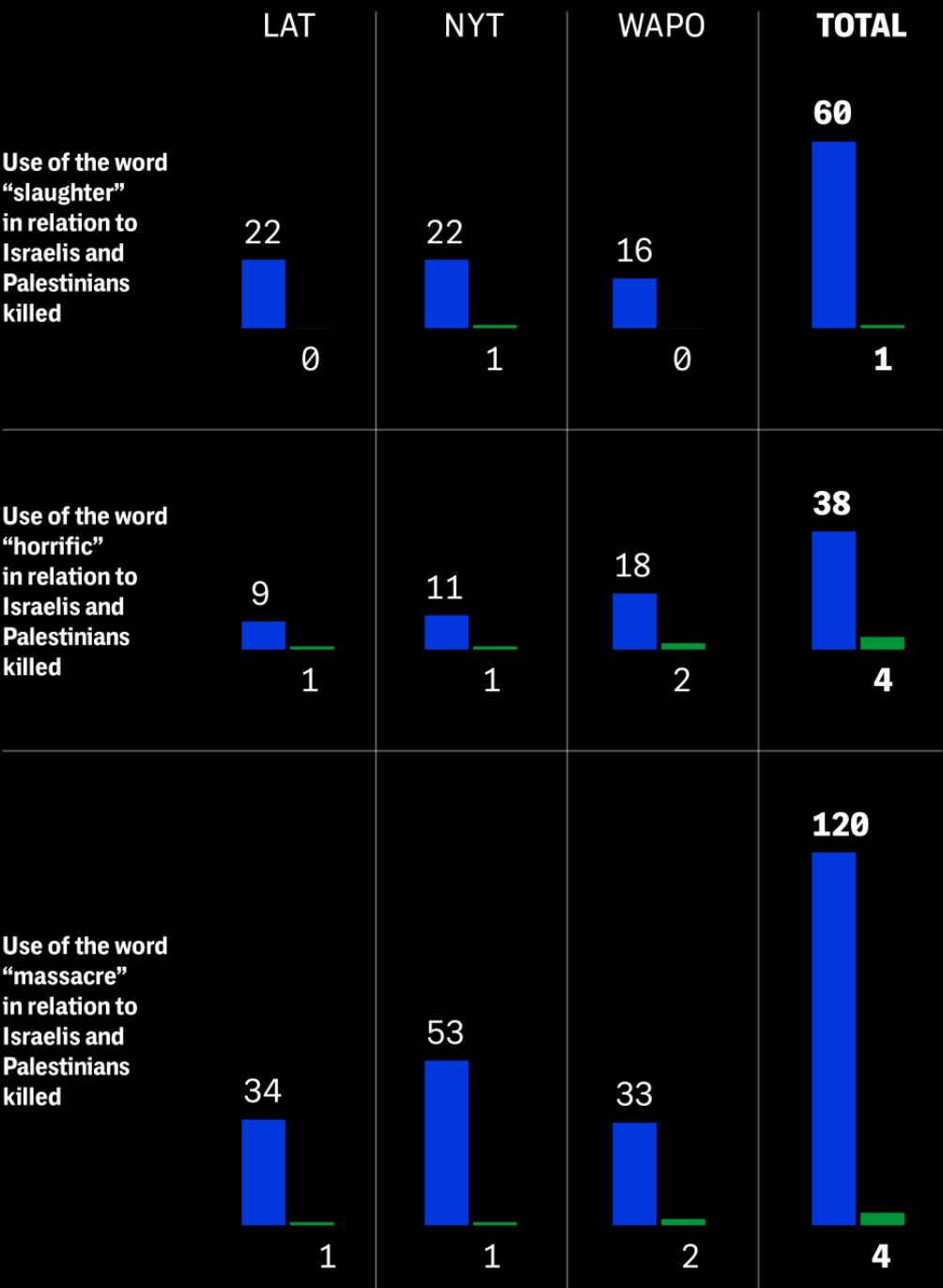
Highly emotive terms for the killing of civilians like “slaughter,” “massacre,” and “horrific” were reserved almost exclusively for Israelis who were killed by Palestinians, rather than the other way around. (When the terms appeared in quotes rather than the editorial voice of the publication, they were omitted from the analysis.)

The term “slaughter” was used by editors and reporters to describe the killing of Israelis versus Palestinians 60 to 1, and “massacre” was used to describe the killing of Israelis versus Palestinians 125 to 2. “Horrific” was used to describe the killing of Israelis versus Palestinians 36 to 4.

“Slaughter” of Israelis, Not Palestinians

The terms “slaughter,” “massacre,” and “horrific” were disproportionately used to describe Israeli deaths.

■ Israelis ■ Palestinians



Please note that for all terms, instances in which the term has been printed in quotes have been removed from these totals.

Data: Othman Ali

The
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One typical headline from the New York Times, in a mid-November story about the October 7 attack, reads, “[They Ran Into a Bomb Shelter for Safety. Instead, They Were SlaughteredOpens in a new tab.](#)” Compare this with the Times’s most sympathetic profile of Palestinian deaths in Gaza from November 18: “[The War Turns Gaza Into a ‘Graveyard’ for ChildrenOpens in a new tab.](#)” Here “graveyard” is a quote from the United Nations and the killing itself is in passive voice. In its own editorial voice, the Times story on deaths in Gaza uses no emotive terms comparable to the ones in its story about the October 7 attack.

The Washington Post employed “[massacreOpens in a new tab](#)” several times in its [reportingOpens in a new tab](#) to [describeOpens in a new tab](#) October 7. “President Biden faces growing pressure from lawmakers in both parties to punish Iran after Hamas’s massacre,” [one reportOpens in a new tab](#) from the Post says. A November 13 [storyOpens in a new tab](#) from the paper about how Israel’s siege and bombing had killed 1 in 200 Palestinians does not use the word “massacre” or “slaughter” once. The Palestinian dead have simply been “killed” or “died” — often in the passive voice.

Children and Journalists

Only two headlines out of over 1,100 news articles in the study mention the word “children” related to Gazan children. In a notable exception, the New York Times ran a late-November [front-page storyOpens in a new tab](#) on the historic pace of killings of Palestinian women and children, though the headline featured neither group.

Despite Israel’s war on Gaza being perhaps the deadliest war for children — almost entirely Palestinian — in modern history, there is scant mention of the word “children” and related terms in the headlines of articles surveyed by The Intercept.

Meanwhile, more than 6,000 children were reported killed by authorities in Gaza at the time of the truce, with the number topping 10,000 today.

Despite Israel’s war on Gaza being perhaps the deadliest war for children in modern history, there is scant mention of the word “children” in headlines.

While the war on Gaza has been one of the [deadliest in modern history for journalistsOpens in a new tab](#) — overwhelmingly Palestinians — the word “journalists” and its iterations such as “reporters” and “photojournalists” only appears in nine headlines out of over 1,100 articles studied. Roughly [48 Palestinian reportersOpens in a new tab](#) had been killed by Israeli bombardment at the time of the truce; today, the death toll for Palestinian journalists has topped 100. Only 4 of the 9 articles that contained the words journalist/reporter were about Arab reporters.

The lack of coverage for the unprecedented killing of children and journalists, groups that typically elicit sympathy from Western media, is conspicuous. By way of comparison, more Palestinian children died in the first week of the Gaza bombing than during the first year of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, yet the New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times [ranOpens in a new tab](#) [multipleOpens in a new tab](#) [personalOpens in a new tab](#), [sympatheticOpens in a new tab](#) [storiesOpens in a new tab](#) [highlightingOpens in a new tab](#) [theOpens in a new tab](#) [plightOpens in a new tab](#) [ofOpens in a new tab](#) [childrenOpens in a new tab](#) during the first six weeks of the Ukraine war.

The aforementioned front-page New York Times report and a [Washington Post columnOpens in a new tab](#) are rare exceptions to the dearth of coverage about Palestinian children.

As with children, the New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times focused on the risks to journalists in the Ukraine war, [runningOpens in a new tab severalOpens in a new tab articlesOpens in a new tab detailingOpens in a new tab theOpens in a new tab hazardsOpens in a new tab ofOpens in a new tab reportingOpens in a new tab onOpens in a new tab theOpens in a new tab warOpens in a new tab](#) in the first six weeks after Russia's invasion. [Six journalistsOpens in a new tab](#) were killed in the early days of the Ukraine war, compared to 48 killed in the first six weeks of Israel's Gaza bombardment.

Asymmetry in how children are covered is qualitative as well as quantitative. On October 13, the Los Angeles Times ran an [Associated Press report Opens in a new tab](#) that said, "The Gaza Health Ministry said Friday that 1,799 people have been killed in the territory, including more than 580 under the age of 18 and 351 women. Hamas's assault last Saturday killed more than 1,300 people in Israel, including women, children and young music festivalgoers." Notice that young Israelis are referred to as children while young Palestinians are described as people under 18.

During discussions around the prisoner exchanges, this frequent refusal to refer to Palestinians as children was even more stark, with the New York Times referring in one case to "Israeli women and children" being exchanged for "Palestinian women and minors." (Palestinian children are referred to as "children" later in the report, when summarizing a human rights groups' findings.)

A Washington Post [reportOpens in a new tab](#) from November 21 announcing the truce deal erased Palestinian women and children altogether: "President Biden said in a statement Tuesday night that a deal to release 50 women and children held hostage by Hamas in Gaza, in exchange for 150 Palestinian prisoners detained by Israel." The brief did not mention Palestinian women and children at all.

Coverage of Hate in the U.S.

Similarly, when it comes to how the Gaza conflict translates to hate in the U.S., the major papers paid more attention to antisemitic attacks than to ones against Muslims. Overall, there was a disproportionate focus on racism toward Jewish people, versus racism targeting Muslims, Arabs, or those perceived as such. During the period of The Intercept's study, The New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times mentioned antisemitism more than Islamophobia (549 versus 79) — and this was before the "campus antisemitism" meta-controversy that was [contrived by Republicans in CongressOpens in a new tab](#) beginning the week of December 5.

Despite many high-profile instances of both antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism during the survey period, 87 percent of mentions of discrimination were about antisemitism, versus 13 percent mentions about Islamophobia, inclusive of related terms.

When Major Newspapers Fail

Overall, Israel's killings in Gaza are not given proportionate coverage in either scope or emotional weight as the deaths of Israelis on October 7. These killings are mostly presented as arbitrarily high, abstract figures. Nor are the killings described using emotive language

like “massacre,” “slaughter,” or “horrific.” Hamas’s killings of Israeli civilians are consistently portrayed as part of the group’s strategy, whereas Palestinian civilian killings are covered almost as if they were a series of one-off mistakes, made thousands of times, despite [numerousOpens in a new tab pointsOpens in a new tab](#) of [evidenceOpens in a new tab](#) indicating Israel’s intent to harm civilians and civilian infrastructure.

The result is that the three major papers rarely gave Palestinians humanizing coverage. Despite this asymmetry, polls show [shifting sympathy toward Palestinians and away from Israel among DemocratsOpens in a new tab](#), with massive generational splits driven, in part, by a stark difference in news sources. By and large, [young people are being informedOpens in a new tab](#) of the conflict from TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, and older Americans are getting their news from print media and cable news.

Biased coverage in major newspapers and mainstream television news is impacting general perceptions of the war and directing viewers toward a warped view of the conflict. This has led to pro-Israel [punditsOpens in a new tabandOpens in a new tab](#) [politiciansOpens in a new tab](#) blaming pro-Palestinian views on social media “misinformation.”

Analysis of both print media and cable news, however, make it clear that, if any cohort of media consumers is getting a slanted picture, it’s those who get their news from established mass media in the U.S.

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